



Award Size, Duration and Success Rates

Joanne Tornow
Chair, Impact of Proposal and
Award Management Mechanisms
Working Group
May 2006

What Is the Issue?

- Success rate for research proposals was 20% in 2005, down from 27% in 2001
 - ~37% increase in proposal submissions
 - ~25% increase in award sizes (median and average)
- Potential impact on merit review
 - Increased workload on reviewer community
 - Increased workload on NSF staff
- How to manage success rates without unintended consequences?



How is NSF Responding?

- No widespread change to NSF policy
- Working group studying impact of proposal and award management mechanisms (IPAMM)
 - Charge: Identify best practices to achieve an appropriate balance between proposal success rates, award sizes and award duration, with the emphasis on individual, investigator-initiated grants.
- A variety of mechanisms to limit proposal submissions are being tested locally



IPAMM Working Group

- Identified factors that may affect proposal submissions and number of awards:
 - Internal NSF practices, external pressures, changes in university policies, budget constraints
 - Which can NSF influence?
 - Which are broadly significant, which are significant to specific communities?
- Taken inventory of current NSF practices to manage proposal submissions
 - Which worked to reduce submissions?
 - What was the impact on the community?



Sample Practices to Manage Proposal Submissions

- Enhanced communication with the community
- Use of preproposals
- Limitations on the number of proposals from an institution or PI
- More highly focused solicitations
- Increasing length of competition cycle (i.e., 18-24 months between submissions, instead of 12)
- Replacing open submission of unsolicited proposals with a submission window
- Reduce target dates from two per year to one per year



Different Mechanisms Respond to Different Issues

■ Issues:

- Readiness and size of community (e.g., HSD)
- Size and complexity of awards and review process (e.g., S&T Centers)
- Desire to broaden participation of all types of institutions and PIs (e.g., MRI)
- PI, reviewer workload



IPAMM Timeline

