Reviewers Expectations

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Outline

- Definitions
- The review process
- Common mistakes to avoid
- Conclusion

Definitions

- Research – systematic investigation to solve a problem or improve understanding

- Proposal – statement of intent, plan meant to convince. This may be aimed at obtaining resources, or for the award of a degree, etc

- Review - Critical assessment, Careful examination for quality, Making a judgement (YAM advert)

What Reviewers Look for in Applications

- Significance and impact – does it address an important problem in the field? Potential impact?
- Exciting ideas
- Clarity
- Ideas they can understand -- Don't assume too much
- Realistic aims and timelines -- Don't be overly ambitious
- Brevity with things that everybody knows
- Noted limitations of the study
- A clean, well-written application
- Prudent use of funds?

A strong research application...

- Has well-defined and appropriate Specific Aims

- Promises to Advance Knowledge.

- Provides supporting Preliminary Data.

- Has an appropriately detailed Experimental Design.

- Documents appropriate scientific Expertise.

- Has a reasonable & justified budget.

Reasons You are Likely to Succeed

- Strong Rationale/Justification
- Based on published literature of applicant or others
- Based on preliminary data of applicant
- Based on novel and exciting idea
- Logical scientific questions to test hypotheses
  - Clear and uniquely related to hypotheses
  - Focused and achievable in grant period

Reviewers' wish list

- Reviewers are busy people

- Present neat, well organized and easy-to-read document

- Clear concise writing – Good English – grammar & spelling, need for self improvement through reading

- Responds to announcement

- Interesting and new idea or brings fresh insight

Reviewers' wishes - 2

- Convincing preliminary data showing that the proposed method (approach) has promise
- Feasible work plan
- Well written and well thought out research plan
- Writing shows enthusiasm and commitment of researcher
- Evidence that the PI knows the field and is well qualified to do the research

NIH Review Criteria

- Overall Impact
  - Assessment of the likelihood for the project to *exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved*
- Core Review Criteria
  - Significance – *Research Strategy*
  - Investigator(s) – *Biosketch; Personal statement*
  - Innovation – *Research Strategy, Innovation*
  - Approach – *Research Strategy, Approach*
  - Environment – *Resources, Environment*

KNUST Research Fund (KReF) Review Criteria

No.	REVIEW CATEGORY	RATING				
		Excellent	Poor			
		1	2	3	4	5
1	RELEVANCE	1	2	3	4	5
	a) Does the project address an important problem in the field?					
	a) Will the proposed research build on other research efforts in the field?					
	a) Does the research proposal address a current priority need of Ghana?					
	a) What is the potential impact of the proposed research on policy or practice?					
	a) What is the likelihood of uptake of the findings of the proposed research?					
2	EFFECTIVENESS	1	2	3	4	5
	a) Does the application demonstrate financial effectiveness (prudent use of funds, best use of funds for project aims, etc?)					
	a) Does the proposed research have the potential for future development (for SEED category only)					
	a) Does the application demonstrate appropriate and adequate involvement of the various disciplines? (for MULTI-DISCIPLINARY category only)					
3	PROPOSAL QUALITY	1	2	3	4	5
	a) Is the problem defined and embedded into national development?					
	a) Does the application demonstrate originality and propose novel concepts, approaches or practices?					
	a) Is the methodology clearly outlined and scientifically sound?					
	a) Is the research strategy and methodology appropriate to accomplish the project aims?					
	a) Does the team have access to the appropriate equipment, populations and other resources required to achieve the project aims?					
	a) Does the PI and/or research team have complementary expertise and experience for the selected topic and research?					
	a) Is the proposed period adequate for achieving the project aims?					
4	OVERALL EVALUATION (Not an average of the above scores)	1	2	3	4	5

Common Problems in Applications

- Lack of new or original ideas
- Absence of an acceptable scientific rationale
- Lack of experience in the essential methodology
- Questionable reasoning in experimental approach
- Uncritical approach

Common Problems … Cont

- Diffuse, superficial, or unfocused research plan
- Lack of sufficient experimental detail
- Lack of knowledge of published relevant work
- Unrealistically large amount of work
- Uncertainty concerning future directions

Common mistakes

- Poor writing style – vague and unfocussed, or too densely academic
- Incomplete response to the FOA
- Not understanding the state-of-the-art
- Too ambitious, too general in nature
- Vague research plan
- PI lacks proven competence

Examples of reviewer comments

- The detailed work plan was listed in Table of Contents but not included in the application
- Timelines are not specific, beyond year one. The text mentions Tables that were not provided.
- Only one person, is named to coordinate this large project. There is no mention of hiring staff to help with administrative and coordination of the project, although the applicant states the fellow will "supervise staff". It is unclear who these staff these are or what type of infrastructure is available at the applicant organization.
- No organizational charts are provided for how the project will be run, nor for the organizations involved. Therefore, it was difficult to understand how the project will be staffed and structured.

Examples of reviewer comments - 2

- Itemized budget and budget narrative are not consistent.

- Many line items in budget were not adequately discussed in project narrative.

- The publication list of the Principal Investigator appears limited and there is a limited track record with regard to research support.

Positive comments from reviewers

- The scientific focus areas are well aligned with national priorities and well justified in the application.

- The gaps identified with regard to cancer research are well described and the planned efforts to address these, including epidemiology training, establishment of registries and biorepositories, and establishment of palliative care and public outreach resources are well justified and collectively seem feasible.

- The efforts are likely to provide a foundation to impact health care practice and delivery.

Conclusion

- Reviewers are also researchers
- They learn from the review exercises
- Use the reviewers' comments to improve upon your work
- Don't give up
- Avoid mediocrity
- Look for funds to support your research
- Become a reviewer