

Comparison of Federal Agency Funding Review Criteria and Experiential Innovation “NABC” Review Elements

Agency Review Criteria Mapped in this Document: NSF, NIH, NEH, DE, DoD, DoE, NEA

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Key Questions & Specific Review Criteria

NABC Review Elements	Need: What important problem are you attempting to solve? What challenges or limitations have prevented the problem from being solved to date?	Approach: How will the team conduct research that addresses the identified need? What makes the proposed approach unique?	Benefits and Costs: What is the value of the proposed solution to the identified need?	Competition: * Are there other ways the need could be satisfied? What makes this team uniquely well qualified to address the need? *See note at end of this document
National Science Foundation (NSF) Review Criteriaⁱ	Intellectual Merit - Potential of the activity to advance knowledge and understanding Broader Impact – Potential of the activity to benefit society	Well-reasoned, well-organized, rational plan for carrying out proposed activities and mechanism to assess success Adequate resources available to carry out the proposed activities	The potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes	Creativity, originality, and potential for transformative concepts and activities Qualified individual, team, or institution conducting the proposed activities
National Institutes of Health (NIH) Review Criteriaⁱⁱ	Significance – project addresses an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field	Approach - overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project Environment – scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success	Overall Impact - likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved	Innovation – project challenges current paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions Investigators – PIs, collaborators, and other researchers are well suited to the project

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Review Criteria ⁱⁱⁱ	Human significance	Project Feasibility and Work Plan The quality of innovation in terms of the idea, approach, method, or digital technology	Overall Value to Humanities Scholarship Project’s feasibility, design, cost, and work plan Likelihood of stimulating or facilitating new research in the humanities	Quality of Innovation Qualifications, expertise, and levels of commitment of the project director and key project staff or contributors
Department of Education (ED) Performance Measures and Funding Priorities ^{iv}	Importance of the Problem Responsiveness to Absolute Priority	Quality of Project Design Design of Dissemination Adequacy and Accessibility of Resources Plan of Evaluation	Adequacy and Reasonableness of the Budget	Project Staff and Training
Department of Defense (DoD) Review Criteria ^v	Importance	Research Strategy and Feasibility	Impact Budget	Innovation Personnel
Department of Energy (DoE) Office of Science Merit Review Criteria ^{vi}	Scientific and Technical Merit	Technical Approach Feasibility: Technical and Management Capabilities	Reasonableness and appropriateness of the proposed budget	Innovative methods, approaches, concepts, or advanced technologies
National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) Review Criteria ^{vii}	Artistic Excellence: artistic significance Artistic Merit: potential impact on artists, the artistic field, and the organization’s community	Artistic Merit: quality and clarity of project goals and design Artistic Merit: appropriateness of the proposed performance measurements	Artistic Merit: extent to which the project deepens and extends the arts' value Artistic Merit: resources involved	Artistic Excellence: quality of the artists, art organizations, arts education providers, works of art, or services Artistic Merit: project personnel

Reference Document:

Falk-Krzesinski, H. J., & Tobin, S. C. (2015). How do I review thee? Let me count the ways: A comparison of research grant proposal review criteria across US federal funding agencies. *The journal of research administration*, 46(2), 79.

Agency Review Criteria References:

ⁱ [PAPPG Chapter III \(nsf.gov\)](#)

ⁱⁱ [Review Criteria at a Glance \(nih.gov\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ There is variability across NEH grant programs. The review criteria here are representative of the Digital Humanities Advancement Grants: [Digital Humanities Advancement Grants | The National Endowment for the Humanities \(neh.gov\)](#)

^{iv} [Grantmaking at ED \(MS Word\)](#)

^v There is variability across DoD grant programs. The review criteria here are representative of the DoD Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP): [Webinar Series, Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program \(army.mil\)](#)

^{vi} [GRANTS Merit Review System | U.S. DOE Office of Science \(SC\) \(osti.gov\)](#)

^{vii} [GRANTS FOR ARTS PROJECTS: Application Review | National Endowment for the Arts](#)

***A Note about the “Competition” Review Element:**

Proposal review criteria vary across the broad range of agencies and organizations that fund research but share common core elements, as demonstrated in this comparison of federal agency funding review criteria and Experiential Innovation “NABC” review elements. The most notable difference between the NABC framework and review criteria used by federal agencies is the emphasis on identifying competitive advantages of the proposed initiative or approach. The “Competition” category requires researchers to consider other ways that a given need could be satisfied and to identify what distinguishes their team and approach from other similar initiatives elsewhere. While this is an implicit aspect of any proposal for funding, the Experiential Innovation “Competition” category asks proposal writers to explicitly define what makes their proposal uniquely strong in comparison to other approaches or other teams.