

Panel Review Mythbusting

Keeping the Panel Focused on the Review Criteria and Program Description in the RFA

If you have any questions about this handout, please speak to your NIFA program team.

Evaluating Proposals During Review Panel Meeting

- Panelists should evaluate proposals based on:
 - evaluation criteria in the RFA
 - program description in the RFA
 - merits of the proposal
- Panelists should not evaluate proposals based on:
 - their own implicit biases
 - what they think they know about NIFA's review and award process
 - myths of the review and award process

Myth 1

“NIFA does not or should not fund grants with an international component”

Reality

- In reality, NIFA specifically encourages submission of proposals with international collaboration when such collaboration is:
 - beneficial to the proposed project
 - beneficial to sustainability and improvements in U.S. agriculture
- Standard language encouraging submission of proposals with international collaboration is included in all NIFA RFAs
- Sub-awards to international collaborators is a permissible budgetary expense

Myths 2a & 2b

“NIFA should not fund grant proposals from industry (or should only support them through the SBIR program)” and “Certain types of projects should be funded by industry and not supported by NIFA”

Reality

- Most NIFA grant programs have broad eligibility that allows submission of proposals from industry and other research entities
- Congressional authorization of programs determines eligibility, and it may not restrict specific types of projects or eligible institutions
- Eligibility and other restrictions will be specifically identified in the RFA and panelists must not impose their own restrictions
- Focus on merit, program description and benefit to the U.S.

Myth 3

“The Project Director doesn’t have the required approvals or permits and won’t be able to secure these, for example:

- IACUC approval for use of animal subjects
- IRB approval for involvement of human subjects
- import permits”

Reality

- Whether or not the Project Director secures a required approval or permit is an administrative matter for the program to assess at a later date
 - it is irrelevant to merit review of the proposal and should not be considered in the evaluation
 - panelists don’t have a crystal ball and, thus, can’t determine whether specific approvals or permits will be secured
 - some of these approvals are “just in time” and not required by NIFA until after an award recommendation

Myth 4

“The proposed project appears to duplicate previous work and shouldn’t be funded”

Reality

- Whether or not a project is duplicative of or overlaps with an existing project is an administrative matter for the program to assess at a later date
 - NIFA will not make an award that is duplicative of an existing project

Evaluating Proposals During Review Panel Meeting

- If inappropriate criteria are applied to evaluation of a proposal and that proposal is ranked inappropriately low, the program can’t rescue it later
 - in contrast, highly ranked proposals will not be funded if approvals are not secured by the PD, the work is duplicative, etc.
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 - evaluation criteria in the RFA
 - program description in the RFA
 - merits of the proposal