

SCIENCE MISSION DIRECTORATE POLICY
DEBRIEFING AND RECONSIDERATION FOR NRA AND CAN PROPOSALS
SMD POLICY DOCUMENT 09 (SPD-09D)

Version History

Original SPD-09 approved by SMD Science Management Council on September 18, 2006.

Revised SPD-09B approved by the SMD Associate Administrator September 25, 2013.

Revised SPD-09C to distinguish between oral debrief and written request for reconsideration, improve record keeping, and add CANs as well as NRAs, approved by the SMD Associate Administrator September 2017.

Revised SPD-09D to clarify appeal to the AA, approved by the SMD Associate Administrator November 8, 2024

Responsible Official: SMD Lead for Research.

This goes into effect on April 14, 2025.

1. Purpose

This document describes the set of SMD processes for: (1) debriefing and (2) requesting reconsideration, following the declination of part or all of a proposal submitted in response to an SMD NASA NOFO that would result in federal assistance awards (e.g., grants or cooperative agreements), such as ROSES or Cooperative Agreement Notice (CAN). For proposals that would result in contracts, proposers should instead follow the instructions in the RFP and may consult the Ombudsperson at agency-procurementombudsman@nasa.gov.

For the purposes of this policy, "the proposer", who has the right to request a debriefing or a reconsideration, is the Principal Investigator (PI), the "Co-I/Science PI" (if there is one), or an authorized representative of the proposing organization. The proposer may request a debriefing to gain a better understanding of the panel evaluation, the evaluation process, and the reasoning supporting the decision not to select the proposal. The proposer may request reconsideration if it is thought that (1) the evaluation contained errors that contributed to declination and/or (2) the proposal was not handled correctly.

Throughout this document, the term "written" refers to electronic communication (e.g., email or electronic files, such as PDF documents via NSPIRES).

2. Background

After a proposal has been reviewed, the Selecting Official makes their decisions and proposers are notified in accordance with 48 CFR [1852.235-72\(k\)\(1\)](#):

"When a proposal is not selected for award, the proposer will be notified. NASA will explain generally why the proposal was not selected. Proposers desiring additional information may contact the selecting official who will arrange a debriefing."

For the purposes of this policy document, it is presumed that proposers receive a written evaluation (via NSPIRES) summarizing the findings, including a listing of the strengths and weaknesses. Thus, hereinafter the term "debriefing" refers to the remainder of the definition in the [NASA Debriefing Guide](#), i.e., exchanges that: reduce misunderstandings and protests; provide the proposer a clearer understanding of NASA's evaluation process; give an opportunity to

demonstrate that NASA followed the rules and conducted the acquisition in an objective and fair manner; and allow proposers to give NASA their views of the acquisition process.

Although 48 CFR [1852.235-72\(k\)\(1\)](#) specifies that the Selecting Official (usually the Division Director or Division Research Lead) will arrange a debriefing, longstanding SMD practice formally delegates this responsibility to the Program Officer (the POC given in the text of the program element and on [the program officer web list](#), unless otherwise stated in the solicitation.

The SMD policy for debriefing, reconsideration, and appeal follows these steps:

- (a) Request for debriefing. A proposer who has received notification of the selection decision and associated written evaluation or rationale (typically via NSPIRES), may request additional information to be provided in the form of an oral debriefing. Section 3 of this document describes the debriefing process.
- (b) Request for reconsideration of selection decision. Having received a written evaluation and notification regarding a selection decision, a proposer who seeks to demonstrate that there were errors in the evaluation or review process may request reconsideration by providing a written request and rationale. Section 4 of this document describes the reconsideration process.
- (c) Appeal of selection decision. After the reconsideration process has been completed, a proposer has the right to appeal beyond the Selecting Official. Section 5 of this document addresses this process.

3. Debriefings

A debriefing is an informal exchange between NASA personnel and the proposer. The primary objectives of the debriefing (see Section 2) are to help the proposer understand the evaluation process, the evaluation itself, and the process leading to the final selection decision. Debriefings are not part of the proposal evaluation process and will not result in changes to evaluations or selection decisions. Assessment of the technical accuracy of the evaluation's findings do not occur in debriefings.

The debrief process is constrained by the following:

- (a) Debriefings may be requested by a proposer for 30 days after NASA sends the evaluation and notification of decision to select or decline the proposal (notification that a proposal is "selectable" does not qualify). If the proposer has taken no action within this time, SMD is not required to conduct a debriefing.
- (b) Program Officers must respond within 30 days to requests for debriefings (and are encouraged to respond more promptly) to acknowledge the request and arrange a mutually acceptable time for the debriefing, or to delay the debriefing with an explanation of why more time is needed.
- (c) Debriefings are typically by phone but, by mutual agreement, may be in writing, in person, or by video conference. Whatever method is used to conduct the debriefing, reasonable limits may be imposed by the Program Officer on the number and length of further interactions.
- (d) In instances where the proposer's perceived technical inaccuracies in the evaluation, or issues with the review process have not been satisfactorily addressed, the Program Officer should inform the proposer of the process to request reconsideration or, if appropriate, move the proposal on to the reconsideration process described in Section 4.

Program Officers are not to conduct debriefings prior to having sent the proposer notification of the decision and the written evaluation.

4. Requests for Reconsideration

A request for reconsideration is a proposer's detailed, written response to the decision and/or panel evaluation that clearly and concisely lays out perceived factual or technical errors in the written evaluation, perceived problems with the proposal evaluation process, concerns of bias, and/or perceived inconsistencies in the basis for the selection decision. A Request for Reconsideration may only be made on the grounds of one of these issues.

A Program Officer should not respond to a request for reconsideration before the official written proposal evaluation and decision letter have been sent to the proposer, other than to acknowledge the request and state that a proposer may request reconsideration only after having received notification of the decision and the written evaluation.

Proposers are encouraged to take advantage of debriefing prior to requesting reconsideration. The Program Officer or Selecting Official may require debriefing as a prerequisite for reconsideration.

When requests for reconsideration are based on technical issues, it is expected that proposers will focus requests for reconsideration on refuting demonstrable errors in the evaluation by citing the specific statements in the proposal.

In assessing the request for reconsideration, SMD will only take into account material in the original proposal or the evaluation. Requests for reconsideration based on results obtained after the proposal was submitted, or details that were published in papers but that were not discussed in the proposal, are not appropriate and will not be considered.

A request for reconsideration that successfully overturns some or all of the challenged findings may result in the selection decision being reversed, but it also may not because of 1) lack of available funds, 2) remaining compliance issues or weaknesses, 3) other unselected proposals rated higher or equally highly by peer review, and/or 4) programmatic factors e.g., other unselected proposals were deemed higher programmatic priority.

The detailed process for requesting reconsideration is as follows:

- (a) Once SMD has sent the written evaluation and the written notification of a decision to decline all or part of a proposal, the proposer has 30 days to contact the Program Officer, either to request a debrief or to submit a written request for reconsideration. If the proposer receives a debrief, the proposer then has 30 days from the debrief to submit a written request for reconsideration to the Program Officer. If the proposer has taken no action within these time limits, SMD is not required to entertain a request for reconsideration of the selection decision.

Requests for reconsideration must be in writing to the Program Officer and cc the R&A lead given on [the program officer list](#) and sara@nasa.gov (for record keeping). If (and only if) the request for reconsideration involves allegations of bias on the part of the Program Officer, then the request for reconsideration should be to the Selecting Official (typically the R&A lead). For help identifying the Program Officer, R&A lead, Selecting Official, or Division Director, contact sara@nasa.gov.

- (b) Program Officers contacted regarding a request for reconsideration must either refer the proposer to this document or follow this equivalent process:
- i. The Program Officer must explain the purpose and availability of oral debriefings and offer the proposer an oral debriefing as the first step in the process.
 - ii. The Program Officer must outline the process for and time limits on a request for reconsideration.
 - iii. The Program Officer must inform proposers that reconsideration will only be considered after it is requested in writing (e.g., via email).
 - iv. The Program Officer must inform proposers that reconsideration will be based only on the material in the original proposal or the evaluation.
 - v. The Program Officer must inform proposers that reconsideration will not necessarily result in an award, even if it is established that there was an error in the evaluation or the evaluation process, because of 1) lack of available funds, 2) remaining compliance issues or weaknesses, 3) other unselected proposals rated higher or equally highly by peer review, and/or 4) programmatic factors e.g., other unselected proposals were deemed higher programmatic priority.
- (c) Upon receipt of a written request for reconsideration, the Program Officer must respond within five business days, either to acknowledge the request and state that a response will follow within 30 additional days or to inform the proposer that additional time will be required. The Program Officer must send an email to the Selecting Official (and Division Research Lead, if different from the Selecting Official) informing them of the reconsideration request and must cc sara@nasa.gov on this initial response to the request for reconsideration.
- (d) After acknowledging receipt of the reconsideration request, the Program Officer must conduct an initial assessment of the request to aid in deciding whether to maintain or to modify the original selection decision. If the assessment by the Program Officer (or the direction of the Selecting Official) is that further technical input is needed, the Program Officer may provide one or more of the following to one or more knowledgeable and non-conflicted reviewers: the proposal, the findings in question, and the written request for reconsideration.
- If, after initial assessment, new reviews are sought, this should be done via NSPIRES. If the original proposal was evaluated under [DAPR](#), any additional reviews (outside of HQ) should also be anonymized. Based on any analysis by the Program Officer and any inputs from reviewers, the Program Officer must communicate to the Selecting Official (and the Division Research Lead if different) in writing (e.g., via email):
- (1) Justified determinations as to whether the proposer's responses to the disputed findings were found to be valid; and
 - (2) Justified recommendations regarding whether any changes to the rating and/or status of the proposal should be made.
- (e) Discussions between the Program Officer, the Selecting Official, the Division Research Lead, and any additional people identified by the Selecting Official must lead to a decision by the Selecting Official to maintain or to modify the original selection decision for the proposal under reconsideration. The Program Officer must then construct and communicate to the proposer a written response to the reconsideration request. This response must indicate whether any challenged finding(s) will be altered, and whether the Selecting

Official has decided to reverse some or all of the original selection decision for the proposal under reconsideration. In cases where new reviewer inputs (see (d) above) were part of the basis for the decision by the Selecting Official, the response to the proposer must provide a summary version (suitably edited and anonymized) of the reviewer inputs. This response to the proposer must be sent via iNSPIRES (selection module) as a User-defined Document Type named appropriately e.g., "Response to reconsideration". If the original selection decision is modified, then this should be recorded in an amendment to the Selection Decision Document.

5. Appeal to the Associate Administrator

If the proposer is not satisfied with the response from the Selecting Official, then a written appeal may be submitted to the SMD Associate Administrator (AA). The SMD AA may delegate the responsibility for handling this appeal (e.g., to the Deputy AA for Research).

This AA-level review is limited to an assessment of the processes employed by the division, not further technical evaluations. However, if the AA or AA-delegate determines that an internal assessment of the request for reconsideration (e.g., by the Program Officer alone) was not adequate, the division may be directed to acquire technical reviews. The appeal to the AA, which summarizes the reasons for the appeal, must be made in writing within 30 calendar days of the response from the Selecting Official to the request for reconsideration. The Selecting Official, Program Officer, and sara@nasa.gov must be copied on this appeal.

The SMD AA or their delegate must respond in writing to this appeal within 60 calendar days. If additional time is required to prepare a response, then the need for more time should be communicated to the proposer as soon as possible, certainly before the end of the 60 calendar days. The Selecting Official, Program Officer, and sara@nasa.gov must be copied on the response.

For proposals that would lead to contracts only: If the response from the representative of the SMD AA or their delegate is deemed unsatisfactory, the proposer may consult the Ombudsperson at: agency-procurementombudsman@nasa.gov.

6. Record Keeping

To create a lasting record of requests for reconsideration Program Officers shall preserve the request for reconsideration in iNSPIRES (selection module) as a user defined document, shall conduct reviews of the request for reconsideration via NSPIRES, and shall officially respond to the request for reconsideration via the iNSPIRES (selection module), putting the response in the PI package. Appeals to and responses from the AA or their delegate shall also be preserved in NSPIRES in the same manner. A change the status of a proposal (e.g., from declined to either selected or selectable) based on a reconsideration should be considered a "supplemental selection" and so should be captured in either a supplemental or an updated Selection recommendation package or Selection Decision Document.