

AHA LAY REVIEWERS IMPACT ON AHA MISSION

The American Heart Association (AHA) is committed to continually enhancing and improving its peer review process to ensure that we are funding the best research. The Association has recently approved the participation of lay reviewers in its peer review process. Lay stakeholders have a unique perspective that can help shape the AHA research agenda and strengthen its impact on our mission.

Lay stakeholders have perspectives that differ from those of scientists and clinicians. AHA lay reviewers can bring to our process a real-world perspective of how stroke and heart disease impact the lives of those in our communities. Lay reviewers, especially those with a personal connection to heart disease or stroke, can offer researchers an improved understanding of the benefits and burdens of involving patients participating in research studies. Scientists are reminded of the human dimension of a research project and its outcome, adding a sense of urgency for working towards finding cures and more effective prevention, diagnoses and treatments. With the participation of lay reviewers in the review process, there is a greater level of transparency in the evaluation since lay reviewers will provide a safeguard against scientific conflicts or bias that may exist among scientific experts.

The addition of lay reviewers will also be beneficial to them and their circles of influence. Lay reviewers bring back what they have learned to their communities and families resulting in increased awareness of the importance of research. Former AHA lay reviewers have shared that serving on AHA peer review helped demystify the research process, gave them confidence in the rigor of AHA's selection of research projects and made them more inclined to want to serve as an ambassador for AHA in the future.

Lay reviewers in the AHA peer review process will specifically help to evaluate the potential impact of research applications on the mission of the AHA. They will base their initial assessment on a review of an application's lay summary. AHA applicants are reminded to state the potential impact of their proposed work on the AHA mission clearly and in language that can be understood by a non-scientist.

In other words, lay reviewers will initially assess how much of an effect the application will have on helping AHA achieve its mission of building healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. Evaluation of the impact seeks to answer cause-and-effect questions.

Reviewers should ask themselves:

- What effect will this application have on the mission of AHA?
- How clearly does this application support the mission of AHA?
- How will the possible outcomes of this application enhance the mission of AHA?

Lay reviewers will also provide a final recommended score that encompasses all the review criteria of the grant, using the information provided by the scientist reviewers during discussion to help formulate their own individual score. The final score recommended by the lay reviewer should be congruent with the scores of the other reviewers, because their score will now reflect more than just the potential impact of the application.