The 3 R’s: Review, Revise and Resubmit

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Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.

Thomas Edison
Learning Objectives

- Fast Facts
- Should I resubmit?
- How do I interpret agency reviews?
- Why are grant proposal submissions rejected?
- How do I address reviewer concerns?
Fast Facts

- In FY 14, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) reviewed a total of 68,285 proposal applications; 14,372 applications were funded with a 21% success rate

  - Of the 68,285, 35,881 proposal applications were new; 3,796 were funded at a 10.6% success rate
  - Additionally of the 68,285, 10,143 were resubmissions; 3,499 were funded at a 34.5% success rate

- In FY 13, the National Science Foundation (NSF) reviewed 48,999 proposal applications; 10,829 applications were funded with a 22% success rate
Should I Resubmit?
Six Questions

1. Have you reached the resubmission limit for the agency?
2. Check future deadline(s) and if program is still available
3. Were my reviews good enough to warrant resubmission?

Licklider, 2012
Should I Resubmit?
Six Questions

4. Did you receive “fatal” reviewer feedback? Such as:

- The reviewers do not think the work is important
- The reviewers comment that your hypothesis is not supported by your pilot data or the work of others
- The reviewers think the work has already been done by someone else
- The reviewers comment that your methods are not suitable for testing your hypothesis

Licklider, 2012
Should I Resubmit?
Six Questions

5. Is your project a better fit for another agency?

6. Make sure the research is still relevant to PI and to the field

Licklider, 2012
How Do I Interpret Agency Reviews?

- Read carefully and analyze the types of feedback
- What aspects did the reviewers agree upon?
- Were there any outlier comments?
How Do I Interpret Agency Reviews?

- Identify the types of problems presented in the proposal
  - Were the problems across the board or isolated to one reviewer?
  - Can you address these weaknesses?
  - Was there any “fatal” feedback?
  - Are there any presentation problems that are easily corrected?
How Do I Interpret Agency Reviews?

- Determine the strengths in the proposal stated in the reviews
  - Are they across the board?
  - What will you want to keep in the proposal going forward?

- Show feedback to an objective party for strategies for the proposal resubmission
Talk to the Program officer!!!
Why Are Grant Proposals Rejected?

- Administrative
  - Did not meet technical requirements such as font, margins, page limits, etc.
  - Was not responsive to the RFP guidelines
  - Ineligibility

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Administrative Remedies

- Read all eligibility requirements
- Make sure you turn in by the deadline or before if possible
- Make sure you read the Request for Proposal (RFP) guidelines carefully
- Make sure you follow the proposal format, including font, page limits, margins, headings, appendices
- Make sure you answer all questions posed in the RFP

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Why Are Grant Proposals Rejected?

Content

- Lack of an original idea
- Project or program activities are vague
- Proposal is written or organized poorly
- Lack of knowledge of published relevant work
- The project is too ambitious for the time period or money allotted

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Content Remedies

Do the research on your proposed topic
- Has the work been done before or the program been implemented?
- How is your idea innovative and significant to current and future research or programming?
- Have you thoroughly researched prior work and relevant published materials?
- Include comprehensive literature review

Make sure your project or program is well thought out
- May want to do a task/timeline chart to map program before writing

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Content Remedies

- The timeline above will also help to determine if the program is too ambitious for the time period or if your budget requires more money than available

- Make sure that the proposal is precisely written
  - Plain language, no jargon
  - Short declarative sentences
  - Targeted points that explain the program in the most thorough terms possible

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Why are Grant Proposals Rejected?

Team or resources are inadequate

- PI has minimal experience
- No one on the team has experience in the field
- Lack of publications or relevance of publications to project
- Unclear roles and tasks of team
- Team has not had prior experience managing federal grants

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Team or Resource Remedies

- Add experienced Co-PIs or Senior Personnel to your project who have relevant experience in the research field or program area.

- Wait to reapply until you have more either more or more relevant publications or add Co-PIs with relevant publications.

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Team or Resource Remedies

- Make sure the program or research has sufficient resources to be completed
  - Equipment
  - Facilities
  - Time
  - Space
  - Partners

- Make sure the roles of the management team, senior staff and partners are specifically and clearly spelled out
  - May want to include an organizational or management chart

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Why are Grant Proposals Rejected?

Science

- Diffuse, superficial or unfocused research plan
- Absence of acceptable scientific rationale
- Lack of experimental detail
- Questionable reasoning in experimental approach
- Lack of experience in essential methodology
- Evaluation plan or methodology is inadequate
- Lack of preliminary data or weak preliminary data

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Science Remedies

- Strong abstract or intro: “This research or program is important or innovative because…”

- Why is this research or program needed?

- Make sure research plan is focused, precise and comprehensive

- Are your aims too vague?

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Science Remedies

- Use the format provided to show your progression of ideas

- Explain your methodology thoroughly; why did you choose this method(s) over others

- If one of the critiques was project scope, decrease or increase goals and provide more focus on the goals and their measurable objectives

- Make sure to isolate obstacles and alternatives in the proposal

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Why are Grant Proposals Rejected?

- Budget
  - Too high or too low for research project or program
  - Cost/benefit analysis not convincing
Budget Remedies

- Make sure you justify the budget request and your expenses match the scope of your project.

- Make sure it is clear how you determined your budget and expenses.

- Are there any expenses that do not match the activities in the grant or vice versa are there any activities that do not have an expense associated?

Licklider, 2012
Budget Remedies

- Are your expenses reasonable?

- Have you matched the budget to your project and not the project to the budget?

- Have a detailed budget narrative

Licklider, 2012
Why are Grant Proposals Rejected?

- Presentation
  - “Wall of Words”
  - No graphics, logic models, timelines, or illustrations
  - No headings or sub-headings
  - Careless proofreading
  - Writing is vague or diffuse
Presentation Remedies

- Make sure you include white space in your proposal
  - Paragraph indents
  - Spaces between paragraphs
  - Headings

- Make sure to use targeted sentences; avoid long paragraphs, run-on sentences and whenever possible use language a lay-person will understand

- Make sure the writing is pointed

- Use graphs, charts, timelines, logic models, etc. to clearly articulate points and break up the text

Piechowski, 2010; Licklider, 2012
Project Description

Lemmas in this document: 

1. start with: **Wall of Words and Remedy**

**Introductory and Overview**

Lemmas in this document: 

1. start with: **Project Description**

**Figure 2. This figure demonstrates an approach to...**
Final Tips

- Spell Out Your Ideas...Do not assume a reviewer will be able to read your mind or will think like you do.

- Make sure your program is a good fit; talk to program officers before submission and also if you are declined.

- Reviewers have limited time and a stack of proposals to review; don’t make them work too hard to understand your idea.

- Be realistic in the project/program, budget and timelines.
Questions?