

Overview of Peer Review

Grant-making by Nevada Volunteers

Nevada Volunteers, the Governor's Commission on Service, is Nevada's resource center for volunteer and service efforts. One of our primary roles is to select and administer [AmeriCorps*State](#) programs in Nevada. Nevada Volunteers reviews a variety of applications including AmeriCorps State operating grants (annually), occasional mini-grant opportunities for special projects and service days, and periodic volunteer and service awards. Regardless of the size or scope, all applications must be evaluated and rated to determine which will receive awards of funds or recognition.

What is a Peer Review?

Peer Review is the portion of the grant application assessment process that is conducted by a panel of individuals with expertise related to the purpose and/or area of focus for the grant program. In this context, "peer" refers to looking intently or searchingly at the proposal submitted in order to analyze the quality of each application and rate them based on published criteria.

What is the process for Peer Review?

Nevada Volunteers uses online meeting technology and teleconferencing to conduct peer reviews. This allows individuals from many different locations and in a wide variety of circumstances to participate from their home or office.

The peer review process includes training and orientation to the grant program and purpose before applications are distributed. The proposals received are then distributed to peer reviewers electronically along with any forms used for the particular grant program. This is followed by a period of independent (i.e., "on your own") reading and scoring of applications. Peer reviewers then meet virtually (or occasionally in person) to discuss ratings and comments on the applications. The final scores determine the rank order as well as recommendations of peer reviewers.

Is there a stipend for Peer Reviewers?

No. Nevada Volunteers asks peer reviewers to volunteer their time and expertise. The conference call/webinar expenses are underwritten by Nevada Volunteers by using a service that is toll free to the user. On rare occasions, Nevada Volunteers has opted to bring peer reviewers together in a single physical space. If that does become necessary, travel costs may be reimbursed.

Are the identities of Peer Reviewers made public?

The identities of Peer Reviewers are protected during the actual review process. Reviewer comments, scores, and identities, are public information once the decisions on awards are made public. Other information that becomes part of public record are the names of all organizations that applied for funding and their proposals.

Role of Peer Reviewers

What are the responsibilities of Reviewers?

The primary responsibility of peer reviewers is to participate in all phases of the process. Teams of reviewers are selected for each set of applications with the express intent that each person's expertise will be brought to bear on assessing the quality. When people do not fully participate, the absence of someone's expertise or viewpoint has a direct impact on the team. That said, we do recognize that illness or a business crisis may develop unexpectedly and reviewers may have to drop out.

Other responsibilities are to

- Protect the integrity of the process by monitoring for “Conflicts of Interest” and notifying Nevada Volunteers when such a conflict arises.
- Maintain as confidential, information about applicants that is revealed through the peer review process.
- Refrain from using such information in any way that would benefit the reviewer or any other organization or business.
- Complete all the tasks for each phase of peer review including but not limited to attending the online training, reading and assessing proposals, submitting comments and other data requested, and participating in conference calls and online meetings.
- Return any materials requested at the end of the process.

What equipment or material is needed?

Because Peer Reviewers generally work at home or from their office location and this process is accomplished using available technology, the following tools are essential for the role:

- High speed or DSL internet connection to handle opening of large documents and participating in online meetings that are interactive.
- Access to a fax or the ability to scan signed forms for transmitting to Nevada Volunteers.
- A computer and phone with separate connections that permit using both at the same time.
- (optional – depends on working preference) Printer

What are the qualifications of Reviewers?

In general, peer reviewers need to have demonstrated technical experience in a field related to a need and activity discussed in a proposal. Generally the needs and activities can be classified as related to health, human services, disaster/emergency services, environment, education, veterans affairs, and economic opportunity. Experience with grant writing or reviewing is helpful but not required.

Individuals with technical expertise and experience in volunteer program design, implementation, or management are very likely to be asked to serve as peer reviewers. This happens because the grant programs managed by Nevada Volunteers are awarded to organizations with existing or planned volunteer programs.

Several categories of grants also require assessment of an organization’s capacity to administer a major grant program. For that reason, Nevada Volunteers needs peer reviewers with expertise in financial systems, nonprofit management, organizational development, and the various ways that nonprofits as well as public agencies generate match for federal dollars.

Other qualifications are the ability to assess written narrative using predetermined criteria and discern as well as provide rationale for the quality rating assigned; ability to read significant volumes of material within a pre-determined schedule; ability to organize one’s self to accomplish the work required on a schedule that generally does not accommodate extensions or modifications; ability to participate in discussions that are not face-to-face and negotiate with other reviewers over the ratings and scoring.

What is the benefit of being a peer reviewer?

Peer Reviewers gain experience in analyzing and scoring grants that benefit local programs directly. Reviewers gain a detailed understanding of the grant-making process for a major source of funding allocated to Nevada and learn about the selection criteria for National Service programs such as AmeriCorps. Reviewers have an opportunity to network with experts in their profession from around the

region. Finally, reviewers have a chance to learn from others how technical aspects of meeting a community need integrate into activities through strong program designs.

What is the time commitment for participating in a review?

AmeriCorps State Grants

This grant application peer review process is a somewhat time-intensive and time-sensitive activity. The components of a review and an estimate for the amount of time each phase takes are as follows:

- 1 hour -- Orientation conference call
- 1.5 hour -- Review of written assessment instructions provided to each reviewer, signing and emailing/faxing/ mailing any required certifications (e.g., Conflict of Interest)
- 1 to 2 hours per application to accomplish all these tasks -- read and analyze proposal, develop and record comments and/or ratings, draft comments and submit.
- 20 minutes per proposal -- Online scoring meeting including development of final comments [if applicable].
- Travel time (if applicable).
- The **total time commitment ranges from 5 to 15 hours over a 20-35 day period** depending on the number of applications received.

Mini-grants and Awards

- 20 minutes -- Orientation
- 20 minutes -- Review of written assessment instructions provided to each reviewer, signing and emailing/faxing/ mailing any required certifications (e.g., Conflict of Interest)
- 30 minutes per application to accomplish all these tasks -- read and analyze proposal, develop and record comments and/or ratings, draft comments and submit.
- 10 minutes per proposal -- Online scoring meeting including development of final comments [if applicable].
- Travel time (if applicable).
- The **total time commitment ranges from 3-5 hours over a 7-15 day period** depending on the number of applications received.

How long is my application kept in the pool of potential reviewers?

Peer reviewers that are selected will remain in the pool of potential reviewers for two years. We will accept applications at any time. Toward the end of the two-year period, you will be contacted to determine if you would like to remain a member of the pool or deactivate your application.