

Collection #0518-0028

## A. JUSTIFICATION

### **1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.**

The Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) oversees peer review of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) research plans in response to Congressional mandate in The Agricultural Research Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-185, Section 103d).

The ARS peer-review panels are scientists who review current scientific research projects. These scientists have expert knowledge in the fields being reviewed. Peer review panels are convened to provide in-depth evaluation of each project plan. The panels review between 2 and 10 project plans. Smaller or larger panels are convened necessary to assure clear focused review of either very narrow or larger programs. The OSQR oversees the process of panel member selection, their personal documentation, and the recording, and transmittal of panel reviews. Panels with five or fewer plans to review meet using a web/phone tool and do not travel. Panels with more than five plans travel to the OSQR offices in Beltsville, MD, to conduct the review.

### **2. Indicate How, by Whom, How Frequently, and for What Purpose the information is to be used.**

The OSQR does not require respondents to maintain copies of any of the subject forms. ARS's recordkeeping requirements are a composite of:

- 44USC Chapters 21, 29, 31, and 33, Federal Records Act
- 18 USC Chapter 101 Records and Reports-§2071, Concealment, removal, or mutilation generally
- 5 USC Chapter 552, Freedom of Information Act Regulated in Code of Federal Regulations: 36 CFR, Chapter 12, Subchapter B, Records Management
- Further defined in Departmental Regulations:
  - DR 3080-1 Records Disposition
  - DR 3040-1 Electronic Records Management Program
  - DR 3040-2 Call Detail Records
  - DR 3090-1 Vital Records Program

Each of these laws, regulations, and Departmental manuals pertain to the use of forms to organize the data collected by OSQR. All of data are held for seven (7) years with the exception of the Panelist Information form which contains Personally Identifiable information and is, therefore, retained only as long as record retention guidelines require. The following describes the forms and the rationale for collecting the information.

#### **2a. Peer Review Forms**

These document the comments and recommendations of scientists reviewing ARS's project plans. Two processes, *ad hoc* review and panel review, require similar

documentation. *Ad hoc* reviewers typically provide their reviews by email (rarely by mail) while panel reviewers write reviews in advance and then these are used to produce a single panel consensus review for each plan, as part of either an online (web-based) or in-person meeting. On occasion several *Ad hoc* reviewers may meet to examine a group of plans. These, too, use their initial reviews to produce a consensus review. Typically, if needed, an *Ad hoc* meeting is conducted online using a commercial (currently AT&T Connect) web conferencing application. Similarly, regular panels that have a small number of plans to examine (typically two to five) conduct their review online. For both in-person and online reviews, the same forms and information are used.

#### ARS-199A Ad Hoc Review of ARS Research Project

This form contains space for *ad hoc* reviewers to provide evaluation of plans using three criteria. A fourth section allows for additional comments. The form lists the five Action Classes that provide an overall rating of the plan. The reviewer must select one of these. About 20 projects are reviewed by the *ad hoc* process each year, with, typically, three reviews for each project. Rarely is an individual asked to submit more than one *ad hoc* review in a year. *Minor edits to instructions and definitions have been made to enhance clarity and ensure consistency across all review materials.*

#### ARS-223P Panel Recommendation on ARS Research Project Plans (may also be known as "Peer Reviewer's Recommendation Form)

The Panel Recommendation Form represents the consensus review of group of reviewers vs. an individual reviewer. It is developed by the designated Primary Reviewer following a discussion by the whole review panel. This form is completed for about 200 projects annually in electronic form, however, its completion is required only for reviewers of panels that travel for their reviews (20 or fewer plans annually). For online panels the form is completed by staff using completed ARS-225P and ARS-231 forms and reviewed by panelists. In general, for traveling panels, panelists are responsible as lead reviewer for two (2) such forms, and thus, two in a year. This form does not have an Action Class rating section. *Minor edits to instructions have been made to enhance clarity and ensure consistency across all review materials.*

#### ARS-225P Panelist Peer Review of ARS Research Project

Similar to ARS-223P, this form is used by individual Primary (lead) and Secondary reviewers on each plan to record their comments with regard to assessment of the plan along stated criteria. Space also is available for additional comment. This form is completed prior to the panel meeting and submitted to OSQR via electronic mail about 400 times per year. *Minor edits to instructions and definitions have been made to enhance clarity and ensure consistency across all review materials.*

#### ARS-227-P Action Class Judgment

The Action Class Judgment Form contains five action classes that provide an overall assessment of the plan under review, one of which the reviewer must select. The form is a type of scoring or voting sheet and is used by panels that travel to their meeting. This form is submitted to OSQR in hardcopy format during the panel meeting. Each panel member completes an Action Class Judgment, typically creating 6-8 scores for each of

the 30 projects that are reviewed by a traveling panel annually. *Definitions of Action Classes were edited to make them identical to those across all OSQR documentation.*

#### ARS-231, Reviewer Comment Form

This form provides an opportunity for panelists to comment briefly on plans for which they do not have primary or secondary reviewer responsibility. Panelists are not required to complete this form, but are urged to do so if they feel that there are comments they wish considered by the primary reviewer when assembling the consensus panel comment. *No changes are proposed.*

#### **2b. Records on Peer Reviewers**

These are forms used to document information about *ad hoc* and panel reviewers. All reviewers complete the confidentiality agreement. Those traveling complete the expense form and those receiving honoraria must provide that form.

#### ARS-200-PA OSQR Confidentiality Agreement

This form contains a written explanation of each reviewer's agreement to keep the information in ARS's project plans confidential. Confidentiality agreements are the only forms in the office in which there is a requirement for duplicate copies. We maintain the original copy and the reviewer gets a photocopy. *Bolding was added to underscore the confidential nature of this review.*

#### ARS-202 P Chair and Panelist Information

The Chair and Panelist Information form is an important customer service tool for OSQR. It is collected from about 200 panelists each year. *The form was edited for clarity and request for international participants to include a Swift code to facilitate interbank transfer of honorarium payments and/or travel reimbursements.*

#### ARS-203-PA Suggested Peer Reviewer

The Suggested Peer Reviewer form contains basic information about scientists and other professionals qualified to become expert peer reviewers of ARS's project plans. It serves as a means to gather information and expertise of potential reviewers. The form is rarely completed by external parties. *No changes were made.*

#### ARS-209-P OSQR Expense Report

The Expense Report serves as documentation for approving peer reviewers for reimbursement of their travel and lodging expenses (as appropriate). The report contains space for detailing personal funds spent to travel to and from local airports, lodging, dates, and other information. Reviewers eligible to receive expense reimbursement and/or an honorarium must submit one or both of these forms, totaling about 75 submissions each year for each form.

#### ARS-211-P Request for Honorarium (Invoice)

The Request for Honorarium (also referred to as Invoice) provides a documented request by the participant for payment of an honorarium as a result of their service. In most cases such requests are documented by completing of form SF-1034, Public Voucher for

Purchases and Services Other Than Personal, which is needed to initiate direct bank transfer of the payment or issuance of a check. In the rare cases where SF-1034 is not used and a Convenience Check is issued, this form is completed. *No changes were made.*

**3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques.**

Forms are typically emailed to respondents who return them by email unless original signatures are required (e.g, ARS-200PA).

**4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.**

Since the original OMB submission, no duplication has been found in the information collection.

**5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities (Item 15 of the Paperwork Reduction Act Submission Form), describe the methods used to minimize burden.**

No known impact on small businesses. Ninety-eight percent of reviewers are employed by Federal, state, and national governments; universities; or large corporations.

**6. Describe the consequence to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.**

Each of these forms are used to fulfill the administrative requirements of the ARS Peer Review Process as mandated by Public Law 105-185; Section 103(d). Without the forms, especially the peer review and action class forms, the intent of the legislation would not be met.

The confidentiality agreement serves as a communication tool between ARS and reviewers that confidentiality will be maintained in the Process. Without such an agreement, ARS would risk illegal and unwanted use or abuse of ARS's patented or potentially patented research techniques and products.

The Chair and Panelist Information Form and Expense Report especially assist OSQR in properly paying or reimbursing panelists their honorarium and travel expenses. Without the information on such forms, the office might be in violation of documentation requirements for such payments or fail to provide good customer service.

**7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with the General Information Collection Guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.6 (e.g., Payment to Respondents, Disclosure of Proprietary Information, etc.)**

**-requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly;**

OSQR's forms are submitted as needed from respondents, the great majority of respondents would use the forms once (or in the case of review comment forms, twice) in

a year.

**-requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;**

All of the Records on Peer Reviewers (2b above) forms and the Action Class Judgment Form require a response in fewer than 30 days. The peer review documentation and information about the reviewers themselves is managed by a master schedule to obtain peer reviews of research at fixed intervals. Review comment forms are typically provided eight (8) to ten (10) weeks before they must be returned.

**-requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document;**

None of the forms require more than one original or more than one copy as submitted.

**-requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;**

None of the forms require that the respondents retain any records and the Confidentiality Agreement indicates that retention of review materials beyond the review period is not permitted.

**-in connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;**

None of the forms are connected to a statistical survey.

**-requiring the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB;**

None of the forms use statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB.

**-that includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use;**

The pledge of confidentiality required in the Confidentiality Agreement (ARS-220) is in conjunction with intellectual property rights laws governing ARS's research. No peer reviewer may expose or use knowledge gained as a result of the peer review for their own or their employer's benefit or in unethical behavior in the ownership of scientific techniques or data.

**-requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secret, or other confidential**

**information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.**

OSQR's respondents do not submit proprietary trade secret or other confidential information other than:

The Expense, and Panelist Information Forms include Social Security numbers. OSQR retains these in paper form only and does not electronically store forms containing Social Security Numbers. Social Security Numbers are maintained only as paper forms in a locked file.

As required by ARS policy, reviewers of particular projects are anonymous to foster unbiased criticism of ARS's research. Forms containing the reviewers' names are held confidential to the OSQR.

Panel review forms commonly contain sensitive information, such as the nature of patent or patentable research techniques or products and critiques of an employee's performance as a researcher.

**8. Provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the Agency's notice.**

Monday, September 24, 2012 (Volume 77, Number 185) Pages 58802-58804. No comments were received from the public.

**B. CONSULTATION WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THOSE FROM WHOM INFORMATION IS TO BE OBTAINED.**

OSQR holds a debriefing at the end of each review panel and asks reviewers to comment on the process and to make suggestions for improvement. A number of these have been used to enhance the process.

**9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents.**

Justification for Paying Honorariums

Panel reviewers are, typically, very senior researchers with busy schedules and many opportunities. OSQR depends upon their professional expertise to prepare thoughtful and substantive peer reviews. These individuals are sought by ARS and other scientific organizations for their expert advice. To reflect the Agency's appreciation, and to enhance the likelihood that they will agree to serve, a very modest honorarium, which is well below what such individuals might expect to receive for comparable consulting services, is granted.

**10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or Agency policy.**

Justification for Limited Public Access to the Information Contained in these forms:

The Panelist Information Form includes Social Security Numbers and personal banking information. These numbers are retained only in paper form in a locked file. They are not stored electronically within the OSQR (They may, however, be retained electronically by other offices in the Department which would request them for travel arrangement and reimbursement, or payment of honoraria).

As required by ARS policy, and to foster honest and candid comment, reviewers of particular plans are anonymous. Forms identifying reviewers and/or their review assignments are held confidential to the OSQR. Review comment and Action Class Judgment forms identify individual reviewers only by an alphanumeric code.

Panel review forms and project plans may contain sensitive information, such as the nature of patent or patentable research techniques or products or critiques of an employee's performance as a researcher. They are not publicly available.

**11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior or attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.**

No sensitive personal information is collected, such as sexual orientation or religious beliefs.

**12. Provide estimate of the hour burden collection of information. Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated.**

The burden hours for the forms for peer review are based on prior experience, including report from actual respondents. The attached time table represents the burden hours for each form. The cost to our respondents is based on the average hourly salary of \$123,758 at a pay rate of \$59.30 per hour.

**13. Provide estimates of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers resulting from the collection of information, (do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in item 12). The cost estimates should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start-up cost component annualized over its expected useful life; and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of services component.**

No capital or start up costs, no operation or maintenance cost of services. No respondents have to purchase items to complete the forms.

**14. Estimates of Annualized Cost to the Federal Government.**

The OSQR annual budget is \$602,000. The forms outlined are integral to the functioning of the activities of the office and form the key mission. The information gathered is used by all OSQR employees in conduct of the office's regular day-to-day business.

**15. Explain reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in 13 or 14.**

The slight net increase requested is results from an increased usage of online meetings of panels which has led to some alterations in the numbers of respondents as panel structure has been altered to accommodate this format. In particular the ARS-227P is used less frequently as it is only for the few panels meeting in person and not for online panels. Similarly, ARS-209P is used only for traveling panels, while the information for ARS-211P is already part of ARS202P and, therefore, collection here is only in rare instances. However, the online process involves more individuals (one primary reviewer per plan reviewed as opposed to one primary reviewer for every two plans in the traveling process). This results in a greater number of respondents for ARS-200PA and ARS-202PA because it involves more individual respondents. Taken together these increases and decreases result thus in the online producing a net increase in the number of respondents and a decrease in the number of responses. In total this leads to a very slight increase in the total annual hours.

**16. For collections of information whose results are planned to be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.**

None of the specific contents of these forms are to be published for public use. The OSQR records the results of all peer reviews as a matter of ARS records.

**16. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection.**

The expiration date is cited on the form.

**17. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in item 19 of OMB Form 83-I. List collections that employ statistical methods.**

There are no exceptions. None of the collected information is associated with or designed to employ statistical methods.