Proposal Compliance for NSF and NIH proposals

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Overview

- Proposal “Compliance” in context
- NSF background
  - resources
  - issues we have experienced
- NIH background
  - resources
  - issues we have experienced

Updated 09/14/2016
• What does “compliance” mean in this context?
  – Using the correct formatting
  – Having the correct/required content
  – This is NOT about Human Subjects, Animal Subjects, etc.
• Reasons this is important
  – Reduces RISK for your proposal
  – What is this RISK?...
• RETURNED WITHOUT REVIEW (NSF)
• WITHDRAWN (NIH)
• Proposal never even makes to the reviewers for consideration
• Time and effort spent on a proposal, and you don’t even get valuable feedback from reviewers
• STATS ON NUMBERS OF PROPOSALS/REVIEWS BY AGENCY

• NSF for Federal FY 2014
  – 48,100 proposals evaluated
    • Note this is NOT the number of proposals submitted to NSF
  – 225,800 proposal reviews conducted (so, approx. 4.7 reviews per reviewed proposal)
  – 11,000 awards funded

• NIH for Federal FY 2014
  – 62,641 competing applications
  – 12,577 awards

Updated 09/14/2016
NSF Background

• Consistency across all proposals being reviewed
• Net effect: reducing the number of proposals they actually have to review
• NSF’s view--If the submitter cannot follow our instructions, we are not going to spend our time on it.
NSF

• Grant Proposal Guide (GPG)
  – It is CRITICAL to use the CURRENT GPG
• Follow the instructions in the GPG PLUS any additional instructions in the Program Description, Program Announcement or Program Solicitation
NSF

- Table of NSF Automated Compliance Checks in Fastlane (handout)
  - NSF Fastlane will check formatting (page counts, margins, presence of required files)
  - NSF Fastlane will NOT check CONTENT

Updated 09/14/2016
NSF Content Issues

- Project Description
  - “Broader Impacts” -- REQUIRED
  - Prior NSF-funded Support -- REQUIRED
- PIs AND Co-PIs
  - NO URLs in proposals

Updated 09/14/2016
NSF Content Issues

• Character Counts in Project Summary
  – In Fastlane you are expected to enter info into three text boxes: Overview, Intellectual Merit, and Broader Impacts
  – The COMBINED character count cannot exceed 4,600 characters
  – Then, we must VISUALLY CHECK to make sure the Summary does not exceed 1 page
    • Carriage returns to separate paragraphs can often cause issues
NSF Biosketch

• Handout with notations
• Often the single most difficult item to deal with in terms of proposal compliance
• Get them done EARLY
• Follow format and content requirements EXACTLY
NSF Collaborators and Other Affiliations

• REQUIRED Info
• Information regarding COLLABORATORS AND OTHER AFFILIATIONS must be separately provided for each individual identified as senior project personnel.
• Follow the Guidelines closely, details are in the GPG and/or the Program Announcement
• This is NOT a comprehensive list
• Follow the checklist
• If there is room for interpretation, always err on the most conservative side
• Don’t put your proposal at RISK
NIH

• SF424 (R&R) Application Guide

• Follow the Application Guide PLUS any instructions in the Program Announcement
NIH Background

• NIH Policy on Application Compliance (handout)

• Contains EXAMPLES of non-compliance

Updated 09/14/2016
• NIH has not yet established a pattern of rejecting proposals based on close reading of format and content requirements
• NEW NIH Biosketch format and content adoption in May 2015
• “Be mindful that non-compliance can have serious consequences”
NIH Biosketch

• Sample (handout)
• As with NSF, follow format and content instructions exactly
• To date, we have not had an NIH application issue related to Biosketches
• But NIH has put the research community on warning
NIH Appendices

• New Policy eliminates most APPENDIX materials from NIH proposals effective 1/25/2017

• Allowable appendix materials
  – For applications proposing clinical trials (unless the FOA provides other instructions for these materials):
    • Clinical trial protocols
    • Investigator's brochure from Investigational New Drug (IND), as appropriate
  – For all applications:
    – Blank informed consent/assent forms
    – Blank surveys, questionnaires, data collection instruments
    – FOA-specified items.
    – If appendix materials are required in the FOA, review criteria for that FOA will address those materials, and applications submitted without those appendix materials will be considered incomplete and will not be reviewed.
NIH Appendices

- Applications submitted for due dates on or after January 25, 2017 will be withdrawn and not reviewed if they are submitted with appendix materials that are not specifically listed in this Notice or the FOA as allowed or required.
Takeaways

- Sponsors WILL hold a proposal to format and content requirements
- Sponsors (especially NSF) WILL “kick out” proposals that are not compliant with instructions
- Talk to your PDS early and often
- ORSP can review for these format and content issues, but we need time to do so