

Interviews with Technical Review Panel Members

In an interview for the Global Fund Secretariat, Regina Ombam, Karyn Kaplan, and Jane Carter shared their experiences about being Technical Review Panel (TRP) members.

How long have you been a Technical Review Panel member?

Regina: 2 years 3 months.

Karyn: 2 years

Jane: I have been on the TRP for 2.5 years, starting from Window 1 of the 2017-2019 funding cycle.

What has been the most rewarding experience of being on this panel?

Regina: Serving as a member of the TRP promotes learning and information sharing. The best has been to see our funding decisions help the Global Fund to direct resources to countries and populations in greatest need. Playing an advisory role to the Global Fund Board is really rewarding; most of our recommendations have been taken positively by the Board.

Karyn: It is a learning experience and a privilege to work with a high-level group of experts to provide thorough and helpful review of country proposals to improve the technical quality and, ultimately, the impact on national-level HIV, TB, and malaria programs. Another aspect is the visibility that one can have on national level programs, the comparative value perspective across regions, issues, and types of programs.

Jane: The most rewarding experience is working with new colleagues during the review windows – colleagues both on the TRP and in the Global Fund Secretariat. I have learned so much about a variety of topics that I knew less about. I'm certainly confident about my own area of expertise but the discussions about malaria, sustainable health systems and gender and human rights have all been enlightening and opened up new thoughts. Although the TRP works by consensus, I think it is through this process of coming to consensus that I have learned the most: sometimes we start with disparate opinions and through debate it all comes together. This process itself has opened new ways of working with people outside of the TRP, in my other work, which has been helpful.

What are some of the challenges you encounter?

Regina: Working in a review group where the context that informs the country's choice of interventions is not clearly presented in documentation to panel members.

Karyn: The workload is intensive. We typically work an average of 16 or more hours a day, packing in an enormous amount of reading, critiquing, ranking/reporting and discussing, and completing forms.

Jane: The biggest challenge is the first review window that one attends. I am not sure anyone can prepare for the fast pace and learning the "TRP speak" (understanding that every single word of

the TRP in a review form is scrutinized and meaningful, down to the modifiers and adjectives used to ensure that the recommendation and guidance provided to the applicant is crystal clear).

What skills should TRP members have?

Regina: Understanding of human rights, gender, sustainability, strategic investments and financing should be skills set that panel members have, with a clear understanding of how this plays out in the three diseases.

Karyn: The breadth and depth of knowledge and proven record of relevant experience to give expert and insightful reviews on one's subject (HIV, TB, malaria, resilient and sustainable systems for health, human rights and gender, and strategic investment and sustainable financing); an ability to work well with diverse teams and present arguments in a balanced and convincing way; have an eye towards teamwork and reaching consensus; having a critical voice/eye and being bold to make one's point even if perceived as controversial; can process a very large amount of information in an efficient way; willingness to constantly learn and having an ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment even within the TRP, to implement new review policies, standards, and processes. In the review process, TRP members can ask for support from the Global Fund Secretariat when necessary.

Jane: Panel members have to be open to debate, open to considering new positions and opinions, realize that the windows are hectic and full of work, and willing to dive into something new, and show flexibility. Passion for the work and for the mission of the Global Fund is also key. It is also critical to be able to communicate – both verbally and writing in English, since it is the language used at the meetings. I have seen though some heated debates where members may convert to their first language and other members help to translate the nuances. Confidence in participating in discussions and the writing work is important.

What recommendations would you make to potential TRP members?

Regina: Respect every member's opinion and thinking.

Karyn: Do as much advance reading as possible, prior to in-person meetings. Read the background documents and prepare questions for Global Fund country teams in advance. Stay on top of and try to share with others the latest documents relevant to the technical expertise area (HIV, TB, malaria, human rights and gender etc.). Make an effort to build relationships with other TRP members. Take time to rest and recharge. Walk to the meeting venue, don't take the bus! Fresh air is crucial during the over week-long review marathons.

Jane: Be open to participation and ask questions. Everyone feels a bit at loss at the beginning, but other members who have been on the TRP for sometime as well as the Global Fund Secretariat are always there to help.

Anything else you'd like to add?

Karyn: Do not take membership on the TRP for granted or underestimate the commitment one makes when signing on. It is an incredibly important job we are tasked with and it deserves full attention when doing it. Also, always declare conflicts of interest you may have in advance.



Jane: The TRP is one of the most fun, enjoyable, and hard-working times of my professional career, and I feel so very blessed to have been part of the group during this term.