

Research Review Committee (RRC)
Department of Psychiatry
Policy on Review of First R-Series Grant Applications:
The “First Independent Research Support & Transition (FIRST)”
Process

A. Goals of the Policy

- To ensure that a faculty member’s first R-series NIH grant application is highly competitive
- To provide a process that helps junior faculty members transition from the highly structured review process of a K award application to the less structured standard RRC review process

B. Policy Statement

The Department of Psychiatry has a highly-structured K Review Process for mentored career development award applications to NIH. The Department also has a systematic process for review R-series grant applications to NIH, or equivalent applications to other funding sources. However, the standard “Type A” RRC review process is less structured than the K Review Process. Junior faculty members with K awards are expected to submit their first R-series award 2-3 years into their K award. Given their limited experience preparing such applications, K awardees may benefit from a more rigorous review process than afforded by the standard Type A RRC review. Likewise, junior faculty members recruited from outside of the Department may have limited experience with internal peer-review in general, and the RRC review process in particular. These factors provide the motivation for the RRC policy on first R-series grant applications.

The intent of the new “First R” review process is to help junior faculty submit highly competitive R-series (typically R21 or R01) award applications. The First R review process draws on elements of the K Review process to provide more intensive, iterative review of the developing application. This process will teach junior faculty some of the formal and informal rules of grantsmanship, with the aim submitting a successful first R application and developing skills that will translate to subsequent high-quality grant applications.

C. Research Review Committee Process for First R-Series Applications

1. The enhanced process for review of first R-series applications is voluntary. Faculty members are encouraged, but not required, to participate. If the faculty member chooses not to participate, s/he will follow standard procedures for Type A RRC review of the application.
2. The Principal Investigator will identify 3 mid-senior level Department faculty members to serve as a First Independent Research Support & Transition (FIRST)

Committee. The PI may seek assistance in developing the FIRST Committee from his/her mentor, Dr. Buysse, Dr. Lewis, and members of his/her Mid-K Consultation Committee. Members of the FIRST Committee must have served as Principal Investigator on a previous R-series (or equivalent) award. One member of the FIRST Committee should be designated as Chair, to help coordinate the review process.

4. The FIRST Committee will conduct 3 rounds of review of the Specific Aims page of the application. The Specific Aims page is the most critical element of the application, and constitutes a blueprint for the Research Plan.
5. The FIRST Committee members will read and comment upon 2-3 iterations of the Specific Aims page. Committee members are expected to provide written comments for each round of review. Initial review comments on the Specific Aims do not need to follow any specific format, but should address both the content and the organization/style of the aims page. Additional comments may be provided in an edited version of the Specific Aims document (e.g., using Track Changes in Word).
6. In addition, the FIRST Committee is encouraged to meet at least one time in person with the applicant during the review process. In many cases, this meeting will likely have optimal impact if conducted after the first or second round of review (i.e., review of the entire application and provision of written comments).
7. All written reviews of the application will be distributed to the FIRST Committee members, Dr. Buysse, and the RRC Coordinator, Melissa (Missy) DeVito.
8. Following the second or third round of review, the FIRST Committee members should discuss (in person, by phone, or e-mail) whether they believe the application is ready to proceed. The FIRST Committee Chair will notify Dr. Buysse in a brief e-mail of the Committee's approval.
9. The PI will then work on the body of the application and submit it to the RRC for routine Type A review at least one month before the internal deadline at OGC. Type A review will be conducted as with any other application. Reviewers may overlap with FIRST Committee members, but should include at least one new reviewer.
10. If, after initial NIH review, the application needs to be re-submitted as an A1 application, the PI may choose to seek advice once again from the FIRST Committee. Reviews should focus on the Summary Statement and Introduction to the Revised Application, as well as the revised Specific Aims. The subsequent Type A RRC process will be identical to that described for the initial submission.
11. A Principal Investigator may request FIRST review for more than one application if these applications are being submitted for different deadlines, and/or for different funding mechanisms (e.g., R03, R21, R34, R01).

Date: July 21, 2021