IT'S AS FLEXIBLE AS YOUR P

NIH R Grants: Perspectives from a study section member



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Preparation

- Find the right NIH home for your research
- Know your audience
- The 30000 foot view is critical
- Details matter

The Aftermath

- Interpreting scores
- Next steps
- Persistence



The Basics – NIH Institutes

27 Institutes and Centers (IC)

Each with a different:

- o mission & priorities
- budget
- funding strategy





Institute Choice

- Does your proposal fit the mission of the institute?
- What are the current paylines?
- What is the bonus for Early-stage or New investigators?

Institute	General (%)	NI (%)	ESI (%)	Other
NIA	15	18	20	AD: 25-30
NIAMS	10		15	
NIDDK	16		25	
NINDS	14		25	AD: 25-30
NHLBI	14		24	

(AD: Alzheimer's)



Know your audience – the review panel

Study section choice

- Use the Assisted Referral Tool for guidance.
- https://art.csr.nih.gov/ART/
- Look at the rosters do the members publish in your field?
- Will the members be interested in your problem?



Know your audience – The review panel





Know your audience – The review panel





Know your audience – The review panel





Emphasize the importance of the work (Significance)

Make major hypotheses clear (Approach)

Simple graphics help reviewers understand the science and the goals



The Details: Review Criteria

Significance

- Recognize prior work lay out the strengths and weaknesses
- Spell out the gaps in understanding and why they need to be filled
- Underscore your strategy to fill those gaps

Approach

- Clear and rigorous study designs
- Blinding and biological variables
- Include rationale
- Power calculations will you be able to detect what you think you will find?
- Sufficient preliminary data to provide confidence in feasibility

Innovation

- Conceptual does your proposal lead to a paradigm shift?
- Technical have you developed new methodology or a novel platform to enable your proposal to be successful and groundbreaking?



The Details: Review Criteria

Investigator

- Demonstrated expertise through prior publications and preliminary data
- Find collaborators to complement your skill set and support the science

Environment

• Normally acceptable – can the infrastructure support the work? If so, great!

Additional factors

- Postage stamp figures please don't
- White space please do!
- Animals and/or humans make sure these are complete
- Authentication and resource sharing remember to include them



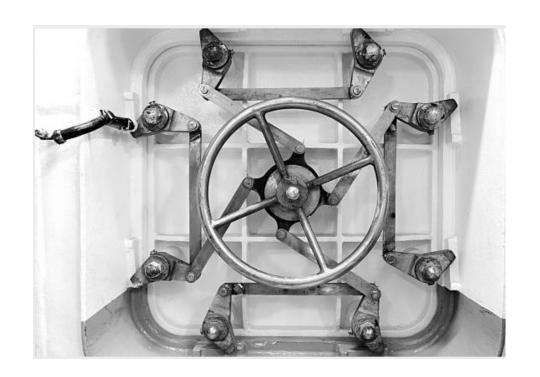
The review – what goes on behind closed doors?

Your grant will have ~20 minutes devoted to discussion

- Clearly stated goals makes it easy for reviewers to present.
- Remember that reviewers may not have similar areas of expertise.
- Open discussion reviewers discuss disparate opinions. Panel can raise additional questions/comments
- Scores are revisited Disparate scores can resolve, or not!
- Score should match level of enthusiasm
- Panel can vote out of range reason should be stated, but score is not



Even watertight proposals





...can be unraveled

The review – new aspects

Randomized review sequence

- Top grant in a study section may be first/last/ or in the middle of discussion
- Keeps reviewers on our toes

Virtual vs. in person

- Attention can wander on ZOOM
- Discussions can become prolonged on ZOOM
- Scoring seems consistent regardless of format



The Aftermath - Interpreting Scores

Single digit percentile?

Well done!

Close but not close enough

- Investigator is fixable (new collaborator/specific expertise)
- Approach is fixable (consider the reviewers comments)
- Significance may be fixable (Were you unclear, or is the problem not as important as you anticipated?)
- Innovation can be a score modifier, not a driver

What not discussed can mean

Where is the problem?



Step back

Consider what needs to be addressed

Act to address the critiques

- Convincing preliminary data
- Securing necessary expertise
- Modifying study design

What not discussed can mean

- Is there a fatal flaw?
- Is there a common flaw?

The Aftermath - Persistence

Keep trying...and trying.....and trying

Clarify and reinforce your message

Motivate and justify your approach