WICS @ CogSci

constructing a successful grant proposal

What Makes a Proposal Stand Out for a reviewer (especially a panelist)?

Tell a story!

- What is the basic, high-level question you want to answer ("what is the meaning of life?" not "what happens if I show people cars instead of houses?")

- If the experiments "work" what will we have really learned?

- Why should anyone care?

Main issues should be clear at the macro-level -- so non-expert readers can get the gist and be interested.

THE "WOW FACTOR"

Test for the macro-level story:

- Read only the first line of every paragraph

- Next read only the first and last lines of every paragraph.

- You are writing the proposal for the reviewers (not your collaborators/advisor/ students/friends/heroines & heroes of science)

- Still, details should be clearly described to the extent possible for expert reviewers.

    (and **ALWAYS** take advantage of "Suggested Reviewers" form)

- Don't make it physically impossible to read (font, margins, etc)

Proposal Preparation

➢ A year or two in advance: Volunteer to be an external reviewer and agree to adhoc review requests.

➢ Give yourself plenty of **TIME**

➢ Print the solicitation and hang it by your computer! Follow it EXACTLY.

➢ Check program website for additional requirements

➢ Ask colleagues to *critically review* proposal drafts

➢ Use "Suggested Reviewers" form

➢ List ALL collaborators, even if no publication or in early stages

➢ Be aware if there is a target date or deadline

➢ Coordinate with your sponsored programs office in advance

Where to submit?

Sign up for "Get NSF Updates by Email"

Who funds your colleagues?

Learn to use the Awards database (topic areas AND funding amounts)
   » nsf.gov – awards – search awards – advanced search

Contact PO(s) by email to see if you've identified the right program

- Summarize your proposed research *in one page*

   1)   What is your (macro-level) research question?

   2)   How you will try to answer it?

   3)   Why should everyone care about this question?

   4)   Consider co-review options

Declined? Common Criticisms

- No compelling rationale (no theoretical framework)

- No preliminary data (proof of concept)

- Insufficient detail (experimental method and/or theory)

- Experiments don't relate to the theory

- Results could have alternative explanations

- Over-ambitious/Too incremental

- If the experiments "work," what will we really have learned? And will anyone care?

- Not sufficiently responsive to solicitation

Develop a thick skin! Try again! It's not personal….