



U.S. Department of Justice

Office on Violence Against Women

Washington, DC 20530

FY 2017 Office on Violence Against Women Peer Review Guidelines



Image source: Food Management

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More information regarding the Violence Against Women Act grant programs can be found at <http://www.justice.gov/ovw>

I. ABOUT THE OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Office on Violence Against Women (“OVW”) has prepared this guidebook to give you, the peer reviewer, a general understanding of our grant programs and the applications you will be reviewing. You should also know that your role is of utmost importance. Your expertise will impact communities across the country as they work to address sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Specifically, you will have a role in assisting OVW in determining which communities and organizations have access to the limited grant dollars administered by OVW. Because of this important role, we have decided to describe our Peer Review process and provide you with guidance on how you can be an effective peer reviewer.

An Overview of the Office on Violence Against Women and Its Discretionary Grant Programs

Since its inception in 1995, OVW has awarded over \$7.2 billion in grants and cooperative agreements to enable communities to provide assistance to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, enforce protection orders, and train police officers, prosecutors, and judges. OVW has also handled the Justice Department’s legal and policy issues regarding violence against women, coordinated Departmental efforts, provided national and international leadership, received international visitors interested in learning about the federal government’s role in addressing violence against women, and responded to requests for information regarding violence against women. OVW works closely with other components of the Justice Department, other federal government agencies (e.g. the Department of State, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, etc.), as well as state, tribal, and local jurisdictions to implement the mandates of the Violence Against Women Act and subsequent legislation.

OVW currently administers 19 grant programs (4 Formula and 15 Discretionary Programs) and a technical assistance initiative. These grant programs are designed to develop the nation’s capacity to reduce sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking by strengthening services to victims and holding offenders accountable.

Discretionary grant funds are awarded to a variety of recipients. Each discretionary program solicitation explicitly defines eligible recipients, (e.g., states, tribal governments, units of local government , faith-based organizations, institutions of higher education, private nonprofit organizations, and other organizations serving victims/survivors).

What is OVW Peer Review?

Peer Review is the technical and programmatic evaluation of grant applications by a group of subject matter experts qualified in a particular area related to violence against women. Every year OVW, through its Peer Review process, convenes panels of experts in domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking, and other relevant practitioners, to evaluate grant applications based on the specifications outlined in the program solicitation. Most competitive applications for discretionary grant programs are subject to Peer Review. OVW conducts several different methods of Peer Review: external or internal Peer Review, which can be conducted either in-person or on-line.

The Peer Review process provides an objective, independent review of applications. Subject matter experts (SMEs) and/or OVW staff identify strengths and areas of improvement of applications, rate them, and recommend which applications merit further consideration for funding. Peer Review recommendations are advisory in nature. Peer Review generally consists of written strengths and areas of improvement comments, provided in response to the program solicitation, together with the assignment of numerical scores.

Who is an Office on Violence Against Women Peer Reviewer?

1. The vast majority of OVW peer reviewers are active practitioners or recent retirees from relevant sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking professions. OVW does not use professional peer reviewers because it is our goal to have applications reviewed by individuals with up-to-date, on-the-ground knowledge of both the challenges and best practices in addressing violence against women.
2. Potential peer reviewers may include victim advocates, judges, prosecutors, representatives from community-based and faith-based organizations, law enforcement, legal professionals, and others with expertise on violence against women issues, as well as substantive knowledge in working with tribal communities, other culturally specific populations, college and university communities, rural areas, urban areas, and those working with persons with disabilities and persons over 50 years of age.
3. OVW maintains a database of knowledgeable practitioners, persons who have demonstrated experience in the fields relevant to the particular grant program for which applications are being reviewed. While the database is maintained by a peer review contractor, the list of eligible peer reviewers is developed and expanded by OVW.

4. Peer reviewers are expected to evaluate grant proposals in accordance with criteria outlined in the program solicitation and convey their analysis of an application clearly and accurately when completing their individual scoring forms and preparing for the panel's consensus discussions.
5. Peer reviewers must also adhere to OVW's conflict of interest and confidentiality policies. Copies of these policies can be found in your reviewer packet. Please review these documents carefully as you will be asked to sign them before commencing your individual review of any of the assigned applications.
6. As policy dictates, an OVW program will not allow an individual to serve as a peer reviewer who has a pending application to that specific grant program. OVW makes every attempt not to consult, as peer reviewers, individuals who are employed by an applicant for grant funding, employed by a Memorandum of Understanding partner of an applicant, or otherwise situated to gain financially from a submitted application. As a general rule, an individual with such a relationship to an application is considered to have a conflict of interest and cannot serve as a peer reviewer for the grant program under which they have a pending application.

In rare instances in which OVW requires select expertise to effectively peer review a grant program, the OVW Program Unit may seek approval on a case-by-case basis to waive the conflict of interest. In such an instance, the OVW Program Unit must document that a waiver is necessary because the need for the reviewer's services outweigh the potential for a conflict of interest. Justification should include: 1) information regarding the necessity for the expertise offered by the potential reviewer; 2) a description of the steps the program unit has taken to identify individuals with the required expertise, including federal employees; 3) documentation that other individuals with the required expertise are either unavailable and/or they have conflicts of a commensurate or higher degree (e.g. the proposed reviewer is a project partner while another possible reviewer is a direct employee of an applicant). If the need for the particular reviewer is based on scheduling availability, the Program Unit must describe the modification of the peer schedule or process that would be necessary in order to engage the services of an individual with the required expertise and a lesser conflict.

The waiver request memorandum should also include the anticipated number of applications and the expected number of awards. This will assist the reviewers of the waiver request to determine the degree to which the conflicted reviewer might be able to influence the overall outcome of the Peer Review consensus discussion. Determination that the conflicted reviewer could have a significant impact on the

overall outcome of the peer review process will most likely result in a denial of the waiver request.

A waiver request must be submitted for approval to the OVW Director through the Program Unit's Supervisor, the Deputy Director for Grant Development and Management, and an OVW Attorney Advisor. If the OVW Director grants the waiver requested, the reviewer must not be permitted to serve on the panel reviewing the application to which the reviewer is connected. Please see the Role of the Peer Reviewer on page 8 for more information.

7. Individuals interested in becoming a peer reviewer should provide OVW with a completed Peer Review Recruitment Form, copy of their résumé or curriculum vitae and the mandatory three references knowledgeable about the individual's experience in the violence against women field. The person's professional discipline should also be provided and any Violence Against Women Act funded grant projects to which the individual is now or has been a party to in the past. Interested parties can call OVW at (202) 307-6026 or send an email to ovw.peerreview@usdoj.gov for more information.

It is important to note that grantees that are 100% funded by an OVW grant program must take unpaid leave in order to participate in OVW Peer Review.

II. THE OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PEER REVIEW PROCESS

An Overview of the Grant Application Review Process

The application review process begins immediately after the close of a program's solicitation. In order to promote fairness in the amount of time applicants have to develop their proposals, all applications must be submitted by the date and time specified in the program solicitation. For applicants who experience technical problems and cannot submit an application electronically, they must contact the listed OVW grant point of contact prior to the application due date to request permission to submit an application by alternative means. Please note that only those applicants who can demonstrate that their application could not be submitted due to circumstances out of their control (e.g. acts of nature, failure of the Office of Justice Programs on-line Grants Management System or Grants.gov) will be allowed to submit applications after the due date. As with previous years, OVW does not accept any faxed applications.

The applicant is responsible for uploading a complete application. OVW will not contact applicants for missing or incomplete parts of applications. OVW will check the online submission for all items. The timely submission of applications and their attachments is necessary in order for OVW to meet its award announcement deadlines.

All applications will be subject to a review process that is fair and based on the criteria outlined in the program solicitation. OVW makes every attempt to ensure that proposals which do not fall within the scope of the grant program solicitation are not considered for funding. OVW will conduct a Basic Minimum Requirement (BMR) review of **all** applications prior to holding the peer review. The BMR process evaluates whether the applications received are complete and eligible to receive funding under the grant program. BMR is a short process and does not involve a substantive analysis of the application content. It is strictly to confirm the application's completeness and applicant's eligibility. The BMR process helps OVW to determine whether the application should be forwarded to Peer Review.

In order to be considered substantially complete, an application must include the mandatory attachments listed in the solicitation, which usually include the following:

- Project narrative;
- Budget narrative, budget detail worksheet; and for most programs
- Memorandum of Understanding or Letters of Support

Each program specific solicitation also identifies any additional elements that the applicant must meet to be considered eligible and that the application must meet to be considered complete. For example, some OVW administered grant programs have statutory certifications or statutory minimum requirements which must be met by applicants. Proposals which do not meet the relevant certification or minimum requirements, as required by statute, will not be forwarded to Peer Review. If applications fail to meet the BMR requirements, the application will not receive further consideration.

A substantially incomplete application is a proposal which does not include a required segment of the proposal, the absence of which makes the proposal impossible to review or would cost the proposal a significant number of points, such that it could not be successful. Substantially incomplete applications will not be forwarded to Peer Review nor will the applicant be contacted to submit these items. For example, if a proposal is missing the narrative, it will not go forward. On the other hand, applications missing non-critical elements (e.g. abstract, letter of non-supplanting), may lose points because of these missing pieces, but the proposal will still be forwarded to Peer Review.

During the programmatic review process, OVW is required to review the application to assess the following areas: 1) project scope, office priority/program special interest areas; 2) activities that compromise victim safety; and 3) past performance for applicants being considered for funding that have previously received OVW funding.



The Role of the Peer Review Panel

Peer Review panels are charged with evaluating each application by assigning numerical scores, or points, to each component of an application. Peer reviewers' individual scoring should be guided by the scoring format outlined in each program solicitation. Please note that your scoring, discussed below in more detail, is the most crucial part of the service you will provide. Peer reviewers are also charged with capturing consensus strengths and areas of improvement comments resulting from the panel discussion of each application. These comments should be guided by peer reviewer scores. This is true for both in-person and on-line reviews.

Peer Review panels usually consist of three individuals. Each panel will generally have, at least one violence against women victim advocate or representative from a nonprofit, nongovernmental victim services provider, which also may include representatives from faith-based organizations. Programs funded by OVW are not permitted to discriminate in the provision of services on the basis of a beneficiary's religion.

For an in-person Peer Review process, a panel will evaluate up to 12 applications for up to a 3-day period in Washington, DC. Some reviewers may be invited to participate in two panels, in which case they will be needed for a 5-day period. Peer reviewers are given one and a half days to read and score their assigned applications on-site under the guidance and supervision of OVW staff. On the third day, Peer Review panels will convene and discuss each application reviewed and scored in order to provide strengths and areas of improvement during the consensus discussion. Depending on the grant program, the panels may discuss one proposal on the first day to help

identify any challenges with the scoring form before the reviewers have scored the remaining applications. This provides an opportunity for peer reviewers to score one application and uncover any parts of the solicitation or scoring form needing additional clarification before completing their remaining proposals. It also provides peer reviewers and OVW staff the opportunity to see the reviewing style of all members of the panel and to estimate how long the panel will take to discuss its applications. This is an excellent opportunity for first-time reviewers to become comfortable with the review process. During the Peer Review process, an OVW staff person will be available on-site to answer substantive or programmatic questions.

While it may at first appear difficult to leave your work and family for 3-5 days, it provides peer reviewers with the ability to focus on the task at hand without the distraction of their other work commitments. This is particularly critical since OVW does not use professional reviewers, but instead relies upon practicing or recently retired professionals with violence against women expertise. Being on-site also gives reviewers direct access to assistance from OVW staff overseeing the grant programs. Additionally, this process shortens the entire time of that the award-making process by at least 3 weeks. One added benefit for reviewers is that they have an opportunity to meet with other violence against women professionals from around the country. During an on-line Peer Review, the timing of the review process differs from an in-person process. While the in-person process generally takes up to 5-days to review and score the applications, an online review may take up to 2-3 weeks to read and score the applications. During this process, peer reviewers are given 2-weeks to read and upload their scores into the online Grants Management System (GMS). On week 3, peer reviewers will convene and discuss each application reviewed in order to provide strengths and areas of improvement, over a structured telephone conversation along with a recorder and an OVW program staff.

Regardless of the Peer Review format, all peer reviewers will receive compensation in the amount of \$150 for each application read and scored.

The Role of the Peer Reviewer

Peer Review panel members, OVW staff, and the Peer Review contractor must maintain complete confidentiality of all application materials, reviewer identities, comments, deliberations, and recommendations of the Peer Review panel. The review panel guidelines prohibit panelists from providing any information — before, during, and after the review — regarding their deliberations or recommendations to anyone outside the Peer Review process. Should a Peer Review panel member receive a request for application materials, panel discussion information, recommendations, the review process in general, or about a specific application, the reviewer must notify the

designated OVW point of contact and the Peer Review contractual point of contact immediately.

All peer reviewers must attend the orientation meeting where OVW staff will discuss the specific discretionary program under review. During orientation, OVW staff will provide an overview of expectations for the Peer Review process, roles and responsibilities of reviewers, OVW Staff and the Peer Review contractor. The orientation meeting will also highlight changes to the solicitation and scoring form. For on-line reviews, this information will be covered over the phone.

Peer reviewers should carefully read the discretionary grant program solicitation and develop a clear understanding of the criteria under review before reading and evaluating the applications. For in-person reviews, OVW staff will be available on-site during business hours throughout the Peer Review to answer questions regarding the solicitation, or the reviewer scoring form. For on-line reviews, OVW staff will be available via telephone for the entire duration of the Peer Review consensus meeting.

Peer reviewers should be cognizant, at all times, of OVW's policies concerning confidentiality and conflicts of interest, reviewing and scoring the application. During the course of reviewing their assigned applications, a reviewer may become aware of possible conflicts of interest and/or issues that may call into question their impartiality or objectivity regarding a proposal. In order to address the conflict in a timely fashion, reviewers should immediately bring the conflict to the attention of an OVW staff member or the Peer Review contractual staff for resolution. The OVW Program Unit should determine if the issue identified rises to the level of a possible conflict of interest. If the issue identified rises to the level of a possible conflict of interest, the OVW Program Unit should consider replacing the reviewer, or if the replacement is not possible, the OVW Program Unit must follow the steps identified earlier in this section to seek a waiver. If the issue identified is not an actual conflict, but might create an appearance of partiality, the OVW Program Unit should either assign the reviewer or the application to another panel. It is important that each peer reviewer review and sign/initial confidentiality and conflicts of interest forms. This provides ample opportunity for applications to be assigned to another Peer Review panel which does not have a conflict. During external, in-person reviews, the reviewer will not receive their scoring forms until they have signed their conflict of interest forms. Please note that peer reviewers who do not return confidentiality and conflict of interest forms, may compromise their ability to receive compensation for participating in peer review.

Peer reviewers should compare the application they are reading with the discretionary grant program solicitation. Each discretionary grant program solicitation outlines the criteria for review of each application, including point accumulation and scoring,

statutory eligibility, and program requirements. Each application should be rated against the criteria contained in the solicitation and corresponding Peer Review scoring form. Applications should not be compared against one another. Applications will be scored based on the degree to which the applicant responds to each section and addresses each element contained within the corresponding section. Furthermore, applications will be scored based upon the quality of the response and the level of detail provided. Each element **must** be addressed in the section in which it is requested. Points may be deducted if the applicant does not include the information in the appropriate section even if it is included elsewhere within the application. Each section will be reviewed as a separate document and will be scored as such.

When rating the budget, reviewers must consider the budget in relation to the Program Narrative sections of the application.

Peer reviewers should make detailed notes regarding their thoughts on each scoring form. Reviewers' notes should clearly identify why points were deducted from a particular criteria or why no points were deducted. Notes should include page numbers from applications whenever possible, as this will assist with the panel discussion. Peer reviewers should attend the panel meetings on time and fully prepared to discuss their evaluation of an application: scores, positive and negative attributes, and strengths and areas of improvement.

The primary purpose of the panel's discussion is to identify and resolve areas of stark disagreement. For example, reviewers should be in agreement about whether or not the proposal includes all of the elements necessary for the applicant to successfully implement the project described. Peer reviewers should also use their discussion to reach consensus where possible, and if necessary, adjust their initial numerical scores accordingly. This should occur after a thorough and accurate discussion of the merits of each section of the application. To the extent possible, peer reviewers should attempt to reach consensus. The written product of this discussion is the panel's *consensus report*.

The consensus strengths and areas of improvement written for each application reviewed include comments that are developed and agreed upon by a majority of the panel. For example, if the panel consists of three reviewers, two would constitute a majority. The consensus report will describe the strengths and areas of improvement. The lead reviewer will be responsible for eliciting consensus comments from the Peer Review panel, which the meeting recorder will capture on a summary report at the conclusion of each application review.

Lastly, for in person reviews, each panelist will be assigned to serve as the *lead reviewer* for some of the proposals. The *lead reviewer* is responsible for facilitating the panel's discussion for their assigned applications. It is recommended that first-time reviewers do not serve as the *lead reviewer* for the very first application the panel discusses. Specifically, the *lead reviewer* will be responsible for certifying the scores of each panel member. This consists of ensuring that all of the scores have been recorded accurately on each panelist's individual scoring form, the panel's matrix consensus form and the flip chart matrix form. The *lead reviewer* will also be responsible for ensuring that all of the changes made have been noted in red ink, the panelist has initialed all of their changes, and all figures are calculated correctly. Finally, the lead reviewer will be required to sign the consensus form indicating that all of these scores are recorded, legible, and accurately calculated. In addition, the OVW Peer Review contractor will also certify all scores by verifying individual peer reviewer scoring forms against the recorder's notes and the scoring matrix sheets for each consensus meeting.

For on-line reviews, OVW Staff will take on a facilitation role via phone during the consensus meeting. After the consensus meeting, all reviewers are required to change scores within GMS after the panel discussions are complete to reflect any adjustments made to their initial comments and/or scores. However, it is important to note that GMS will automatically calculate and verify all scores via the Peer Review module.

During the consensus discussion, the *lead reviewer* is also responsible for ensuring that the panel provides the recorder with complete, accurate and final consensus comments for each criteria area.

The Role and Responsibility of the Recorder

For both in person and on-line reviews each panel will be supported by a recorder who will capture the panel's consensus strengths and areas of improvement comments to create a consensus report for each application. Complete and accurate consensus reports are critical to the Peer Review process as they assist program staff in making funding recommendations and are also used to provide constructive feedback to the applicants. All recorders are required to take part in a mandatory orientation to discuss OVW's expectations during the Peer Review process.

Please note that the recorder is not a substantive or programmatic expert, and therefore, should not answer substantive or programmatic questions.

The primary responsibility of the recorder is to:

- Keep accurate record of scores, if applicable.
- Be observant, accurate, and comprehensive when recording consensus strengths and areas of improvement as dictated by the reviewers.
- Bring to the attention of the OVW Program Specialist and/or the *lead reviewer* any potential discrepancies among peer reviewers' strengths and areas of improvement to ensure that conflicting comments are addressed prior to the end of the discussion for each application.

During the Meeting:

Recorders will:

1. Capture panelists' consensus comments for each application as instructed by the panelists. Consensus is defined as agreement by a majority of the panel (2 out of 3 panel members). Recorders should capture as much detail as possible. Written consensus comments should not be paraphrased.
2. When necessary, ask for clarification to ensure that reviewers' comments have been correctly captured.

3. Before discussion moves to the next critical element section, read back the consensus comments to panelists to confirm all consensus comments were captured.
4. Keep track of scores and all score changes, if applicable.

At the end of the discussion for each application:

Recorders will:

1. Read notes/consensus comments aloud to panelists to ensure that comments are accurate, complete, and clearly stated and that no discrepancies exist after each application criteria section.

OVW's Role After Peer Review is Conducted

As mentioned previously, although very important, the peer reviewer's role is advisory in nature. In addition to the scores, OVW considers a number of factors, including past performance of grantees, geographic diversity, underserved populations, and other priorities when making funding decisions.

It is also important to know that OVW's Director makes all funding decisions and those applicants not recommended for funding will most likely be notified no later than October 31st of each year. Please note that it is OVW policy that at no time are applicants told the names of peer reviewers or the scores they received. However, applicants may request a copy of the panel's consensus comments on strengths and areas of improvement.

III. THOUGHTS AND TIPS ON EFFECTIVE REVIEWING

Reading the Discretionary Grant Program Solicitation

Solicitations, also referred to as Requests for Proposals (RFPs), contain all of the pertinent information needed to apply for an Office on Violence Against Women discretionary grant. The solicitation will generally describe the grant program, eligible applicants, required applicant certifications, the program's statutory purposes and priority areas, and information on how to apply.

Solicitations will also discuss the required content areas of an application and the number of points an application can earn on any given section. It is important that you pay close attention to this section, as the peer reviewer Scoring Form will mirror this section of the solicitation.

Reading Discretionary Grant Program Applications

Peer reviewers must read, evaluate, and score each application assigned to them **before** the Peer Review panel convenes on day three of the in-person session. In some instances panels may start meeting in the afternoon of day two. This will be announced during the orientation session or the panel itself may choose to do so after scoring its first application. If the panel wants to meet earlier or later than the time established during orientation, this request should be made to the OVW staff and the Peer Review contractor to ensure the availability of an OVW staff member and a meeting recorder. **A panel should never meet without an OVW staff member and meeting recorder present.**

A peer reviewer will be assigned approximately up to 12 applications and typically have a day and a half to two days to complete their evaluation. Please allocate sufficient time to carefully read, evaluate, and score each application.

Please do not conduct any sightseeing and other business and personal meetings during the three days allocated for Peer Review. Please note that there have been limited instances in which OVW has been forced to reduce a peer reviewer's compensation because of a substantial failure to complete their scoring. Rushed or incomplete scoring is a disservice to the applicant(s) in question, the other peer reviewers, and the review process as a whole.

All applications should be well written. Nevertheless, when reading an application, a peer reviewer should be cognizant of the fact that many of our applicants have limited resources, including word processing software. Please do not presume that each

applicant has the ability to retain the services of a professional grant writer. Many of the best proposals are NOT written by professional grant writers.

Peer reviewers should give equal value to secular and non-secular applicants and project partners. **No eligible applicant or grantee will be discriminated against on the basis of its religious character or affiliation, religious name, or the religious composition of its board of directors or persons working in the organization. Faith-based organizations receiving OVW funding should retain their independence and do not lose or have to modify their religious identity (e.g., removing religious symbols) to receive OVW funding. In addition, any inherently religious activities must be separated in time or place from grant funded activities.**

Many find it useful to review applications alongside the solicitation. Your evaluation of an application should track the discretionary grant program solicitation as much as possible.

Participating in the Peer Review Panel Discussion

Your professional expertise and analysis of an application are critical to our process of awarding funding support to communities throughout the country. Your ability to prepare clear and concise comments about an application, both oral and written, is essential to our process. Your peers will ask you to justify your score. You have been selected as a peer reviewer because of what you have to offer to the consideration of the proposals submitted in response to this solicitation.

Each panel member will be assigned to serve as lead peer reviewer for approximately one-third of the panel's assigned applications. Panels will meet during the last day and a half or day of the Peer Review session.

The panel discussion is a professional dialogue designed to expand upon the peer reviewers' scores and comments. This dialogue should result in a consensus report containing strengths and areas of improvement. The dialogue may also result in peer reviewers changing some aspect of their original evaluation— scores and/or comments.

You should not feel obligated to change your scores; however, we ask that you respectfully consider the comments of the other reviewers. OVW carefully attempts to balance each panel with a variety of professionals.

Since OVW does not use professional reviewers, but rather individuals actively working or recently retired from work in the violence against women field, peer reviewers will often speak from their experience and may not know or use professional reviewer jargon.

Make sure that your scores are supported by your comments and your comments are supported by your scores. Likewise, the panel's consensus reports should be supported by your final numerical scores.

Make sure that you maintain the confidentiality of the Peer Review process, please refrain from sharing any information about the applications assigned to your panel, and any discussion about them, outside of the panel meetings. This includes the break rooms and lobby at Peer Review. You should also refrain from comparing one application to another.

IV. THOUGHTS AND TIPS FOR PREPARING EFFECTIVE COMMENTS AND CONSENSUS REPORTS

Articulating and Drafting Your Comments

- Throughout this document, we have emphasized the important role that your comments, as a peer reviewer, have on OVW's application review process. What follows below is a list of thoughts and tips that will help you to prepare the types of comments that would be most helpful to us. Your comments may also be used to help the applicant improve future applications.
- Your comments should be formulated in complete sentences, be helpful, and considerate. Citing page numbers when describing strengths and areas of improvement can both expedite your panel's discussion and help applicants to better understand your comments.
- Please avoid using general comments; we want you to be as specific as possible. Consider what would be most helpful for the application to improve their proposal.
- Note where the application proposes to do something in opposition to the letter or spirit of the solicitation (a copy of which will be provided to you).
- Your comments should reflect an evaluation of the application (or a particular component of an application), including the ever important "*why.*" When citing a strength or area for improvement, try to articulate what the more *appropriate* or *reasonable* practice or policy should be.
- Your comments should be accurate. You should also feel free to revise or otherwise edit your comments at any time during your review of the applications or the panel meeting.
- When reviewing a proposal's budget, please make sure that the budget reflects the activities described in the narrative. The budget should not include items not related to carrying out the proposed project. Consider whether or not all budget items are necessary for the success of the project. Are they reasonable? However, do keep in mind that prices vary across the country.
- OVW provides peer reviewers with scoring forms that reflect strengths and areas of improvement. When developing your strengths and areas of improvement

with your panel, please consider the following strategy. 1) Since you cannot know how the proposal will perform as compared with proposals reviewed by other panels, assume the proposal is not getting funded even if you have given it a very high score. 2) Given the aforementioned assumption, what would it have taken for you to have given the proposal a perfect score?

V. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY

[See attachment]

DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

CONFLICT OF INTEREST CHECKLIST

It is the policy of the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) that a peer reviewer shall not participate in the review of any application when he or she has a real or potential conflict of interest. Please INITIAL BESIDE EACH conflict of interest situation confirming that you DO NOT have the specified conflict of interest.

I have not been, nor will I be, directly involved in this project or any other project (e.g., as a current or past advisory board member, board of directors, consultant, collaborator, or conference speaker whose expenses would be paid from the grant).

I am not employed by the same institution or organization as the applicant, nor was I employed there within the past year.

I have not collaborated with the applicant within the past year on work related to the proposal.

I am not now nor have been under consideration within the last year for a position at the applicant's organization or institution.

I have not served in an official capacity with the applicant's organization within the past year.

My organization does not have members or closely affiliated officials (e.g., board of trustees members) who serve in an official capacity with the applicant's organization or institution.

I do not have a familial or current/former romantic relationship with any individuals employed by the applicant or any of the partnering organizations on the project.

I have not had professional or personal relationships with the project director, or other key personnel identified in the application, including as a student, thesis advisor, or postdoctoral advisor.

The applicant and I are not known to be either close friends or open antagonists.

I do not have an application under review by OVW within the same grant program that I am reviewing.

_ I have never conducted a formal program process or outcome evaluation of the assigned applications.

_ I have not provided substantial technical assistance to any of the applicants assigned to my panel.

_ I am not reviewing any applications submitted from a jurisdiction located within my primary state of residence or employment or submitted by a tribe of which I am a member.

Your signature on this document indicates that each application will be reviewed and scored impartially with no biases, either for or against, and based only on the merits and guidelines outlined in the grant program solicitation.

I certify that I have no conflicts of interest in performing the assigned task(s). I have informed OVW Staff or the Contractor of any prior knowledge or interest in any documents or information pertinent to this assignment.

Please identify any proposal(s) of conflict:

Legal Name (Printed)

Signature Date

Solicitation Name Panel Number

**OFFICE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
CONTRACT AGREEMENT**

CONFIDENTIALITY

I agree to treat as absolutely confidential all application materials, names of all applicants, reviewer identities, comments, deliberations, scores, and recommendations. I will not provide any information before, during, or after the review to anyone outside OVW or the Contractor staff. If I am contacted for information about the applications, an applicant, or the Peer Review process, I will immediately notify **Ms. Tia Bowman**, OVW's Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), at **202-353-9349**. I understand that failure to comply with this policy will result in my removal from the OVW Peer Review Consultant Pool.

Signature

Date

ADHERENCE TO TIMELINE

I agree to complete all tasks per the dates referenced in the Assignment of Task letter. If requirements and schedules are not met, this contract is subject to cancellation, with reduced or withheld payment for services.

I have reviewed this contract agreement and my signature affixed below is evidence that I agree to perform the assigned task(s) according to the specifications outlined in this letter.

Signature

Date

**United States Department of Justice
Office on Violence Against Women**

Training for Peer Reviewers of Grant Applications
Faith-Based and Community Organizations as Applicants

In scoring grant proposals, OVW's peer reviewers will treat faith-based and other community organizations ("FBCOs") equally, regardless of their religious mission or lack thereof. Listed below are guidelines to help you meet this requirement:

- An eligible applicant or grantee must not be discriminated for or against on the basis of: 1) its religious character or affiliations, 2) religious name, 3) religious mission statement, 4) the religious composition of its board of directors, or 5) persons working in the organization.
- Use the same scoring criteria for both faith-based and secular nonprofit organizations. Give the grant applications of faith-based organizations equal consideration to those of secular nonprofit and for-profit grant applicants.
- Among faith-based applicants, do not favor or disfavor an application based on the particular faith or denomination of the applicant.
- Do not assume anything about an applicant's qualifications from that fact that the applicant is or is not faith-based. Indeed, do not assume anything beyond what is written. You should not give an applicant the benefit of the doubt, or assume the worst, based on information or presumptions you have about the applicant, its religious beliefs, or its religious activities.
- Assume that a faith-based applicant will abide by all the rules of OVW and DOJ. This includes the requirement that grantees serve all eligible beneficiaries, regardless of their religion or their interest or disinterest in participating in the religious activities of the applicant. In other words, unless you have evidence in the proposal that the applicant will not obey these rules, do not assume that they will not obey them just because the applicant is faith-based in character or evangelistic in mission.
- Be honest about your ability to be objective in scoring a proposal from a particular religion, sect or denomination, or from a group with an atheistic or agnostic philosophy. Treat such a bias as you must any other conflict of interest: immediately notify OVW and decline to score that proposal.

- Where a program calls for or gives points for collaborations with non-government organizations, remember that the latter includes FBCOs. The same amount of credit or number of points should be given to proposals showing such collaborations regardless of whether they involve faith-based or secular organizations.
- Previous grantees should not be favored over first-time or previously unsuccessful applicants. Scoring may be based in part on demonstrated capacity to meet program goals. But that capacity can exist in an applicant that has not previously sought public funds.

Summary of USDOJ's Equal Treatment Regulation
Executive Order 13279, dated December 12, 2002, as amended by Executive Order
13559, dated November 22, 2010 and 28 C.F.R. Part 38

It is DOJ policy that faith-based and other community organizations that statutorily qualify as eligible applicants under DOJ programs are invited and encouraged to apply for assistance awards to fund eligible grant activities. Faith-based and other community organizations will be considered for awards on the same basis as other eligible applicants and, if they receive assistance awards, will be treated on an equal basis with all other grantees in the administration of such awards. No eligible applicant or grantee will be discriminated for or against on the basis of its religious character or affiliation, religious name, or the religious composition of its board of directors or persons working in the organization.

Faith-based organizations receiving DOJ assistance awards retain their independence and do not lose or have to modify their religious identity (e.g., removing religious symbols) to receive assistance awards. DOJ grant funds, however, may not be used to fund any inherently religious activity, such as prayer or worship. Inherently religious activity is permissible, although it cannot occur during an activity funded with DOJ grant funds; rather, such religious activity must be separate in time or place from the DOJ-funded program. Further, participation in such activity by individuals receiving services must be voluntary. Last, faith-based organizations receiving DOJ assistance awards must provide written notice to program beneficiaries of certain protections and, if a beneficiary objects to the religious character of the organization, must make efforts to refer the person to an alternative provider. Programs funded by DOJ are not permitted to discriminate in the provision of services on the basis of a beneficiary's religion.

For the full text of the Regulation ["EQUAL TREATMENT FOR FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS"](https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=DOJ_FRDOC_0001-0169), 28 C.F.R. Part 38, as amended, see https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=DOJ_FRDOC_0001-0169