



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food  
and Agriculture

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The NIFA logo, consisting of the letters "NIFA" in a white, sans-serif font, set against a background of green, rolling hills.

Ten things you should consider while writing a proposal

## **GRANT WRITING TIPS**

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# 1. Find the right program for you and your idea

- ◆ Main purpose of program (funding priorities) – does idea fit in mainstream or on the fringe?
- ◆ Don't waste time applying to the wrong program... square pegs don't fit in round holes!
- ◆ Eligibility restrictions?



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## 2A. Assemble an Effective Team and Develop the Proposal Together

- ◆ Include ALL Expertise necessary to complete the project
- ◆ Don't start writing until all team members are identified.
- ◆ Share responsibility of writing, but edit into a single voice



## 2B. Assemble an Effective Team and Develop the Proposal Together

- ◆ Who will be responsible for project activities?
- ◆ If the project involves extension activities:
  - ◆ Who are the stakeholders?
  - ◆ What roles will they play in project development and implementation?
- ◆ Who will evaluate the project?



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## 3. Become a “student” of the RFA

- ◆ Understand the main goals of the program
- ◆ Understand the instructions outlined in the RFA on how to assemble the proposal
- ◆ Read the RFA !!!
  
- ◆ **Read the RFA !!!**

## 4. Develop a timeline for proposal preparation

- ◆ Develop timeline that allows for completion of proposal
  - ◆ 2 weeks before submission deadline
- ◆ If you rush preparation of the proposal, it will show
  - ◆ Reviewers will notice and not be kind



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## 5. Understand criteria for evaluating proposals

- ◆ RFA normally contains the criteria that will be used by reviewers to evaluate your proposal
- ◆ Understand these criteria BEFORE you begin preparing your proposal - provides better understanding of where to put greatest efforts during proposal preparation

## 6. Understand review process and reviewers

- ◆ Reviewer may be assigned 10 to 20 proposals
- ◆ Following directions in RFA helps reviewers
  - ◆ not doing so makes them work harder than needed
- ◆ Preparing proposal logically and clearly helps reviewers
  - ◆ not doing so makes them work harder than needed



## 7. Write the proposal logically and clearly

- ◆ Organize proposal according to outline in RFA or evaluation criteria, whichever is most logical
- ◆ Following the prescribed format makes reviewers happy and more generous
- ◆ Do not make reviewers work harder

## 8. Prepare budget with a strong justification

- ◆ Unreasonable budgets hurt proposals – create skeptics within reviewer ranks
- ◆ Keep budgets within guidelines in the RFA – they are judged on degree of reasonableness
- ◆ Being very under budget does not increase your chances!!

## 9. Obtain critical input from experienced and successful colleagues

### Someone who....

- ◆ Talks frankly, bluntly and clearly – don't want someone who beats around the bush
- ◆ Has little sympathy for your ego
- ◆ Has been successful in obtaining grants
- ◆ Is unfamiliar with what you propose to do



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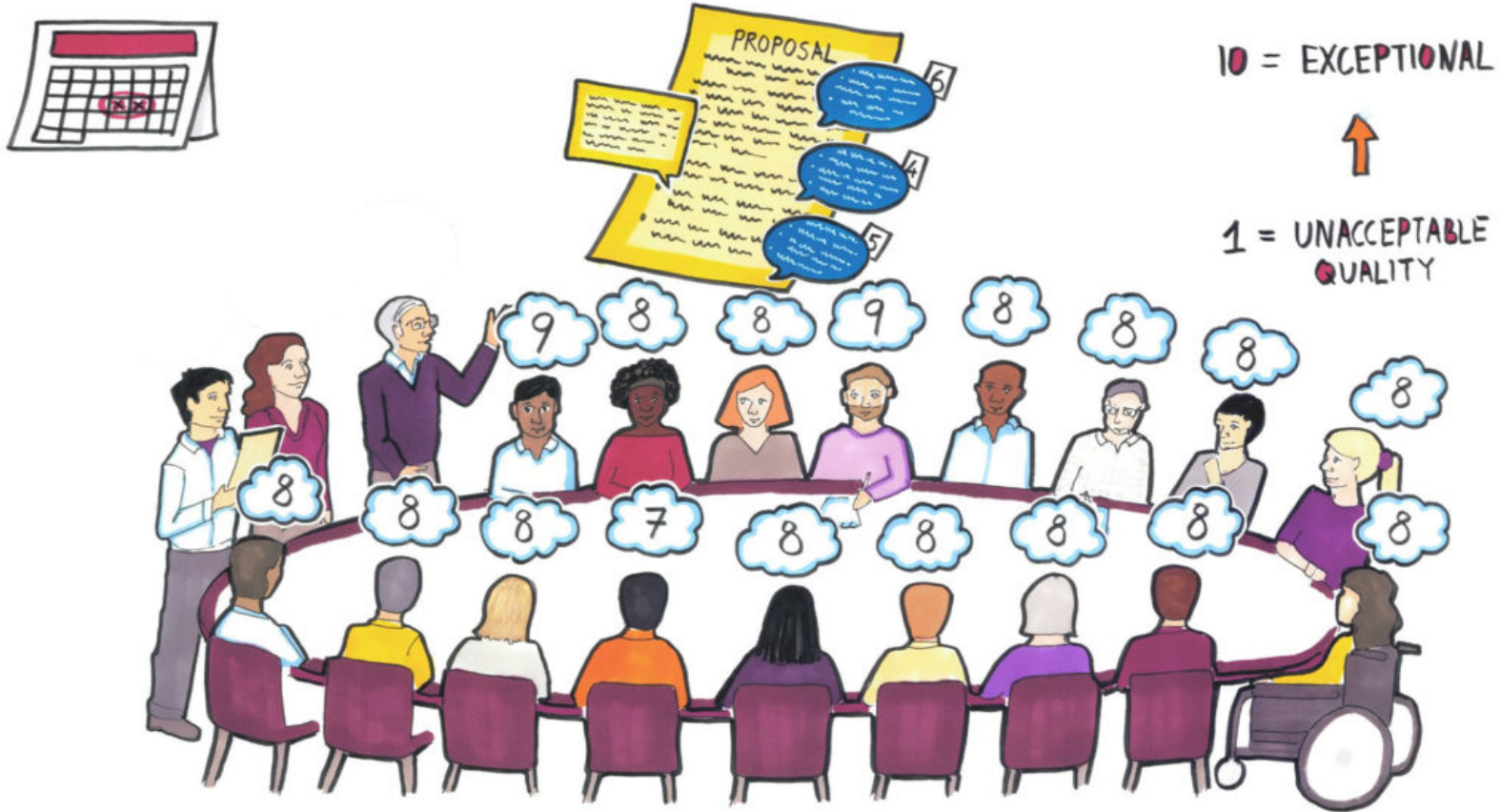
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# 10. Allow time for institutional administrative requirements

## Submit on time

- ◆ All Documents must be in PDF
- ◆ 5:00 pm Eastern Time
- ◆ A deadline is a deadline is a deadline!

# How are Proposals Reviewed?





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# Successful Proposals

- Excite the reviewers
- Excite the reviewers!!!!
- Are easy to read and understand
- Have clear rationale & objectives that fit program priorities
- Clear budget and goals
- Address potential pitfalls, including short-comings and alternative plans

<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/general-grant-writing-tips-success>

# Reasons for Lower Ratings

- Project of little or no relevance to NIFA mission and/or program priorities
- Poorly written, unclear objectives or hypotheses, spelling errors or typos
- Not innovative, little new information gained
- Not as exciting as other proposals (*i.e.*, worth funding, but ran out of funds)