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.

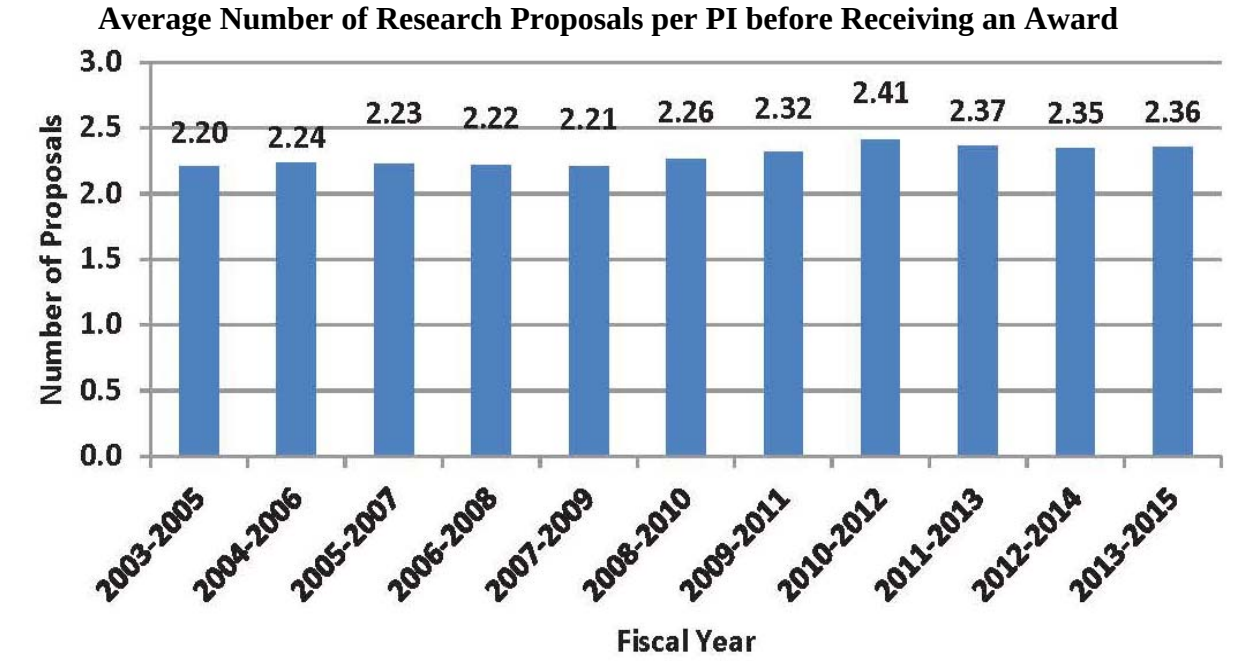
Become a Reviewer!

- 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.



Many Different Agencies – Similar Review Criteria								
	Why does it matter?	**How is it new?**	**How will it be done?**	**In what context will it be done?**	**What is special about the people involved?**	**What is the return on investment?**	**How will financial resources be managed?**	**How will success be determined?**
NSF	Intellectual Merit: potential of the activity to advance knowledge and understanding	Creative, original, and transformative concepts and activities	Well-reasoned, well-organized, rational plan	Adequate resources available to carry out the proposed activities	Qualified individual, team, or institution conducting the proposed activities	Broader Impact: potential to benefit society and contribute to achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes	N/A	Mechanism to assess success
NIH	Significance	Innovation	Approach	Environment	Investigator	Overall Impact	Budget	N/A
DoD	Importance	Innovation	Research Strategy and Feasibility	Environment	Personnel	Impact	Budget	N/A
NASA	Significance	Unique and innovative methods, approaches, concepts, or advanced technologies	Overall scientific or technical merit	Capabilities, related experience, and facilities	Qualifications, capabilities, and experience of the PI, team leader, or key personnel	Relevance	Evaluation of cost	Evaluation against the state-of-the-art
DoE	Scientific and Technical Merit	Innovative methods, approaches, concepts, or advanced technologies	Technical Approach	Feasibility: Technical and Management Capabilities	Feasibility: Technical and Management Capabilities	N/A	Reasonableness and appropriateness of the proposed budget	N/A
USDA	Relevance	Scientific Merit: novelty, innovation, uniqueness, originality	Scientific Merit: conceptual adequacy, clarity of objectives, feasibility	Adequacy of Facilities and Project Management	Qualifications of Project Personnel	Relevance and Importance to US agriculture	N/A	N/A
VA	Significance	Innovation	Scientific Approach	Feasibility: environment available to conduct the studies	Feasibility: expertise of the PI and collaborators	Relevance to the healthcare of veterans	N/A	N/A
ED	Importance of the Problem Responsiveness to Absolute Priority	Responsiveness to Absolute Priority	Quality of project design, technical assistance, design of dissemination	Adequacy and Accessibility of Resources	Project Staff and Training	Design of Dissemination Activities	Adequacy and Reasonableness of the Budget	Plan of Evaluation
NEH	Humanities Significance	The quality of innovation in terms of the idea, approach, method, or digital technology	Project's feasibility, design, cost, and work plan	N/A	Qualifications, expertise, and levels of commitment of the project director and key project staff or contributors	Likelihood of stimulating or facilitating new research in the humanities	Artistic Merit: potential impact on artists, the artistic field, and the organization's community	N/A
NEA	Artistic Excellence: artistic significance	Artistic Merit: extent to which the project deepens and extends the arts' value	Artistic Merit: quality and clarity of project goals and design	Artistic Merit: resources involved	Artistic Excellence: quality of the artists, art organizations, arts education providers, works of art, or services Artistic Merit: project personnel	Artistic Merit: potential impact on artists, the artistic field, and the organization's community	Artistic Merit: appropriateness of the budget	Artistic Merit: appropriateness of the proposed performance measurements

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4892374/