



# New Jersey Office of Faith Based Initiatives

## PEER REVIEW OVERVIEW

The New Jersey Office of Faith Based Initiatives (OFBI) thanks you for agreeing to participate as a reviewer. The peer review overview is provided to ensure that all reviewers have a clear understanding of their role and the expectations of the Office of Faith Based Initiatives. We hope this document will greatly assist you in moving as quickly as possible through the applications.

**Commitment:** Peer reviewers must be available to completely read and rate applications and submit initial scores in SAGE as specified in the Specification of Services document;

**Summary of Grant Cycle:** To give you an idea of how your work fits into the total picture, we have provided the following summary of the grants cycle.

Guidelines for this grant round have been posted on the OFBI website and can be found at <https://nj.gov/state/ofbi.shtml>. The grant program was marketed through postings on the Department of State, Division of Programs website, state grant announcement list, the OFBI Constant Contact email distribution, and OFBI's social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook). Technical assistance sessions were conducted via Zoom and live streamed on Facebook, recorded and uploaded onto the OFBI website. Applicants were also encouraged to contact OFBI staff members directly with questions and concerns. The application deadline is May 26, 2021 at 4:59 p.m.

**Role of Reviewers:** Reviewers provide the OFBI with expert, discipline-specific evaluations of each proposal by reviewing each application thoroughly, consistently and objectively measuring the proposed project against the stated criteria of the funding program. Reviewers, in general, do not recommend specific funding amounts. However, review panels do generally make recommendations regarding funding cut-offs, and the final scores and comments that they submit provide the direct basis for funding decisions.

We ask that you review the *Guidelines and Application* so that you are thoroughly familiar with the program prior to beginning the evaluation. These guidelines are available on our website by clicking <https://nj.gov/state/ofbi.shtml> scroll down to "Spot Light" click "Grant Opportunities."

Each reviewer is responsible for completing an evaluation (including comments on the criteria) and overall rating for every application prior to the panel meeting. The entire application and review process for this program will be conducted electronically through SAGE. You will access your assigned applications and the review materials through SAGE. We ask that you complete your preliminary scores and comments on SAGE at least one week prior to the deliberation date.

Remember that your comments must support the numerical score given. Applicants place great importance on the comments made by reviewers due to the strong qualifications of the persons we engage. Applicants and the rest of the public will have the option to view all comments that you provide in your evaluation. Keeping this in mind, your comments should accurately reflect your evaluation of the application, but they should also be clear, constructive, and free of statements that may be interpreted as inflammatory or as a sign of personal bias.

**The Evaluation Process:** The process begins when you start your reading. The evaluation requires that you provide commentary on each of the criteria and then determine a preliminary score for the application.

### **The Panel Meeting:**

- The panel will decide which application to review first then review each score that each panelist recorded and discuss why the scores were given. If one panelist gives a section a zero and the other 2 gave it a score above zero its imperative that the panel discuss and agree on scores.
- When the discussion has ended, adjustments should be made to the comments to assure they are accurate, constructively worded, clearly relevant to the criteria and the project, and are, in fact, the consensus of the entire panel.
- When the panel is satisfied with the comments, each reviewer assigns the application a final score and you will enter it into your review sheet electronically.

The panel comments are crucial, central outcomes of this process. Not only do the comments drive funding decisions, they can also be the basis for grant contract stipulations and technical assistance to groups..

During the course of the discussion, you may change your mind regarding your preliminary score or your comments. This is fine. However, we ask that if you decide that you have had a change of mind regarding any application, make sure you also adjust the comments and score on your individual evaluation form for that application to reflect your final assessment.

Another important point is that we must evaluate applications on the basis of the information currently before you and not on any prior knowledge or hearsay about an applicant. Please base your review and evaluation solely upon the application materials submitted. Objectivity and consistency are necessary.

**Code of Ethics/Conflict of Interest:** You will receive a disclosure form that you should complete and return to the OFBI staff as soon as possible. You must disclose any relationships you have with applicants that would constitute a conflict of interest for you during the review process. If you have a conflict of interest with one or more of the applicants, please indicate it on the disclosure form and do not review the application in question. During the review of an application, you may discover you have some relationship to the organization or a member of its board or staff. Please call to let OFBI staff know this. Familiarity is not necessarily synonymous with a real or perceived conflict of interest. Ask yourself whether the relationship you may have with an applicant might create a perceived conflict of interest from the perspective of reasonable persons on the street. Please be willing to discuss this with NJOFBI staff to determine if abstention is in order. The best rule of thumb is, "when in doubt, stay out." If there is a real or perceived conflict of interest, please mark the evaluation form "A" for abstain. You may not inquire of the other reviewers what the outcome of the discussion or scoring was, and reviewers may not discuss this applicant with the abstaining member.

**Confidentiality:** It is very important that panelists maintain strict confidentiality and not discuss the panel proceedings with anyone other than the OFBI, even after the awards have been determined. We must stress how important this is. The OFBI maintains confidentiality on the identities of reviewers as well. Reviewers remain anonymous until the time of OFBI award action. After that, the names and credentials of reviewers are available to the public, but the specific scores and comments of any individual reviewers are never disclosed.

**Review Process:** OFBI has a process by which applicants can request a review of the recommendation decision. The basis for this appeal is the consensus comments of the panel, as the representation of the panel's understanding of the application submitted. The review process does not allow for the introduction of new information and/or reconsideration for funding.

The parties agree that the printed name appearing on this agreement are the same as handwritten signatures for the purpose of validity.

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Peer Review Name

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Date