



ECR Hub
EDU Core Research

Workshop

Responding to Declination: Strategies for Revising a Declined Proposal

Columbia B

Tuesday, 1:30– 2:45 pm



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Responding to Declination: Strategies for Revising a Declined Proposal

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Danielle Ferguson, EdD, Senior Researcher, American Institutes for Research

Share one thing you are proud of this year or What traits and skills would you add if you could create your own artificial intelligence (AI) manager?

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Meet the Presenters



Roni Ellington, PhD

Presenter

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Danielle Ferguson, EdD

Presenter

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Workshop Goals

- Share strategies related to how colleagues have responded to declinations
- Review feedback from a declined proposal
- Develop an action plan for responding to the feedback received



Agenda

Overview of the ECR Hub

A Personal Story about Declination

Facts and figures about NSF funding rates

Peer review process and evaluation criteria

Common reasons for lower ratings/rankings

What do I do now? Thinking through the resubmission process

Q&A session





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Overview of the ECR Hub



ECR Funds Fundamental Research

- “***Fundamental research*** generates knowledge and understanding with the potential for broad relevance. The potential implications of ECR fundamental research for improving STEM education practice may be indirect and long-term rather than direct and immediate.”
- ECR funds STEM education research in 3 areas
 - Research on STEM learning and learning environments
 - Research on Broadening Participation in STEM fields
 - Research on STEM workforce development
- “The ECR program seeks to create a **multidisciplinary portfolio** and to fund projects from investigators representing a **broad range of disciplinary backgrounds and approaches**, including those from fields more typically associated with other NSF directorates and offices. ”



Overarching Goals and Target Audiences for ECR Hub

Two overarching goals:

- Extend the influence and reach of existing ECR investments
- Build career development opportunities, especially for underrepresented institutions and scholars

Three target audiences:

- Current ECR grantees
- Prospective ECR grantees (Broadening Participation)
- Stakeholders in other NSF EDU programs (reached via other NSF EDU resource hubs)



ECR Hub Goals

- **Identify the needs of a diverse ECR grantee community** through interviews and surveys of key stakeholders such as current and prospective ECR grantees.
- **Catalogue and synthesize past and current ECR research** through building interactive data tools and topic-specific evidence snapshots for finding specific kinds of ECR projects and learning about their results.
- **Strengthen research networks and information sharing for more than 400 current grantees** through organizing grantee meetings and workshops, creating a centralized website, and sharing information and engaging the community via social media.
- **Conduct outreach and broaden participation of prospective grantees** through proactive efforts to reach scholars and institutions underrepresented in the current ECR portfolio through targeted workshops, webinars, and communities of practice.
- **Consolidate and disseminate resources from existing ECR training institutes** by creating an efficient, one-stop, location on the ECR Hub website for users to access methodological training content (e.g., slides, videos, upcoming events).
- **Build collaborations with other NSF STEM education resource hubs** to advance long-term ECR program goals, such as realizing the potential of fundamental research to inform the next phases of more applied research.



Oh no, I was declined!

A personal story about responding to declination.



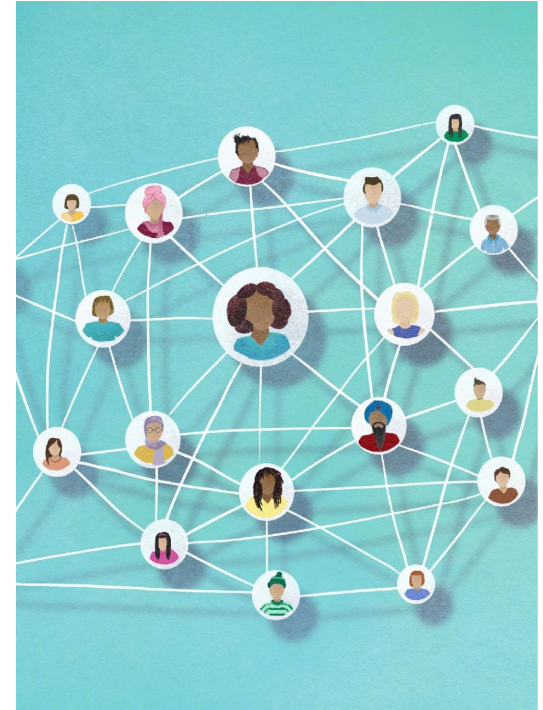
Table Discussion: Oh no I was declined!

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions

Find a partner at your table:

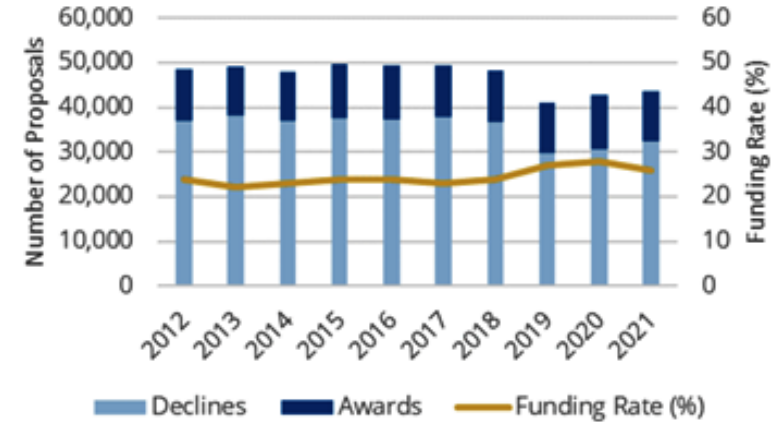
- Introduce yourself (name, role, and university/organization affiliation?)
- Discuss the following questions:
 - What was your emotional reaction to being declined?
 - What was the essence of the comments?
 - How will you respond to each of the essential comments?
 - Who can provide external feedback?



Facts and Figures about NSF Funding Rates

- NSF receives more than 43,600 proposals each year, ~11,300 of which are funded.
- NSF's overall funding rate in 2021 was 26%.
- Principal Investigators submit on average about 2.3 proposals for every award they receive (https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/facts.jsp)

Figure 1 – Overall Award, Decline, and Funding Rate Trends



Source: Table 1 - Overall Proposals, Awards, and Funding Rate

From Merit Review Process, Fiscal Year 2021 Digest, June 2023, NSB-2023-14



Facts and Figures about EDU Funding Rates

Funding Rate by State and Organization

FY 2022 to 2023, Directorate for STEM Education

Org	FY	Number of Proposals	Number of Awards	Funding Rate	Average Decision Time (months)	Mean Award Duration (years)	Median Annual Size
EDU	2023	3,663	990	27%	5.46	3.25	\$198,258
EDU	2022	3,990	953	24%	5.64	3.48	\$184,903
DGE	2023	523	139	27%	6.35	3.51	\$166,667
DGE	2022	573	100	17%	6.05	4.33	\$289,022
DRL	2023	1,132	203	18%	5.49	3.43	\$343,936
DRL	2022	1,301	191	15%	5.72	3.54	\$395,439
DUE	2023	1,517	425	28%	4.95	3.14	\$162,438
DUE	2022	1,598	465	29%	5.21	3.28	\$149,969
EES	2023	491	223	45%	6.39	3.13	\$185,644
EES	2022	518	197	38%	6.69	3.04	\$140,067

The STEM Education Directorate's (EDU) proposal acceptance rates are available at <https://dellweb.bfa.nsf.gov/awdfr3/default.asp>

It can take multiple resubmissions before a proposal is awarded.



Peer Review Process

Reviewers and ECR POs evaluate all proposals against:

1. Components outlined in the [ECR Solicitation](#)
2. NSF's merit review criteria:
 1. Intellectual Merit: The potential to advance knowledge
 2. Broader Impacts: The potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes



What do you think are some common reasons for proposals being declined?



Common Reasons for Low Ratings/Rankings

General reasons

- Insufficient review of background literature/prior research
- Not enough detail on research plan
- Unfocused, project tries to do too much

ECR-specific reasons

- Proposes more R&D than basic research (common with tech-based projects)
- Fails to offer contributions to methods or theory
- Under-describes research design, methods, and/or analysis plans



Table Discussion: Oh no I was declined! What do I do now?

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions

At your table:

- Work in a group of 2-3 to review feedback from a declined proposal.
 - Are there any common themes across the feedback?
 - What are the comments that you do not agree with?
 - Did you have any comments that matched our list of common reasons for declinations?



Each table share 1 comment from the panel review

Are their common themes being shared in the room?



How will you respond to the feedback?

- Identify 2-3 comments that you would like to respond to
- Create a t-chart to match your response to the feedback

List of Comments (Feedback)

Response to the Feedback



Developing an Action Plan

What are the next 2 or 3 steps that you will take to improve your proposal?

What is the timeline for completing these steps?

Suggested Next Steps

Email the program officer whose name and email address are listed in the PO Comments to schedule a conversation

- If you don't hear back from the program officer, please email ecr@nsf.gov

Prepare for meeting with program officer

- Prepare a list of questions you may have on the feedback
- Are there any reviewer comments that you don't understand or don't agree with?



Suggested Next Steps

Prepare your resubmission

- Be sure to substantially revise your proposal or risk it being “returned without review” (RWR) if it is too similar to your previous submission.
- Use your best judgement choosing which reviewers’ comments and suggestions to prioritize in your revision.
- Enlist colleagues and advisory board members to read your proposal draft. Do a mini-review with people you know and trust to give you good feedback and revise accordingly.

If you decide not to resubmit,

- Volunteer to serve on a panel. Email ecr@nsf.gov your CV/web bio to express interest.



Keep in mind...

Characteristics of Competitive ECR Proposals

- The work is important and potentially transformative
- A theoretical frame is presented that is appropriate and well-justified
- Important research questions are clearly stated and tied to theory
- Study population, data collection and methods are tied to the research questions
- Potential analyses are clearly described with sufficient detail for the type of analysis proposed (quantitative, qualitative)



Questions?

