



RESUBMISSIONS & INTERPRETING REVIEWER FEEDBACK

A WEBINAR FROM HANOVER RESEARCH

PENN STATE COLLEGE OF ARTS & ARCHITECTURE

May 11, 2022

PRESENTATION LENGTH ~ 90 min

Q&A and WRAP-UP We will save 10 min for questions at the end with a wrap-up discussion.

RECORDING & SLIDES All attendees will have access to the slides and corresponding recording.

PRESENTER



Rob Guroff, MPP
MANAGING GRANTS CONSULTANT

TOTAL WINS

\$25+
MILLION

More than \$25 million in total grant funding for Hanover clients

AGENCY EXPERTISE



- MPP (Public Policy)
- Joined Hanover in 2014
- Specializes in education grants, programmatic grantseeking, and corporate and foundation cultivation

On a Personal Note...



FOOTBALL FAN: Lives in Eastern PA

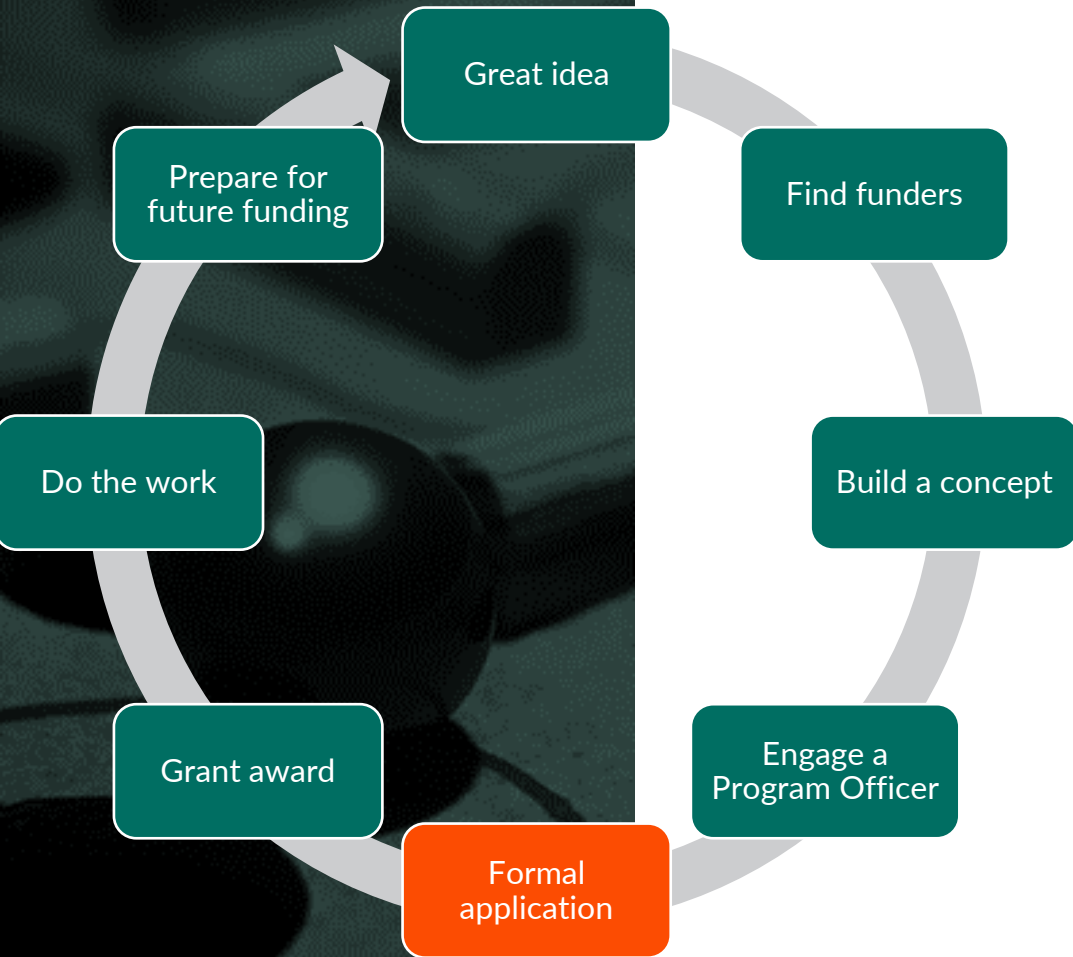


HOBBYIST: Cut paper collage amateur



FATHER OF FOUR: Twin girls + two cats

HOW GRANTS WORK



The grant funding process: from idea to implementation.

1. Start with a great idea.
2. Find funders who are interested in the idea.
3. Build a solid project concept aligned with funder goals.
4. Sell the concept to funders.
5. Complete the formal application process. (Resubmit!)
6. Receive a grant award.
7. Do the work.
8. Prepare for future funding.

This process varies across funder types.



Let's start with a quick poll.

*Have you
received a rejection
to a grant application?*

*Tell us what competition
you applied to.*

*If you received reviewer
feedback, was it helpful?*



REJECTION HURTS

...and it is a reality of grantseeking



Most proposals are rejected
(75-90%)

Very few applications are funded
on the first submission

Rejection will allow you to join an
esteemed group of colleagues!

WHAT PROPOSAL REJECTION IS *NOT*



"My project is simply this. I want to find out once and for all whether there's any truth in the belief that money can't buy happiness."

- An indication that you will never be successful in receiving funding.
- A rejection of your interests or your life's work.

WHAT PROPOSAL REJECTION IS



AN OPPORTUNITY TO...

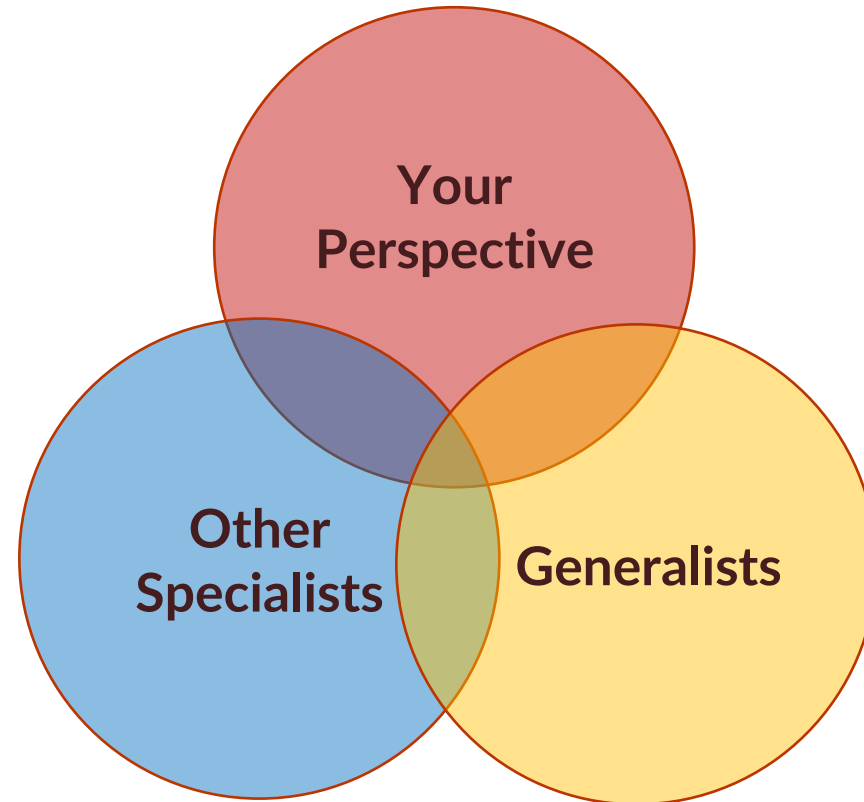
- Learn from your mistakes
- Understand someone else's perspective
- Learn the rules of the peer review "system" and use them to your advantage
- Cultivate your determination and develop an intentional strategy to be successful

LEARNING FROM REJECTION & RESUBMISSION



Photo by [ThisisEngineering RAEng](#) on [Unsplash](#)

You can learn how to **improve your research and proposal** through the process.



THE REALITY OF REVIEWS

Reviews can be extremely helpful and also confusing and flawed.

- Reviewers are only human.
- Reviewers may disagree with each other.
- Poor panel fit could lead to an unhelpful review of a relatively strong proposal.
- Negative reviews may not cover all weaknesses.



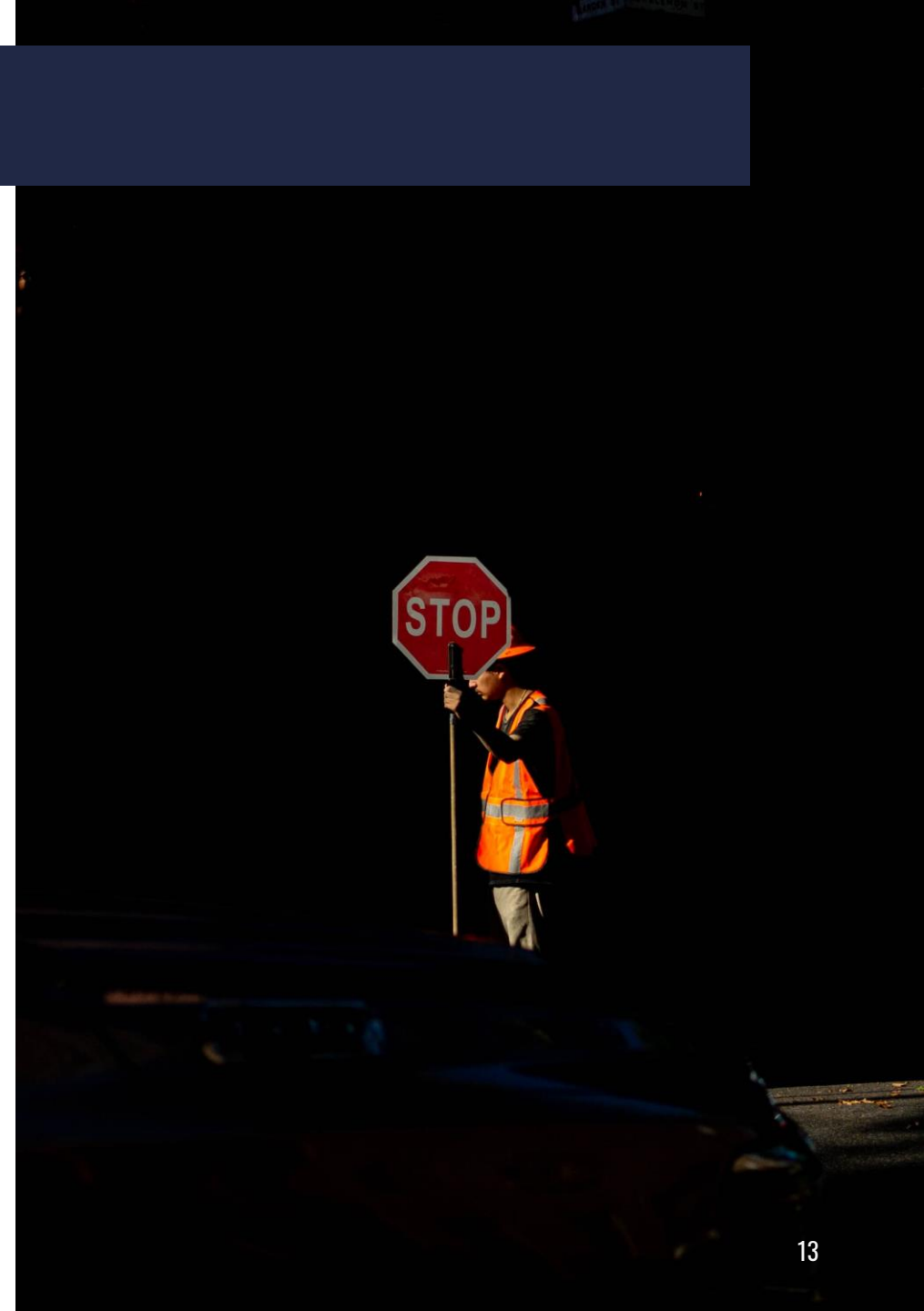
FIRST STEPS

1. Read and consider the reviews
2. Re-read your proposal and annotate it with reviewer input
3. Assess your options
 - Is the critique focused in one or two major areas?
 - Are the critiques accurate/helpful?
 - Can I address the critiques?
 - Should I address the critiques?
 - Is this the best available funding opportunity?



WHY YOU SHOULDN'T RESUBMIT

1. You no longer need the money.
2. Your research has gone a very different direction.
3. You cannot fix the fatal flaw(s) identified by reviewers.
4. The funding opportunity is no longer available.
5. The funder told you not to.



FUNDER-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

			FOUNDATIONS
RESUBMISSION ALLOWED?	YES	YES	RARELY
ANY LIMITATIONS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One time within 37 months • Unlimited “new” submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be substantially revised • Timing may be limited 	Funder-dependent
RESPOND TO REVIEWERS?	YES	NO / MAYBE	Funder-dependent
DISADVANTAGES?	Reviewers see previous scores and comments	Treated like any new submission	Funder-dependent



INTERPRETING REVIEWER FEEDBACK

- What They Said
- Deciding What is Important
- Pop Quiz!

What can you learn from Review Summary?

- Did they “get it”?
- Were they enthusiastic about the idea?
- Were the main concerns procedural or conceptual?

What can you learn from Reviewer Comments?

- Panel composition
- Readability of the proposal
- Technical understanding/assessment



TAKING A CLOSER LOOK: WHAT THEY SAID

Areas of agreement / disagreement

Misunderstandings

Missing details

Things they missed

Tone / interest



Common Critiques

- Someone else already did it
- Not significant or interesting
- Incremental / not enough
- Too ambitious
- Problems with preliminary data
- Lack of detail
- Disagreement with the approach
- Lack of rigor / poor analytical plan
- Failure to discuss potential challenges and alternative approaches
- Inconsistencies
- Poorly written

DETERMINING WHAT IS IMPORTANT

More Important

- Areas of agreement across reviewers
- Comments from the reviewer who knows your area best
- Any misunderstandings
- Comments that question feasibility or scope
- Comments about missing information
- Critiques about writing, presentation, or structure

Less Important

- Things that are just wrong
- Comments from people who you can tell were misassigned to your proposal
- Comments that recommend a different project or approach rather than critiquing what you are proposing
- Soft comments that note a preference rather than a clear weakness

**It never hurts to ask a peer,
Program Officer, or consultant to weigh in.**

PROCEDURAL VS CONCEPTUAL WEAKNESSES

Procedural Weaknesses (Good)

- Usually easy to address
- Something about the proposal writing/format/structure/flow could be strengthened

Conceptual Weaknesses (Bad)

- Usually hard to address
- Your core idea(s) may need adjustment
- You may need to go back to the concept development stage

POP QUIZ!

Is this a procedural weakness or a conceptual weakness?

The proposed work is compelling. It describes a novel and important investigation of X and Y. However, the approach to specifically evaluating Y is weakly described.



POP QUIZ!

Is this a procedural weakness or a conceptual weakness?

Although the panel agreed that the proposed activities are noteworthy and well-organized, there was disagreement as to whether the project methodology would adequately address the question. There was also concern that the two proposed Objectives 1 and 2 did not have clear complementary goals.



POP QUIZ!

Is this a procedural weakness or a conceptual weakness?

The panel concurred that there was little discussion about how researchers and/or the university would sustain this program after the possible funding period has ended.



POP QUIZ!

Is this a procedural weakness or a conceptual weakness?

Peer-led learning is a great way [to improve student engagement in coursework], however, the proposed activities and budget do not reflect this intent. The desired effect of the proposed changes should be reflected by the budget.



What's this?

Personally, I think that the international experience that you propose is good, but I also believe that your proposed duration of six weeks for this project may have hurt your chances of receiving funding. I suggest you read the advice provided by the reviewers and that you try to answer their questions overall. I will be happy to talk to you in more detail once you read the reviews and have time to think about them. If you want to do so, please email me so that we can set up a time to talk.



RESPONDING TO REVIEWER FEEDBACK

- Responses to Reviewer Comments
- Incorporating Changes in the Proposal



How not to respond to reviewers' comments.

What should you include in your resubmission?

- Some funders don't want to see responses to reviews (like NSF)...
- ...but if they do (like NIH):
 - Include title and proposal number of original submission
 - Thank reviewers, emphasize strengths and positive comments
 - Use Reviewer numbers (R1, R2, R3)
 - Largest concerns should receive the most page-space
 - Make sure your responses refer to a section of your proposal
 - Be brief and direct
- If you don't know if you should include responses, ask your Program Officer.

How can I craft appropriate responses to reviewer feedback?

- Be responsive, not defensive
- Don't skip critiques
- Avoid disagreeing
 - If you can't make a change or respond...
 - Acknowledge the critique
 - Discuss limitations that preclude direct response
 - Discuss any related revisions, even if they are different
- Address reviewers' missed information
 - Acknowledge lack of clarity and/or need to restructure
- Be specific about the changes you have made

RESPOND, DON'T DEFEND – REVIEWER RECOMMENDS NEW ELEMENT

R1. Recommend the addition of a 6-month follow-up study to ascertain if the effect persists after the structured intervention.

Defensive

We chose not to conduct a follow-up study as our primary focus in this application was to determine whether the intervention could be effective in real time.

Responsive

The reviewer raises an important point. Therefore, we have added a three-month post intervention focus group that will assess whether the family continues to dance together, how often, and in what format. We are unable to follow the participants for six months due to the fact that recruitment is rolling over the first two years of the grant, leaving insufficient time to follow the last recruited family. However, we will also perform a six-month focus group in a subgroup of the first 50 recruited families.

RESPOND, DON'T DEFEND – REVIEWER MISSED KEY INFORMATION

Reviewer missed important information.

Defensive

We already included age as a matching criteria as noted on page 18 of the original application.

Responsive

We apologize for our lack of clarity in describing the study design. We will include age as a matching criteria. Specifically, cases and controls will be matched on age <18, age ≥ 18 (see Section C.4. Study Design).



FUNDER-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS



NIH requires you to include a one-page introduction with responses to reviewer critiques.

If you do a new submission, you cannot refer to a previous submission or reviewer critiques.



NSF does not give you an opportunity to respond to reviewers, and reviewers will not see previous reviews.

Some POs say you should directly address critiques in the proposal, and if so, get that recommendation in email.

It's increasingly common for POs to suggest responses to reviewers in CAREER proposals.

INCORPORATING CHANGES IN THE PROPOSAL

- Echo language from the critiques to show reviewers you were listening
- Correct any misunderstandings
- Contrast your approach with incorrect suggestions or misunderstandings
- Use structure, subheadings, formatting, new graphics to aid reviewers in seeing what they missed the first time
- Use repetition and summarize key points frequently to help reviewers



A grant rejection can be the initial step in developing a relationship with the funder.



Persistence and patience can lead to success.



Questions?



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