MAKING IT RAIN: HOW TO GET YOUR GRANT APPLICATION FUNDED BY NIH

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WHAT DOES NIH FUND?

High impact research on public health and well-being

A gap in the literature is not enough: grant application ≠ journal article

Consult NIH Institute and Center priorities, review NIH web site on the grant process

Payline is roughly 10-12% (varies by agency and mechanism)
**BEFORE GRANT WRITING: INITIAL STEPS**

Discuss your project idea with colleagues, especially those with NIH experience

Identify the appropriate NIH Program Officer (PO)

   Email the PO your “elevator speech” version of your project

Obtain one or two funded applications to view examples of successful applications

The BGSU Advantage: R15 Academic Research Enhancement Award
NO BRAINER: Draft your application early, get feedback from colleagues, and revise.

Integrate NIH goals (e.g., from Health People 2020 or reports from specific institutes) in your application.

Write your application so that reviewers outside of your narrow area of expertise can understand and appreciate your proposed project.

Draw attention to sentences that speak directly to the review criteria by using bolded text.
To examine the divorce and repartnering experiences of midlife and older adults, we use prospective, longitudinal data from the 1992-2010 Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a NIA- and Social Security Administration-funded data collection that is the premier source for understanding the economic and health challenges and opportunities of aging. The original HRS sample included a cohort born 1931-1941 who were 51-61 in 1992. Since then, additional cohorts have been folded in, allowing researchers to examine midlife and older adult experiences until over time. Midlife is an important milestone (Karp, 1988). During this life phase, more people face the emergence of health problems, grown children are leaving home, and individuals begin to think about retirement. These key life course transitions may serve as turning points, reshaping individuals' priorities, including their marriage. Prior research has established linkages between these life transitions and marital quality among older adults (Moen, Kim, & Hofmeister, 2001; White & Edwards, 1990; Yorgason, Booth, & Johnson, 2008). But how these life transitions are associated with gray divorce or the ramifications for older adult well-being have been largely overlooked in the literature, probably because gray divorce was considered a rare event. This is no longer true today.
The Scientific Review Officer (SRO) assigns the application to a study section.

Study sections are organized and convened by the SRO—review rosters online.

All applications assigned to a study section are reviewed, but only some are scored.

Applications scored within the Center/Institute’s funding range are reviewed by Council prior to grant award.
National Institutes of Health
Grants Process
At-A-Glance

Planning, Writing, and Submitting

**Planning:** Applicant should start early, collect preliminary data, and determine internal deadlines.

**Writing:** Applicant often begins writing application several months prior to application due date.

**Submitting:** Applicant organization submits most applications to NIH through the Federal portal, Grants.gov.

Receipt and Referral

1 – 3 Months

Applications compliant with NIH policies are assigned for review by the Division of Receipt and Referral in the Center for Scientific Review (CSR).

CSR assigns application to an NIH Institute/Center (IC) and a Scientific Review Group (SRG).

Scientific Review Officer (SRO) assigns applications to reviewers and readers.

Peer Review

4 – 8 Months

**Initial Level of Review:** SRG members review and evaluate applications for scientific merit.

**Priority Scores:** Available to Principal Investigator in eRA Commons.

**Summary Statement:** Available to Principal Investigator in eRA Commons.

**Second Level of Review:** Advisory council/board reviews applications.

Award

9 – 10 Months

*NIH Requests additional information needed for in-Time for award.

**Pre-Award Process:** IC grants management staff conducts final administrative review and negotiates award.*

**Notification of Award:** Institute/Center issues and sends Notice of Award (NoA) to applicant institution/organization.

Congratulations! Project period officially begins!

Post-Award Management

Administrative and fiscal monitoring, reporting, and compliance

Visit: [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grants_process.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grants_process.htm) for more about the NIH grants process.
THINK LIKE A REVIEWER

Reviewers assess the strengths and weaknesses of applications on several criteria:

1. Overall Scientific Impact
2. Significance
3. Investigators
4. Innovation
5. Approach
6. Environment
INSIDE THE STUDY SECTION MEETING
BETORE THE MEETING

Study section members receive a list of applications that will be reviewed during the meeting and are asked to report their expertise and conflicts for each application.

Members are assigned applications to review. They write a paragraph summarizing the overall impact of the project and then address the five review criteria.

Reviewers score assigned applications, providing both an overall score and scores on the five criteria. Scores and reviews are posted online prior to the meeting.
## NIH SCORING SYSTEM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Very strong with only some minor weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Strong but with at least one moderate weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Some strengths but with at least one major weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>A few strengths and a few major weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Minor Weakness:** An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

**Moderate Weakness:** A weakness that lessens impact

**Major Weakness:** A weakness that severely limits impact
DURING THE MEETING

Study section members receive a list of the grants rank ordered by their preliminary scores. Applications with worse scores are not discussed (unscored).

Discussion of an application:
- Chair asks reviewers to state their preliminary scores
- Reviewer 1 provides a summary of the application, emphasizing its strengths and weaknesses across the review criteria
- Reviewers 2 and 3 provide their assessments
- The discussion is open to the entire group to ask questions and weigh in with their opinions
- Chair inquires about Human Subjects
- Chair invites reviewers to revisit their initial scores. This establishes the scoring range.
- All members score within the range, or state they wish to score outside of the range
- Chair asks reviewers for any comments on the budget
AFTER THE MEETING

Reviewers edit their critiques to match their revised scores

SROs write a summary of the study group’s discussion of the application’s strengths and weaknesses that is provided to the applicant along with the reviews
I GOT MY SCORE—WHAT’S NEXT?

Review the summary statement

Email your PO to ask about the funding line and to discuss reviewer feedback on your application

Should you revise your application?
THANK YOU!

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