Presubmission Proposal Reviews at the College of Nursing (CON)

Nancy T. Artinian, PhD, RN, FAAN
Associate Dean for Research and Professor

"It's a foolproof formula for writing grant applications."

Presubmission Proposal Review Expectation

- At the CON it is expected that all PIs seek a review for external grant applications or have rationale for forgoing the review process.

Getting the Proposal Review Process Started

- Once the PI makes known an intent to submit a proposal, our research office generates a timeline with due dates for proposal preparation activities including a date for presubmission review.

- Ideally the review meeting is scheduled at least 1 month before the application due date to allow time for the PI and research team to make any suggested revisions.

Selecting Reviewers

- PI and Associate Dean for Research discuss options for potential reviewers.
- We aim to have at least 3 reviewers for each proposal.
- Reviewers may be from the CON, from within the University or from outside the university.
- **Selection criteria that are considered:**
  - Recent success as a PI on an NIH grant, ideally on grant funded by agency targeted in the proposal to be submitted
  - Strong background in research methods
  - Expertise in the substantive area
  - NIH study section experience
  - Expert researcher who may or may not have knowledge of the substantive area addressed in the grant (but can read for clarity)

Arranging the Review Meeting

- The Associate Dean for Research or designee contacts and confirms reviewers and makes arrangements for day and time for the review meeting.

- Contact reviewers as early as possible—reviewers are busy, need to plan for the review, and need to set aside the requisite time.

- Send copy of the funding opportunity announcement to reviewers before the review meeting.

- Let reviewers know about the funding mechanism the PI is targeting (e.g., R01, R21)—so they know to expect a 6 or 12 page proposal.

Sending Review Materials to Reviewers

- Two weeks prior to the presubmission proposal review date, the PI submits a completed proposal for review to Associate Dean for Research who subsequently sends the proposal to reviewers.

- Two weeks gives reviewers time to carefully consider the application and realistically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

Grant Application Review Materials

- The more grant application materials that can be provided at the time of presubmission review, the better reviewers can evaluate all funding agency review criterion.

- PIs are encouraged to submit the following for review:
  - Specific aims
  - Significance and Innovation
  - Approach
  - Research Team Biosketches
  - Resources and Facilities
  - Human Subjects

Presubmission Review Meeting— Who Attends?

- The PI is welcome to invite others to the review session.

- Everyone in attendance should have read the proposal in advance—
  - there is no summary of the proposal at the meeting
  - there is no time to allow for answering questions that are not related to suggestions for changes in the proposal.

The Presubmission Review Meeting—What Reviewers Do

- Review sessions are scheduled for 90 minutes.

- Reviewers are asked to:
  - provide a written critique
  - read their written critique

- Allowing to read all comments without interruption allows the entire sets of comments to be considered as a whole.

- Stopping in the middle of comments might lead the PI to focus on only selected components of reviewer concerns, and not capture the overall importance of various comments.

- Allows for really independent reviews—one reviewer is not influenced by others at this stage.

The Presubmission Review Meeting— What the PI Does

- The PI DOES NOT ask any questions or make comments while the reviewers read the prepared comments.

- This allows the PI to really think about what is being said and not be thinking of how to 'defend' the decisions in the midst of needing to hear the next comments.

- It makes listening easier.

Template for Written Feedback from Reviewers

- Full template at: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/critiques/rpg.htm.

- Reviewers provide an overall *impact score* to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved.

- The impact score takes into consideration the five scored review criteria and additional review criteria.

  - Strengths

  - Weaknesses

Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
4	Very good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact
Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact
Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

Template for Written Feedback from Reviewers

- Reviewers are asked to:
  - Consider each of the 5 review criteria—Significance, Investigators, Innovation, Approach, and Environment
  - Determine scientific merit of content in the proposal for each criterion and give a separate score on a scale of 1 to 9
  - Write a list of strengths and weakness for each criterion

---

Template for Written Feedback from Reviewers

- Reviewers are also asked to consider additional criteria to determine scientific & technical merit, but do not give additional scores.
  - Protections for Human Subjects
  - Inclusion of Women, Minorities and Children
  - Vertebrate Animals
  - Biohazards

Following All Reviewer Comments….

- The PI asks questions and engages in discussion AFTER all the reviews have been read.
- Reviewers often comment on each others' remarks, or ask each other questions during the discussion phase.
- Sometimes new ideas, ideas that were not fully addressed by any one reviewer, emerge from the discussion.
- The discussion period is the time to allow several minds to tackle difficult problems the PI and team haven't been able to solve.
- The discussion period is extremely interesting for all participants and is a great vehicle to experience exciting collegial exchanges.

Following the Review Meeting

- The PI leaves the review with three sets of written comments and lots of ideas about ways to further improve the proposal.
- Any changes in the proposal are determined by the PI.
- The PI may want to contact the reviewers for further individual discussion about their suggestions.
- The PI is free to schedule an individual meeting with the Associate Dean for Research following the review to discuss and/or problem solve related to issues to be resolved prior to submission of the proposal.

Success!

- Investigator submits revised application to grant agency.