Understanding the Grant Proposal Review Process

The Proposal Review Process
• Process by which proposals are evaluated and recommended for funding
• Varies by type of sponsor
  o Family foundation: decisions based on what family likes
  o Private foundation: decisions based on board members preferences
    • At larger foundations, decisions often informed by peer reviews
  o Government agency: decisions informed by peer reviews

The Proposal Review Process
• Administrative compliance review
  o Passed on for review
  o Rejected without review
• Three-tiered selection process
  o Peer reviewers – score or rank applications
    • Typically experts in designated areas and not employees of the sponsoring agency
    • Process varies by sponsoring agency – electronically at home/office, during convened review sessions, or combination
  o Program officers – make funding recommendations
  o Division/agency directors – make final funding decisions
The Proposal Review Process

- Administrative review of recommended proposals
  - Selected applicants may be contacted for more information
    - Pre-award forms
    - Human/animal subjects research approval
    - Updated current and pending support info
    - Adjust budget to awarded funding level
    - Environmental assessments

The Proposal Review Process

- Applicants notified of funding outcome
  - Funded
    - Official grant award notification to follow
  - Not Funded
    - Request reviewer comments and scores
    - Follow up with program officer for feedback
    - Enlist colleagues to help
    - Revise and resubmit proposal
    - Look for other funding opportunities

NSF Proposal & Award Process

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phase 1: Proposal Preparation and Submission (90 days)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Opportunity Announced</td>
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<td>• Proposal Submitted</td>
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<td>• Proposal Received</td>
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<th>Phase 2: Proposal Review and Processing (6 months)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Reviewers Selected</td>
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<td>• Peer Review</td>
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<td>• Program Officer Recommendation</td>
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<td>• Division Director Review of Recommendation</td>
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<th>Phase 3: Award Processing (30 days)</th>
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<td>• Business Review</td>
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<td>• Award Finalized</td>
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NSF Merit Review Criteria

• Intellectual Merit
  o Potential of the research to advance knowledge and understanding
  o Originality, creativity, and the potentially transformative nature of the proposal
  o Qualifications of researchers
  o Organization and conceptual foundation of the proposed activities
  o Access to resources needed

• Broader Impacts
  o Important outcomes and consequences of NSF-supported research
  o Representative Activities:
    • Advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training, and learning
    • Broaden participation of underrepresented groups
    • Enhance infrastructure for research and education
    • Broaden dissemination to enhance scientific and technological understanding
    • Provide benefits to society

NSF Proposals and Awards Trends

HOW IT’S SPENT
NUMBER OF NSF COMPETITIVE PROPOSALS, NEW AWARDS, AND FUNDING RATES

FY 2009 funding rate is higher, but 1/3 of awards were made from one-time ARRA funds.

NIH Peer Review Process
NIH Study Sections

- Predefined boundaries for what each study section can review
- Combined expertise of the scientists in a study section is intended to span the breadth and diversity of the science it covers.
- May also recruit temporary reviewers or secure mail reviews from outside consultants
- Investigators can include in a cover letter a request to be assigned to a particular study section
  - Descriptions and rosters of regular standing study sections are available online: [http://www.csr.nih.gov/Roster_proto/sectionI.asp](http://www.csr.nih.gov/Roster_proto/sectionI.asp)

NIH Evaluation Criteria

- **Significance** - Does study address an important problem? How will scientific knowledge or clinical practice be advanced? What will be the effect of study on field?
- **Approach** - Are design and methods adequately developed, well integrated, well reasoned, and appropriate to aims of project? Does applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternatives?
- **Innovation** - Is project original and innovative? Does project use novel ideas or address a critical barrier to progress in field?
- **Investigators** - Are investigators appropriately trained and well suited to carry out the work? Is work appropriate to experience level of investigators?
- **Environment** - Does scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success (i.e., collaborative arrangements, institutional support)?

NIH Proposals and Awards Trends

Dept. of Education Review & Award Process

- Applications reviewed administratively for compliance/ completeness (electronic process)
- Applications assigned for peer review (panel of field readers)
- Rank order list from panel scores
- Number of applications that could be funded with available funding
- Perform cost analysis for highest ranking applications (allowable costs, requests for additional justification for budget items)
- Formal list of recommended applications with recommended funding levels (the funding “slate”)
- Final selections from slate made by principal officer in program office (may consider prior experience/ performance)
- Issue award notices to successful applicants

Dept. of Education General Selection Criteria

- Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR)
  1. Meeting the Purposes of the Authorizing Statute
  2. Extent of the Need for the Project
  3. Plan of Operation
  4. Quality of Key Personnel
  5. Budget and Cost Effectiveness
  6. Evaluation Plan
  7. Adequacy of Personnel
- Specific Selection Criteria always part of application guidelines

Why Serve as a Peer Reviewer?

- Gain first-hand knowledge of review process
  - Get an “insider” view
  - Learn to think like a reviewer
  - Experience the dialogue among reviewers
  - Learn about common problems with proposals
  - Discover strategies for writing strong proposals
- Access to strong proposals
- Meet colleagues and program officers with related interests
Become a Peer Reviewer

- National Institutes of Health
  - http://cms.csr.nih.gov/PeerReviewMeetings/StudySectionMeetings/StudySections/ServiceasReviewers.htm
- National Science Foundation
- US Department of Agriculture
  - Send email to newreviewer@csrees.usda.gov
- Corporation for National and Community Service
  - http://www.nps.gov/volunteer/08reviewer.htm
- Health Resources and Services Administration
  - https://grants.hrsa.gov/webReview/
- National Endowment for the Humanities
  - https://securegrants.neh.gov/prism/
- US Department of Education
  - https://www.ed.gov
- US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education
  - http://tandl.ed.gov/about/ofps/aboutofps.html
- Institute of Museum and Library Services
- Kentucky Department of Education
  - http://education.ky.gov/kde/administrative+resources/grant+information/competitive+grants+from+kde
- Ask program officers at any agency

Video Resources

- Inside the NIH Grant Review Process
- DVD with NSF presentation available for checkout

Follow-up Activities

- Look into serving as a peer reviewer for an appropriate agency
- Next time: Reflecting on Success and Learning from Experience
  - Faculty panel
Questions

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