

Presubmission Proposal Review Guidelines

Wayne State University
College of Nursing (CON)

Presubmission proposal reviews are scheduled to help you prepare the best possible grant proposal. Receiving feedback from your colleagues gives you the opportunity to polish your proposal and increases the likelihood that your grant will be funded or scored. The Center for Health Research places a high value on presubmission proposal reviews.

Presubmission proposal reviews are for your benefit and increase the likelihood of your submitting a quality proposal, therefore it is strongly recommended that PIs seek a review for all external grant applications or have rationale for forgoing the review process.

The following provides an overview of the process for arranging and for implementing CON presubmission proposal reviews.

1. The PI, with Associate Dean for Research assistance, obtains at least three reviewers who will provide written critiques of the proposal. Reviewers should have recent success as a PI on a grant funded by your target agency. It is encouraged that you have one reviewer from outside nursing, if appropriate. At least one reviewer with a strong methodology background is also good. Hopefully, most of the reviewers will have some knowledge of your area. Keep in mind you want reviewers who will provide many suggestions, you have friends to tell you are wonderful; you need ideas to further improve your great work. Often people who have not been reading your proposal as you develop it will provide more new information to you than someone who has been commenting on sections as you prepare the work. It is suggested that the PI ask reviewers personally to participate—it is more likely that reviewers will say yes to the PI than to anyone else or to email.
2. The PI submits a complete proposal and grant review criteria used by the target agency to reviewers at least one week before the presubmission proposal review. A complete proposal means that as much as you can possibly have done, including any appendices (e.g., instruments) that would be helpful. Certainly you need the specific aims, background and significance, and methods (through analysis) sections. Keep in mind the major focus of the review is the science. Reviewers need a complete document to realistically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. The week time frame allows the reviewers to carefully consider your document so you get the best possible feedback. Remember you are asking reviewers to spend considerable time on your work, giving them a week to read the document conveys the message that you expect quality and quantity in their written comments.
3. It is extremely important that investigators plan ahead and schedule the presubmission proposal review to occur 4-5 weeks before the due date of the proposal (ideally)—certainly schedule to allow time for you to make any suggested revisions. You may find that major revisions are required following your presubmission proposal review—you need time to make those revisions.

4. Distribute the draft materials on time so reviewers can be adequately prepared. It is recommended that you give reviewers lead time and let them know when to expect your proposal. Reviewers are busy, need to plan for your reviews, and to set aside requisite time to conduct their reviews.
5. Reviewers are asked to provide a written critique of your proposal. Reviewers should NOT summarize or describe the study. They should focus on evaluative comments. Both strength and weaknesses should be presented, along with suggestions to improve weaknesses. Most generally, reviewers will organize their comments around the grant evaluation criteria (e.g., for NIH R series: significance, innovation, approach, investigator, and environment).
6. Review sessions will be scheduled for 90 minutes. Probably every minute will be used. If you have more than 3 reviewers, you may need more time.
7. At the presubmission proposal review session each reviewer will be asked to read their prepared comments. Reviewers will move right through these comments sequentially. This time of allowing the reviewers to read all their comments without interruption allows the entire sets of comments to be considered as a whole. Stopping in the middle of comments might lead the PI to focus on only selected components of reviewer concerns, and not capture the overall importance of various comments. This also allows for really independent reviews of your work, so one reviewer is not influenced by others at this stage. This model of reading entire comments prior to any discussion or questions is identical to that used by the NIH nursing study section.
8. At the review session, the PI DOES NOT ask any questions or make comments while the reviewers read the prepared comments. This allows the PI to really think about what is being said and not be thinking of how to 'defend' the decisions in the midst of needing to hear the next comments. It makes listening easier.
9. The PI asks questions and engages in discussion AFTER all the reviews have been read. Reviewers often comment on each others' remarks, or ask each other questions during the discussion phase. Sometimes new ideas, ideas that were not fully addressed by any one reviewer, emerge from the discussion. The discussion period is the time to allow several minds to tackle difficult problems you haven't been able to solve. The discussion period should be an extremely interesting for all participants. Presubmission proposal reviews are a great vehicle to experience exciting collegial exchanges.

11. The PI is welcome to bring others to the review session. No one should attend and participate in discussion who has not read the entire proposal prior to the review. Other participants make their comments only during the discussion. PIs can invite others to the review that are not obligated to participate in the discussion, but all participants participating in discussion should have read the entire document since no summary or description will be provided and there is simply not time to allow for answering questions that are not related to suggestions for changes in the proposal. Co-investigators are also welcome to participate, as determined by the PI.

12. The PI leaves the review with three sets of written comments and lots of ideas about ways to further improve the proposal. Any changes in the proposal are determined by the PI. Of course, the PI may want to contact the reviewers for further individual discussion about their suggestions.

13. If you wish, feel free to schedule an individual meeting with the Associate Dean for Research following the review to discuss and/or problem solve related to issues to be resolved prior to submission of your proposal.