



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 3, 1978

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Dr. Jeffrey S. Kane
Advanced Research Resources Organization
4330 East West Highway
Washington, D.C. 20014

Dear Dr. Kane:

Thank you for your letter and reprints on peer assessment. Your inferential leap connecting my request to my new position was understandable, but incorrect. For many years I have been concerned about the validity of the federal peer-review system of peer review for grants, and (1.) have urged a self-critical assessment of the process, (2) certain changes in procedure, especially aimed at enhancing the exchange of information in a timely way, and (3.) more empirical observations of and insight into the group processes involved in study section actions. My main concern has been with the conflicts between bureaucratic tidiness and the obligation to get enough accurate information to make a valid judgment. There is not much feedback now that could help correct reviewers' misconceptions: for grants much less than, say, for mss.

Your review, although only obliquely connected with my concerns (I am aware of many different connotations of "peer groups") was helpful and thank you for sending it.

The NIH is more receptive than ever before to self-examination and if I have an opportunity to pass on the gist of your letter to some useful effort, I will do so. However, I should think you could more fruitfully press your own inquiries on the directors of NIH, NIMH and NSF if you have a research design that you feel might lead to improvements in a fundamental gatekeeping process.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg,
President

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of NIH; NIH per mem.