**HOW TO REVISE AN NIH APPLICATION**

It pays to revise your NIH grant application. Right now about 80% of all funded projects are resubmissions. So don’t get discouraged; see revising as part of the process. The reviewers don’t say “revise and resubmit” but if your score was reasonably good, or if the comments are reasonably supportive even if unscored, then be persistent.

At the PAA, Rebecca Clark, our program official at NICHD, gathered together a panel of grant awardees, reviewers and program officers to speak about the “Five Things People Should Know About Resubmissions”.

**Pam Smock (many kinds of revisions)**

1. Get into the reviewers’ head – what is it that made them not see the wonderfulness of your research? Common flaw: lack of clarity and coherent. A form of etiquette, really.
2. Take each reviewer comment seriously. But don’t give up your internal integrity and commitment to your research. It’s your creativity and unique contribution.
3. View a revision as an opportunity, not a rejection. It’s guidance for the researcher, not a contract for ending it.
4. Call the program officer to get a sense if you should revise (more on this below).
5. No typos or excess ‘white space’ on the paper (show that you need to use all the space available because your work is that deep). But be concise and don’t include fluffy filler.

**Jason Boardman (revised R03)**

1. Collaborators are great, but they aren’t co-authors. Drop them if they think it’s not worth while to revise.
2. Write your grant as one singular voice, not a hodgepodge of different researchers’ language and approach. Even if different people write different sections, go back and rewrite it in your own prose, so that it flows from section to section.
3. Get experience reviewing. Ask a faculty mentor to let you read over a proposal**.
4. Bug the program officials to get more insight. They can tell you the tone and tenor of the discussion, whether it was enthusiastic, matter of fact, or dismissive.
5. Don’t write your revision for the reviewers, because there may be different reviewers. The revision should stand on its own. The reason for your revision isn’t “because the reviewer said so” but because “it’s solid scientific logic or method.”

**Feinian Chen (revised a K grant)**

1. Get in touch with the Program Official to get his/her advice. Their job is to get successful applications through the process.
2. The program official can help you select the advisory committee and reviewers.
3. Look at other successful applications – particularly the parts that your reviewers discussed.
4. Make a spreadsheet of ‘things to do/address’ and go through the list.
5. Set up a target resubmission date to help you deal with the insecurities and the “my research is crap” feeling.

**Michael Rendall (many grants)**

1. Don’t tell the reviewers they were wrong.
2. Write all sections in one style. Rewrite in your own language if necessary.
3. Consider the mechanism. Resubmit to another program, e.g., R03 to a R21, etc.
4. Believe in your idea. Show the summary statement to others: things may be addressable.
5. Revise but do it afresh. It has to stand on its own.

Valerie Durrant (review committee)
1. Your audience is the study group, not the PA or RFA.
2. Review panels are interdisciplinary. Don’t turn off someone outside your discipline, for example with jargon.
3. Know the literature outside your field, at least a bit.
4. What’s the impact of your research? Don’t let the reviewers come to the conclusion that ‘nothing is new here.’
5. Don’t do too much too different. “ Trying to do too much” and “not enough focus” are common reviewer criticisms.

Carla Walls (scientific review)
1. The page limits – especially the new ones – mean you have to be clean and concise.
2. Don’t get discouraged when not funded initially.
3. NIH wants you to do well. So call your program official for insights and advice.

Rebecca Clark (program official)
1. Don’t yell at your program official. [LL says: If you’re that angry or upset, it’s too early to call.]
2. Be respectful to reviewers.
3. Your proposal’s title and abstract may confuse or obfuscate your content and thus get your application assigned to the wrong study group.
4. Stay away from controversial titles and phrases like ‘gay marriage’ and ‘abortion rights’. Congressfolk notice these and the topics wave red flags. Sometimes NICHD changes titles for this reason.
5. Ask specific questions when contacting the program official for follow-up. Not “why didn’t I get funded” but more like “what did the reviewers mean when they said xxx.”

Other thoughts from several other panelists ...
- Be persistent. Don’t give up. Remember: 80% of funded grants are resubmissions. The pay-line is also 3-4 times higher for resubmissions than for first-time submissions.
- Be sure you clarified the importance of your research, to science, and to society’s well-being and the NIH mission.
- Address reviewers’ comments, don’t ignore them.
- Clarify the Significance to people outside your field.
- Know when to fold. Sometimes it’s just not worth it to NIH.
- As of 2010 only one resubmission is allowed. They are checking to make sure that people aren’t trying to circumvent this rule by renaming it and submitting it as if it were a brand new proposal. If found, it will get returned without any review.

*This document is also available for download on the Popcenter website, www.popcenter.berkeley.edu.

*Note from LL: Journal of Marriage and Family has a reviewer internship program for new PhDs and advanced graduate students. Many, many of the problems in proposals are shared in peer-reviewed articles. You will learn a lot. Visit http://www.ncfr.org/journals/marriage_family/review/become.asp for more information.