

How to write a good grant review

A personal perspective!

Dr Julie Owens

What's changed in 2000?

- abolition of RGICs
- primary spokespersons on DP select external assessors
- primary spokespersons review external assessors reports, identify key issues, further questions, generate DP report
- *external assessors written report and DP report sent to applicants for written response*
- *DP rank all applications based on external assessors written reports*
- DP reviews assessors reports, written response and ranks applications

Assessment

Criteria

- *inherent scientific merit of the research project and potential benefit to health*
- *demonstrated ability of the investigator(s) to carry it out*

Written comments and ratings

Assessment

- Evaluate
- Substantiate
- Rate
- *Relate the above*

Written comments and ratings

Assessment

- Significance
- Approach
- Feasibility
- Track Record
- Budget
- Questions for the applicant
- Additional questions for the applicant
- General comments

(1500 characters)

Ratings

- Outstanding *in top 5% internationally*
- Excellent *in top 10% internationally*
- Very good *in top 25% internationally*

- *Good in top 30% internationally*
- Fair
- Marginal
- Poor

Significance

- the extent to which the project, if successfully carried out, will make an original contribution to biomedical and/ or health science
- high priority, in relation to health or disease?
- big question?
- novel?
- other competitors?

Significance

- ‘..... an original contribution to biomedical and/ or health science’
- high priority, in relation to health or disease?
- big question?
- novel?
- other competitors?
- **quote**
- reviews
- editorials
- literature search (CC, Medline)
- international/ national conferences
- funding body priorities (NHMRC, national, international)
- professional organizations
- government

Significance

- "The hypothesis is novel and the project describes an original approach to this important question." **X**

Significance

"The hypothesis is novel, although it is clear from the papers presented at the most recent International Congress of Endocrinology this year, that this is an area of current interest in the field. It addresses a fundamental gap in our understanding of how X acts to alter Y and if substantiated, will provide the basis for the design and testing of new approaches to prevention and treatment of Z. Z remains a common and intractable condition in Australia and elsewhere....." ✓

Approach

- the extent to which the conceptual framework, design (including as applicable, the selection of appropriate subject populations or animal models), methods and analyses are properly developed,

well-integrated and appropriate to the aims of the project

Approach

Will the research plan achieve the aims and test the hypotheses?

- *conceptual framework*
- is it logical, complete? *why?*
- **design**
- including selection of appropriate subject populations or animal models
- is it appropriate? *why?*
- **methods & analyses**
- cutting edge/ most appropriate? *why?*

Approach

- "The experimental design will not allow the applicant to address all of the experimental aims." ✕

Approach

- "I am concerned that there are no experiments listed that will directly address the third aim of the proposal. As this is the most novel area of the proposal, this is a significant omission and I have reduced my rating accordingly." ✓

Feasibility

- the likelihood that the proposed work can be accomplished by the investigators given their documented
- experience and expertise
- past progress
- preliminary data
- requested and available resources
- institutional support
- access to special reagents or technologies
- adequacy of plans for the recruitment and retention of subjects

Feasibility

- the likelihood that the proposed work can be accomplished by the investigators
 - identify
 - what is essential
 - difficult
 - requiring further documentation

Track Record

- productivity and factors which may have either enhanced or inhibited it?
- relate to discipline and nature of work

- changing circumstances, eg refer to brief cv
- **quality of the publications and standing of the journals in which the applicant has published recently?**
- relate to discipline and nature of work
- contribution to field
- national and international recognition

Budget

- **is the requested budget reasonable?**
- known costs
- costs comparable to other similar work?
- staffing appropriate?

Questions for the applicant

- **Specific questions on areas which require clarification, including problems and limitations likely to be encountered**
- prioritise any identified deficiencies
- construct specific questions relating to these
- any further questions, comments in subsequent sections

Good Reports

- provide evidence to support each key element of the critique
- weight individual criticisms
- make it clear which of the criticisms are important and should be addressed in the reply
- *if necessary, indicate your own specific area of expertise - to put the assessment in context*

Unhelpful Reports

- are brief and/ or uncritical
- are brief and rather damning, without providing a substantial basis for the criticisms
- include only non-critical comments, then give a low or non-competitive rating for each or all elements
- include a series of substantial criticisms, then rate the project very highly
- list all major, minor, extremely minor flaws with no weighting - a 'kill at all costs' approach?
- include personal, offensive or idiosyncratic views and provide no judgement on the scientific, theoretical or technological merit of the project

Preparing Assessors Reports

- <http://www.nhmrc.health.gov.au/research/grants/assess.htm>
- <http://www.detya.gov.au/highered/research/grants/largeassessor.htm>

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