

A blurred background image of a business meeting. Several people in professional attire are gathered around a table. One person is holding a smartphone, another is holding a tablet displaying a document with charts. There are coffee cups on the table. The overall tone is professional and collaborative.

NIH Specific Aims Page: Know Your Audience

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NIH Review Orientation (R01, R21, and CDA)

Submitted grants assigned to a study section ("Scientific Review Group") by the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) largely based on abstract and specific aims

Study sections can be ad hoc or standing with different dynamics

- Standing study section rosters are available online
- A roster will be included with any comments to receive after the review

Three reviewers are assigned to each grant (review criteria will be covered by next speaker)

- Primary does a full presentation
- Secondary and tertiary briefly add to the primary

All study section members not in conflict rate the application based on the presentation and a quick read of the abstract and specific aims pages



Much Is Determined Based Largely on Abstract and Specific Aims

- These need to be incredibly polished—get lots of people to read and give feedback
- Certain expectations are ubiquitous
 - Perfect grammar and spelling!
 - Avoid too many abbreviations
 - 3 Aims are typical
 - Many expect hypotheses to be listed under each aim
 - Make the potential impact crystal clear

Clear Communication Is Essential in the Abstract and Specific Aims

- You can't cover all aspects of your proposal; you must focus on what is most important
- But this depends on the reviewer
- So, you need to do everything you can to understand the perspective of the reviewer

Who Serves on a Study Section?

- Non-intramural scientists with deep expertise in “relevant” domains
- Scientific Review Officers use various sources to find reviewers, including:
 - Scientists recommended by scientific societies
 - Authors of recent publications
 - Speakers at scientific meetings
 - Scientists recommended by current and former review members
 - Nominations from professional societies and university deans



U.S. National Library of Medicine

Know Your Institute

- NIH is made up of 27 distinct institutes and centers
- Each has its own culture, values, terminology, interests, and emphasis
- While all are governed by the same "rules" interpretation vary

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

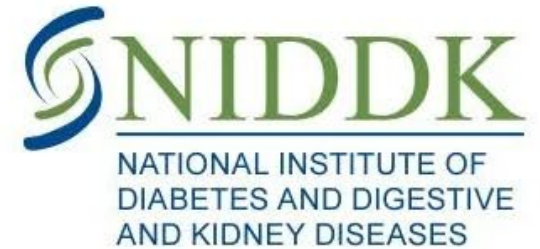
Institute of Medicine and Diseases



National Human Genome Research Institute



National Institute of Mental Health



National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering



National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research



National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases



How Can I Learn More About the Institute

01

Study the website and the studies they highlight there

02

If responding to a request for applications, talk to scientific officer

03

Talk with colleagues and mentors who have

- Successfully submitted to that institute
- Served on a standing or ad hoc study section
- Be aware that they cannot talk about specific applications or specific comments made at review
- They can help you understand the cultural perspective of that institute



My Grant Wasn't Funded, What Now?

- Only about 15-20% of grants are successful
- Some that fail to be funded first submission are subsequently funded
- The secret is to read the tea leaves carefully
 - Was your grant discussed? (only about half are discussed)
 - Although it is painful, study the reviewer comments very, very carefully
 - Did they feel the study was important, but had specific, addressable concerns about the methods?
- The trick here is to balance the advantage of having a clearer idea of what the reviewers wanted against the distinct possibility that someone else may review it next time
 - Pay attention to your score, if close to the fundable range, try again
 - You are allowed a single page response on resubmission which can be very helpful



Consider Your Grant Application As Opening a Dialogue

- The more you discuss, the more you will understand what they are looking for
- Absolutely take advantage of any offers from scientific officers to discuss either before submission or when drafting a resubmission
- As colleagues familiar with your targeted institute to read your abstract and specific aims