Always keep the proposal review in mind when writing your proposal

DO NOT write the application for yourself, unless you plan to fund it yourself
You MUST convince an entire review panel, the program officer, and the funding agency

What Reviewers Consider
- What the proposers want to do
- Why they want to do it
- How they plan to do it
- How they will know if they succeed
- What benefits would accrue if the project is successful

Basis for the Decision
- Peer Review
  - Content of the review is as important than rating
  - Program Officer analyzes fairness and substance of the review; any technical issues raised (can they be resolved swiftly and easily); reviewer’s enthusiasm for the project; any additional feedback from reviewers/panels or other program officers; sometimes clarification from the PI is needed
- Program Officers consider portfolio balance
  - Research and education topics
  - Potential for transformative impact
  - Priority or timeliness of the area of research and systems
  - Demographics of the PI population and diversity of institution types
  - Stage of PI career development
- Depending on agency - Program Officers may make recommendations or make decisions

How Do Reviewers Read Proposals?
- Reviewers approach to your proposal is similar to how you approach reading a technical paper
- Reviewers attempt to understand complex information quickly and clearly and, most importantly, to determine whether or not the value of the proposal warrants a closer reading
- Reviewers look for shortcuts that help them do an “end run” around organizational structure of the document in a non-linear way
- This approach helps to more quickly determine whether or not there is value to be gained from continued reading
- Therefore, make it easy for reviewers to find important information through graphics, tables, and descriptive headings and subheadings
Know your Review Criteria

- Realize that evaluation/merit criteria vary from one agency and even from one program to the next (link)
- Carefully review the criteria specified in the RFP AND the most recent grant proposal guide (link to guides)
- Determine how the agency assigns weights to each of the criteria (if applicable)
- Ensure that you address every criteria and sub-criteria because the criteria constitute your scoring card

Who are your reviewers?

- Reviewers have varied experience, from first-time reviewers to veterans, from subject matter experts to generalists with minimal knowledge of your field
- Reviewers review MANY proposals
- Reviewers have limited time for reading your proposal
- Reviewers do not have time to find information that is not well organized, clear, visual, or highlighted
- Do not expect reviewers to read your proposal more than once. If they don’t easily see what is required, they will mark you down and move on. Whether it is in the proposal or not, if the reviewers don’t easily see it, you will be marked down and will have to apply again next year.

Become a Reviewer!

- Serving on a review panel is like a graduate education in grant writing
- Agencies need thousands of reviewers each year
- This will help you get perspective on agency and program
- Build professional networking
- Build relationship with the Program Officer
- Contact your Program Office about becoming a reviewer

Keep in mind it is unusual for PIs to be funded the first time

- Consider re-applying
- Read the reviewer comments
- Remain calm!
- Read the reviewer comments again
- Talk to Program Officer about the relative importance of each comment
- Listen to the tone of Program Officer – is s/he receptive to you re-applying
- Read previous successful proposals
- Discuss ideas with colleagues
- Work with R&ED to create a resubmission strategy
Persistence pays off
According to NSF, it takes an average of 2.36 submissions before a PI is funded.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Why does it matter?</th>
<th>How is it new?</th>
<th>How will it be done?</th>
<th>In what context will it be done?</th>
<th>What is special about the people involved?</th>
<th>What is the return on investment?</th>
<th>How will financial resources be managed?</th>
<th>How will success be determined?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSF</td>
<td>Intellectual Merit: potential of the activity to advance knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>Creative, original, and transformative concepts and activities</td>
<td>Well-reasoned, well-organized, rational plan</td>
<td>Adequate resources available to carry out the proposed activities</td>
<td>Qualified individual, team, or institution conducting the proposed activities</td>
<td>Broader Impact: potential to benefit society and contribute to achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Mechanism to assess success</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIH</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td>Overall Impact</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoD</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Research Strategy and Feasibility</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASA</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Unique and innovative methods, approaches, concepts, or advanced technologies</td>
<td>Overall scientific or technical merit</td>
<td>Capabilities, related experience, and facilities</td>
<td>Qualifications, capabilities, and experience of the PI, team leader, or key personnel</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Evaluation of cost</td>
<td>Evaluation against the state-of-the-art</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoE</td>
<td>Scientific and Technical Merit</td>
<td>Innovative methods, approaches, concepts, or advanced technologies</td>
<td>Technical Approach</td>
<td>Feasibility: Technical and Management Capabilities</td>
<td>Feasibility: Technical and Management Capabilities</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Reasonableness and appropriateness of the proposed budget</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Scientific Merit: novelty, innovation, uniqueness, originality</td>
<td>Scientific Merit: conceptual adequacy, clarity of objectives, feasibility</td>
<td>Adequacy of Facilities and Project Management Capabilities</td>
<td>Qualifications of Project Personnel</td>
<td>Relevance and Importance to US agriculture</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA</td>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Scientific Approach</td>
<td>Feasibility: environment available to conduct the studies</td>
<td>Feasibility: expertise of the PI and collaborators</td>
<td>Relevance to the healthcare of veterans</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Importance of the Problem Responsiveness to Absolute Priority</td>
<td>Responsiveness to Absolute Priority</td>
<td>Quality of project design, technical assistance, design of dissemination</td>
<td>Adequacy and Accessibility of Resources</td>
<td>Project Staff and Training</td>
<td>Design of Dissemination Activities</td>
<td>Adequacy and Reasonableness of the Budget</td>
<td>Plan of Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEH</td>
<td>Humanities Significance</td>
<td>The quality of innovation in terms of the idea, approach, method, or digital technology</td>
<td>Project’s feasibility, design, cost, and work plan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Qualifications, expertise, and levels of commitment of the project director and key project staff or contributors</td>
<td>Likelihood of stimulating or facilitating new research in the humanities</td>
<td>Artistic Merit: potential impact on artists, the artistic field, and the organization’s community</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>Artistic Excellence: artistic significance</td>
<td>Artistic Merit: extent to which the project deepens and extends the arts’ value</td>
<td>Artistic Merit: quality and clarity of project goals and design</td>
<td>Artistic Merit: resources involved</td>
<td>Artistic Excellence: quality of the artists, art organizations, arts education providers, works of art, or services</td>
<td>Artistic Merit: project personnel</td>
<td>Artistic Merit: appropriateness of the budget</td>
<td>Artistic Merit: appropriateness of the proposed performance measurements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4892374/