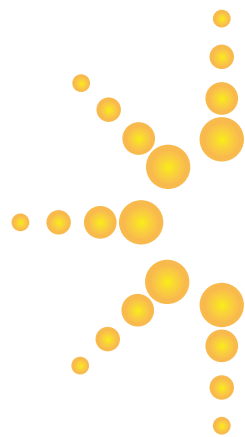


Revised NIH Proposals: How to Increase Your Priority Score

Presented by: Dorothy Lewis, PhD

Provided by:



**Principal
Investigators
Association™**

Principal Investigators Association

3606 Enterprise Ave, Ste 160
Naples, FL 34104
800-303-0129

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Best Regards,

Leslie Norins

Publisher

info@principalinvestigators.org

Resubmission Strategies

Dorothy E Lewis PhD
Houston, Texas
Dorothy.Lewis1951@gmail.com

You have the best ideas

- The grant is your baby, your best effort.
- But the grant's brilliance seems to be covered by a large object, blocking it out.
- What is that and what can be done?



Got the not so good score, what's next?

- The score tells you overall status of the grant.
- If 1 or 2, likely to get funded.
- At 3, may get funded, but likely will have to revise.
- At 4, will not get funded, but pretty close—the critique should be reasonable.
- At 5 or 6, still possible to respond to critique, but chances of really improving score to funding level are not good.
- At 7-9, should rethink ideas.

The critique comes later

- Waiting for the review is hard
- CSR has shortened the period—it's less time with the on line system.
- New critique format can be frustrating and not very informative.
- The key is to RESPOND well

- HOWEVER, usually this takes thinking, time and maybe more experiments or a publication.

Take time to resubmit

- There is a lot of pressure to turn around the grant right away.
- However, if the critique is extensive, better to think, read and produce your best product.

- This was always true, but now JUST ONE chance to fix!!

Only one revision (as of 2009)

- Used to be two were allowed, now just one.
- Means you only have one chance to fix
- Bar is therefore raised higher than before
- Means that a lot of 3's and 4's will NOT get funded, as in the past.

Biggest Initial recommendations

- Do not overreact
- It may seem worse than it is
- Best to calm down and read the critique when relaxed
- Remember, reviewers are humans and are thus likely to make mistakes.

Strategies for Overcoming.

- Wait a few days to really read the critique.
- Put yourself in the reviewers shoes.
- Decide in your own mind what they are finding fault with.
- Ask someone else to read the review—they might see it differently than you (because you are too close to the subject)
- Watch for lingo that means something

If the review is over-the-top bad—what to do?

- Contact the program officer responsible—they should have been in the room when discussed. LISTEN to them! Engage them in your cause, if possible.
- The review is unfair, the reviewers didn't read the grant—ie YOU have a major problem with grant

Recourse for poor review.

- Enlist program officer—maybe could get bridge funding—depends on their portfolio.
- Make a case for a different study section/different expertise, etc.
- Write a formal rebuttal letter—to the Institute head (but I don't know that this can work!) Might make you feel better.
- Many will not be able to help—so best thing to do is.....

GET ON WITH IT!!!!!!

Critique lingo that's significant

- Too descriptive
- Significant but unlikely to have impact
- Fishing expedition
- Data will be hard to interpret.
- Such and such is a fatal flaw
- Preliminary data not convincing.
- Unsure of expertise

What to do if the data is not convincing

- Some responders just take it out—depends on whether was needed to make argument.
- I am always a bit put off by this strategy—ie why show the data in the first grant, if it's so easily dismissed?
- Get more convincing data, better yet—publish!!!

What to do if the grant is too descriptive

- This really means you are going to do experiments and you likely will get results, but the reviewer doesn't think they will lead to a mechanism.
- This is a big problem—grants that don't get at mechanisms are likely doomed.

What if proposal is significant but impact is not assured?

Reader is telling you that even though you are working on a significant problem, etc—likely your approaches won't work or won't lead to mechanism and this means that the possible impact will be reduced.

Fishing expedition?

- Tons of experiments—casting a lot of lines, BUT having no idea where the fish are, what bait to use or even if you have the right poles to catch fish.
- Many new investigators write proposals that are basically outlines for experiments, but each one is not justified, etc to solve a problem.

What if data will be hard to interpret?

- This usually means there are TOO many experiments proposed and not a cohesive picture
- Sometimes it means that the data is expected to be too variable—with outcomes in several directions
- Sometimes it means that there is no stat plan
- It's a clear warning—GRANT may be hard to FIX!!!

Fatal Flaw

- Hard to argue if you have made a big mistake— or have not considered a huge outcome.
- Only work around is to change focus away from the flaw.

What if expertise is an issue?

- Even if you don't think you need it, get someone with credibility in the field to work with you.
- Extent of interaction (collaborator or consultant) will depend on depth of criticism.
- May need help with actual analysis of data.

Remember, Approach constitutes 85% of impact score

- Most important critique that influences score are those directed at approaches.
- Next is significance
- Next is innovation

In my own experience

- The actual ideas are not criticized—the significance of what I want to do has not been criticized (maybe once or twice!)
- Rather, when I get to the approach—I likely have listed litany of experiments, but with little explanation for what each is expected to tell me.
- Or, the approaches don't tell a story when done—ie how will data be interpreted.

Best advice is to spend most time on approaches.

What sells a grant?

- A good and significant idea
- Strong preliminary data
- Rationale for aims and design of approaches

Will they really test the most important outcome?

Will the results be significant and definitive?

Write a strong Introduction

- This page (a single page) is your chance to thank the reviewer and point by point say how you changed the grant.
- It will lead the reader and help them make the best review (especially if they have seen it before)
- Don't come across as angry or defensive—this may be how you feel, but it doesn't help with rebuttal.

Time to be humble

- The tone should be one of deference—sarcasm is NOT the best way to convince someone else of your viewpoints.
- You can disagree with someone without losing your temper (Right?)
- Don't let the discourse of our times, poison your discourse.
- Most reviewers are trying to do a good job.

My thoughts on this

- What I tell myself is that if the reader doesn't get it, I didn't do a good job explaining it.
- The onus to do this, is on ME, it's not the reviewers problem to understand me, its MY problem to be understood.

Write an organized Introduction

- Use this page to convince the reader that you care about responding to the critique.
- Use this page to tell the reader how much you think the grant has been improved.
- Use this page to sell the grant all over again.

A good Intro strategy

- Thank the reviewers, and then restate what they liked—ie we are glad that you liked this aim, etc
- Then, go over each critique—be specific about what was changed
- SHOW them in the document what has been changed—bolding, underlining, something.
- IF changes are too extensive—say this, and then say since the grant has significant changes, a complete read is necessary.

Page limits

- If you respond to the reviewers with new language, a new aim or new data—you are likely to have to cut somewhere else—page limits still apply.
- Be a wordsmith—savor each word that you use.
- 12 pages Ro1, 6 pages R21---that's all

What you must do to resubmit

- Take the reviewers suggestions to heart.
- Re-imagine the grant—at a cloud level
 - Do you really need all that data?
 - Do you really need all that experimental detail?
- This will allow you to use fewer words.
- ALWAYS, remind the reader why the work is important to do

From the cloud level

- Some people flood your head with detail, so you cant see the forest either.
- You are NOT helping the reader by giving so much detail (could be useful, but also may be a hindrance).
- MOST reviewers will assume that you know the technical details—they are more interested in WHY you are doing each experiment, what you expect to get and----what the data is going to mean.

When to hold 'em, when to fold em'

- If too low a score (7-9) maybe not your best idea.
- Maybe you didn't present the grant in best light.
- Take critique and learn from it—need more/different data? Refocus on different studies?
- Need a collaborator with better/different expertise?



New title/New grant?

- Tempting to simply change the title of a twice reviewed grant and resubmit.
- Not so fast—can't just change the title and resubmit—the SRA or the study section will catch and toss it or be unfriendly to it.
- Need a big enough difference in proposal to use this strategy.

New Grant

- Per guidelines
“An application in the same general area of research but with different components (e.g., aims, methods, outcomes) may be sufficiently different.”

Also, “a significant change in direction and approach” and “include substantial changes in all sections of the research plan”

Granted, above is open to interpretation.

Other nuances

- Can't just eliminate an aim—bulk of grant is not different enough
- Can't just split aims into 2 different grants—bulk of each grant is not different enough

- What CSR assumes is that if the ideas have been seen twice and not fundable score, the chance of the work EVER receiving a fundable score is low, therefore, MOVE on to something else.

What if submitted by different mechanism?

- If you wrote a grant under an RFA, which was not funded—it is NOT considered as the first RO1 submission.
- In other words, you can submit as a NEW grant

Submit former RO1 as R21?

- This is not really an appropriate work around to the 2 time revision rule, as the mechanism of an R21 is different—ie should be high risk/high reward.

What if I want a new study section?

- CSR will consider, but does not have to follow.
- As in all things, best to talk to someone about how you feel that another review group would be more appropriate.

What if I want to raise budget in resubmission?

- This is allowed, however if grant is now over 500K of direct costs, then WRITTEN permission by NIH institute must be obtained 6 weeks prior to proposal submission.

Key points to resubmission

- Rethink the grant—especially approaches.
- Write a convincing introduction.
- Follow this with real and noted changes in grant.
- Try not to be sarcastic or mad.

- Don't make the grant fly, if it's not a windy day!!!!

