

Small Grants Program Proposal Review Form

Instructions to Reviewers

Reviewer Instructions at a Glance

1. Base review solely on the written proposal.
2. Read proposal with an eye for completion of criteria-related tasks.
3. When necessary, write a separate narrative describing concerns that call for a response from the investigator.
4. Suggest necessary budget modifications, if any.
5. Make a ***Summary Funding Recommendation*** by selecting one of the three options available.

The purpose of the review is to determine whether a proposal can be funded in its original form or whether a response from the investigator is required before an award can be made. A response from the investigator may be in the form of either revisions to the proposal or explanations that resolve points of concern. The proposal is the sole basis for deciding funding, and its length is limited to six pages. While this limit places a premium on succinct writing, it also requires that reviewers bear in mind that investigators do not have room to be expansive. Any feedback to the investigator should be constructive in tone and explicit.

In the segments that follow are descriptions of the three criteria that should be used for this review. The descriptions are followed by a list of six specific writing tasks commonly associated with the criteria. These are meant to help focus attention while reviewing a proposal, and they may provide terminology for communicating a concern to the investigator. Next to each task is a three-option scale to help keep track of tasks that have been accomplished and others where a response from the investigator is called for. A single concern may require a response from the investigator before funding can be awarded. By the same token, given the exact nature of the proposed study and the investigator's expository strategy, certain of the tasks may sometimes be *unnecessary*.

Reviewers also may raise questions about the budget, and these too may call for a response from the investigator. However, cost-effectiveness of the budget is not one of the three review criteria, and necessary changes in the budget are normally negotiated once the technical merit of the proposal has been determined. The final task of a reviewer is to make a ***summary judgment recommendation*** regarding the disposition of a proposal, and the options available are the following: (1) fundable in its present form, (2) fundable pending a response from the investigator to reviewer comments, or (3) of indeterminate fundability, meaning there is a need for significant re-working of the research purpose/question and/or methods of the project.

Criterion 1: Clearly defined research purpose or question

Does the proposal state the research question that guides the project, that is, does it identify what the project will test, determine, learn, describe, document, draw, unearth, reveal, etc? An effective proposal articulates a specific and narrowed research question or purpose that can be accomplished within the program funding limits, and preferably within the fiscal year. The statement of the research purpose should not vary in its substance from one part of the proposal to another. The proposal presents concepts and defines terminology needed to understand the study's purpose, even when the reviewer is not a specialist in the field.

A proposal that does not effectively address this criterion leaves the reviewer with appreciable uncertainty about the precise focus of the investigation. Key terminology may be undefined. Discrepant statements of purpose may appear at various places in the proposal. An inadequate proposal also may state a purpose or multiple purposes that are beyond the scope of what can be accomplished within the limitations of time and funding.

Criterion 2: Significant research question/purpose

Does the proposal present a persuasive case that the study will make a worthwhile contribution to its field? An effective proposal describes how the study will add authentic new knowledge to the field, including by extension or replication of existing knowledge. The proposal may explain that this new knowledge will resolve a gap, a dispute, or an uncertainty in the literature of the field. The proposal presents the literature, theory, or logic that constitutes the basis for the purpose of the study. Theory or literature unrelated to the purpose is excluded. When the proposal asserts that the literature is silent on the question/purpose of the study, the investigator may identify sources that have been consulted. The proposal also may support the significance of the study by describing its potential contributions to improved professional practice. If the research is a pilot study, the proposal should justify the need for such an investigation to field test instruments, determine the feasibility of promising methods, or resolve other uncertainties in preparation for a future investigation.

An inadequate proposal fails to demonstrate that the proposed research may reveal new knowledge in the field and/or why it is significant. Another possible shortcoming of a proposal is failure to use appropriate citations from the literature of the field to support claims that the study will generate new information that is worthwhile.

Criterion 3: Effective research methods.

The methods of the project can include such components as site selection, choice of archives, sample characteristics, data collection methods, experimental design, and data analysis. When judging the merit of project methods, proposal reviewers must evaluate whether each component of the methodology addresses the project's stated purpose. Thus, a well articulated purpose or question is the primary lens for viewing and appraising the adequacy of the project's methods. Does the proposal identify and, where necessary, define, delineate, explain the logic of, and/or defend the procedures that will be used to accomplish the research purpose or answer the research question of the study? Does the proposal explain what information will be collected, how it will be collected, and how the collected information will be treated so that it can be used to respond to the research purpose.

A proposal may be inadequate because there is insufficient information for the reviewer to judge whether the proposed methods respond effectively to the research question/purpose. A proposal also may be inadequate because a component of the methodology is either inappropriate for responding to the research question or has not been adequately justified. An inadequate proposal may also be missing a methodological component that is necessary for meeting the research purpose.

Suggested Budget Modifications (Optional)

Suggest changes, if any, in the project budget. These may relate to (1) expenses prohibited by program policies, (2) amounts that seem excessive for certain expenditures, (3) insufficient amounts to cover certain expenditures, (4) unspecified expenditures needed to complete certain project tasks, (5) total expenditures entered without an explanation for how they were estimated.

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Project Title: _____ Investigator: _____

Reviewer: _____ Date Needed: _____

Indicate the need for a response from the investigator by circling one of the options (None, Some, or Significant) next to the task. Where a response is called for, provide narrative comments that guide the investigator. Select one Summary Judgment Recommendation from among those at the bottom of the page and forward your decision along with any narrative comments. Keep this form for your records.

Tasks		Need for response (circle one)
Criterion 1: Clear research question or purpose		
1	Clearly states a narrowed research question or purpose that is maintained throughout the proposal.	None Some Significant
2	Defines terms needed to understand the research question or its significance.	None Some Significant
Criterion 2: Significant research question		
3	Presents literature, theory, or logic that forms the context of the question and gives rise to the statement of significance.	None Some Significant
4	Explains how the project will contribute to the field.	None Some Significant
Criterion 3: Effective research methods		
5	Demonstrates that the methodology addresses the research question by (a) defining/delineating key elements of the methodology, (b) explaining their logic, and/or (c) defending their quality or effective prior use.	None Some Significant
6	Explains the feasibility of carrying out the research methods.	None Some Significant

Summary Funding Recommendation

(Circle a single option)

1	Fund in present form.	2	Fund pending response from investigator.	3	Unable to determine funding without review of a re-submitted proposal.
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