

**Submission by the American Association of Immunologists (AAI)
to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Request for Information (RFI) on
Proposed Changes to Reporting Outcomes from NIH Peer Review**

October 13, 2026

The American Association of Immunologists appreciates NIH's efforts to align funding decisions with agency scientific priorities and to encourage enhanced focus on overall peer review outcomes. However, AAI strongly opposes the proposal to withhold final impact scores and percentiles from applicants, institutions, NIH program staff, and Institute, Center, and Office (ICO) leadership and advisory councils. This proposal significantly reduces transparency and risks undermining confidence in NIH funding decisions.

Withholding overall impact scores is inconsistent with NIH's longstanding commitment to transparency and accountability in the stewardship of taxpayer funds. NIH's current peer review system, long considered the global "gold standard," provides investigators with meaningful information about how their proposals compare to those of their peers. Replacing this precise and granular assessment with a system that groups applications into three broad categories would reduce transparency and withhold a useful metric without any evidence that this would achieve the intended outcome of strengthening alignment with the NIH Unified Funding Strategy (UFS). In fact, one of the core tenets of the UFS is to "prioritize scientific merit," a goal that will be more difficult to accomplish in the absence of these key metrics. At a time when both NIH and the administration have emphasized the importance of openness, accountability, and public trust in decision making, intentionally withholding information that will continue to be generated by the review system represents a step in the wrong direction.

Overall impact scores provide critical information that helps investigators improve future submissions and determine if their proposal was competitive enough to resubmit. Written critiques, while indispensable, do not fully convey where an application falls relative to the broader pool of proposals. The scores are used to assess whether an application requires minor or substantial revisions, or whether an entirely different approach is required. The loss of this metric will make it more difficult for researchers to make informed decisions regarding resubmission strategies in an already highly competitive environment.

Access to overall impact scores is particularly important for mentoring and quality workforce development. NIH funding supports trainees and early-career investigators who rely on guidance from experienced mentors. The impact scores and reviewer comments help mentors advise mentees on how to interpret review outcomes, identify strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies for future success. The proposed change would deprive mentors and mentees of an important benchmark for



understanding competitiveness within the NIH peer review system and would likely disproportionately affect early-stage investigators new to navigating this system. Institutions also rely on overall impact scores and percentiles for planning purposes, as the overall scores provide them with an important degree of predictability regarding funding outcomes.

The proposed change may also inadvertently increase administrative burden on NIH program staff. Investigators who no longer have a clear understanding of the relative scores of their proposals are likely to seek additional guidance from program staff regarding the competitiveness of their applications, likeliness of funding, and explanations for why proposals were not funded. The lack of transparency may also lead to an increased number of proposals as investigators hedge their bets against uncertainty in funding outcomes, placing additional workload on NIH program staff and volunteer peer reviewers. Importantly, withholding the overall impact score, an important benchmark of peer review results, risks signaling to volunteer peer reviewers that their essential contributions are being devalued, disincentivizing already fatigued volunteers who dedicate substantial time and effort to study sections.

Importantly, removing access to final overall impact scores and funding percentiles would weaken an important source of accountability in the NIH funding process. These measures provide a transparent link between peer review and funding decisions, helping reinforce confidence that scientific merit remains the primary driver of supporting taxpayer-funded research. Withholding these scores risks creating more uncertainty about how funding decisions are made. Preserving transparency is essential not only for fairness, but for maintaining public trust in the integrity and independence of the U.S. biomedical research enterprise.

AAI urges NIH to retain the reporting of overall impact scores and percentiles to investigators, institutions, NIH program staff, ICO leadership and advisory councils. Maintaining access will better support transparency, investigator learning and development, accountability, and confidence that scientific merit remains the foundation of NIH funding decisions.

