



**EPSRC/SFI/NSF  
Meeting  
November 24-26, 2008**

**Fundamentals of the  
NSF Proposal & Award  
Process**

**EPSRC** Engineering and Physical Sciences  
Research Council

  
science foundation ireland  
fondúireacht eolaíochta éireann



# Ask Early, Ask Often!

| Name          | Title  | Contact  |
|---------------|--|--|
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# NSF Proposal Preparation Basics

# Grant Proposal Guide (GPG)

- Applicability of GPG:
  - Provides guidance for the preparation and submission of proposals to NSF:
    - Contains guidelines for preparation of proposals;
    - GPG is used unless program solicitation stipulates otherwise.



# NSF Proposal Formatting Requirements

- Describes content and formatting requirements for all parts of an NSF proposal:
  - Single Copy Documents
  - Cover Sheet
  - Project Summary (one page limitation)
  - Table of Contents
  - Project Description (15 page limitation)
  - References Cited
  - Biographical Sketch(es) (two page limitation)
  - Budget
    - Budget Justification (three page limitation)
  - Current & Pending Support
  - Facilities, Equipment & Other Resources
  - Special Information & Supplementary Documentation



# Types of Submissions to NSF

- No deadlines
- Deadlines
- Target dates
- Submission Windows
- Preliminary proposals
- Letters of Intent





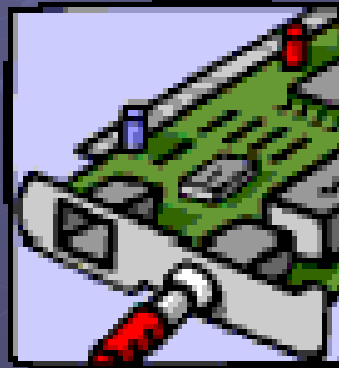
# Budgetary Guidelines

- Amounts
  - Reasonable for work - Realistic
  - Well Justified - Need established
  - In-line with program guidelines
- Eligible costs
  - Personnel
  - Equipment
  - Travel
  - Participant Support
  - Other Direct Costs (including subawards, consultant services, computer services, publication costs)
- Program practices



# How to Electronically Submit a Proposal to NSF

- Grants.gov
- FastLane





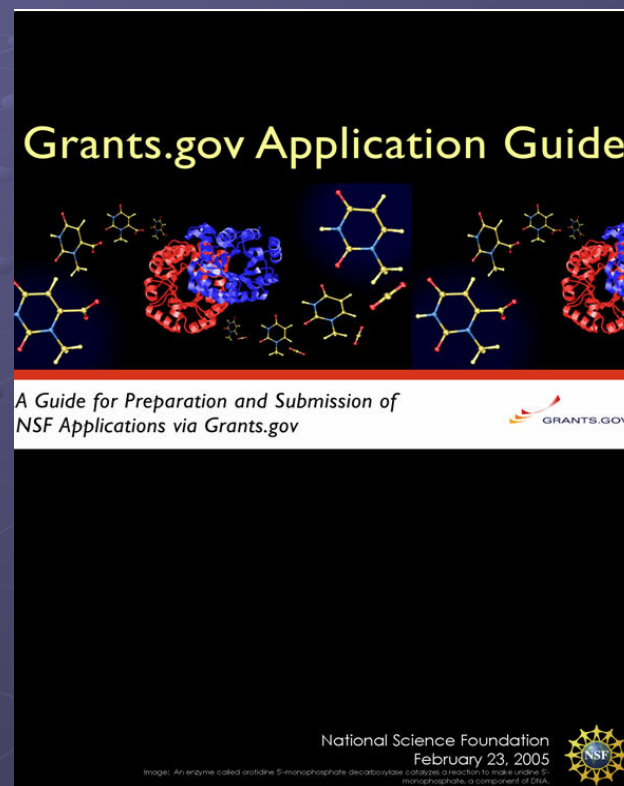
# Grants.gov

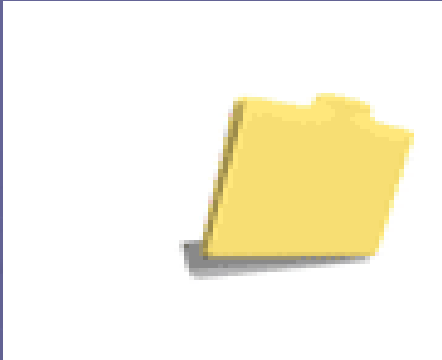
- President's Management Agenda
  - Applicants for federal grants apply for and manage grant funds through a common site, to simplify grant management and eliminate redundancy.



# NSF Grants.gov Application Guide

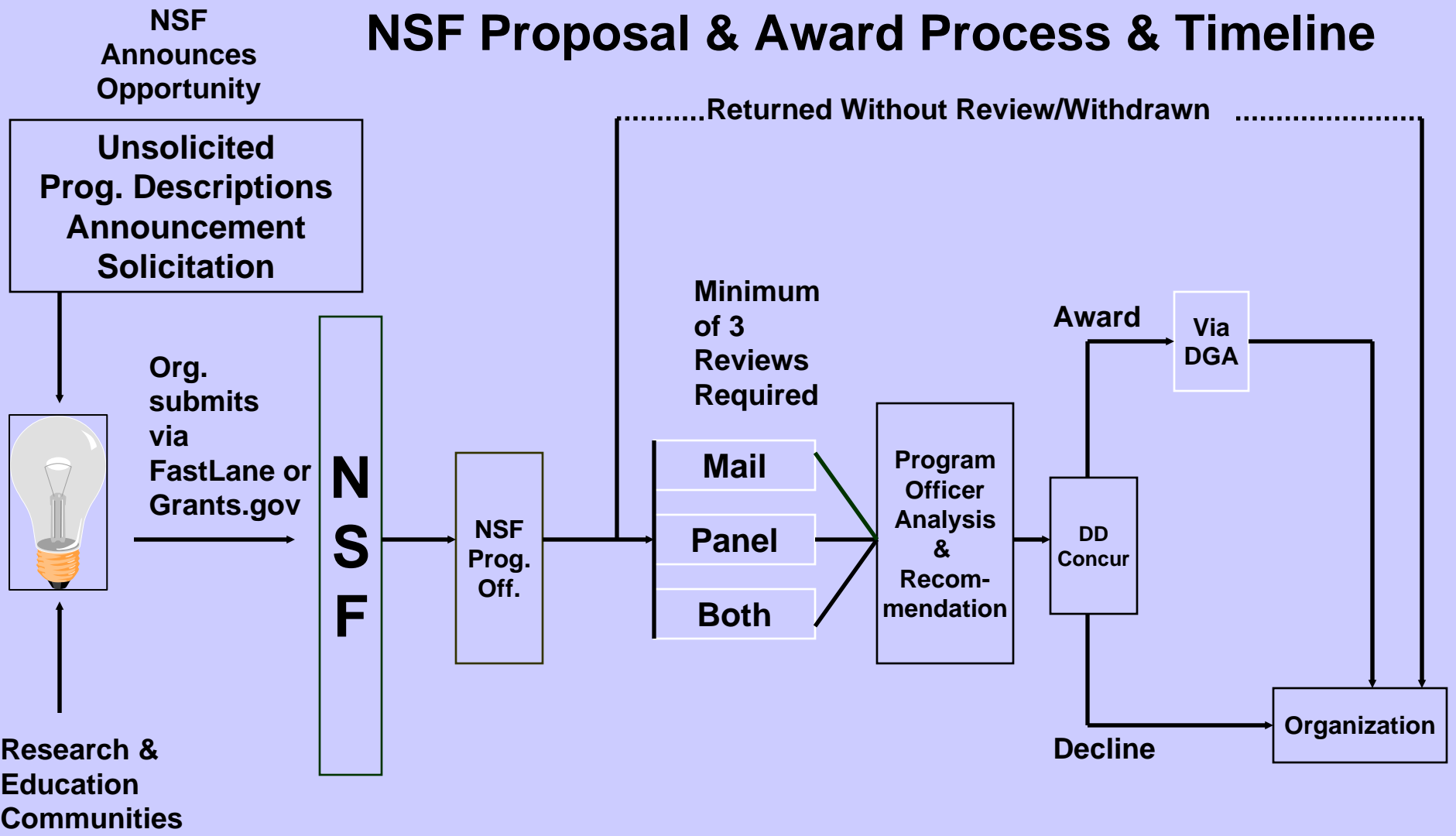
- Intended to serve as the primary document for use in preparation of NSF applications via Grants.gov
- Includes step-by-step instructions for completion of each of the SF 424 (R&R) forms as well as the NSF specific forms
- Provides specific instructions for inclusion and conversion of pdf files





# NSF Merit Review Process

# NSF Proposal & Award Process & Timeline



# NSF Merit Review Criteria

- NSB Approved Criteria include:
  - Intellectual Merit
  - Broader Impacts of the Proposed Effort



# Intellectual Merit

- Potential considerations include:
  - How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields?
  - How well qualified is the proposer (individual or team) to conduct the project? (If appropriate, the reviewer will comment on the quality of prior work.)
  - To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original or potentially transformative concepts?



# Intellectual Merit (Continued)

- How well conceived and organized is the proposed activity?
- Is there sufficient access to resources?





# Broader Impacts

- Potential considerations include:
  - How well does the activity advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training and learning?
  - How well does the activity broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.)?
  - To what extent will it enhance the infrastructure for research and education, such as facilities, instrumentation, networks and partnerships?

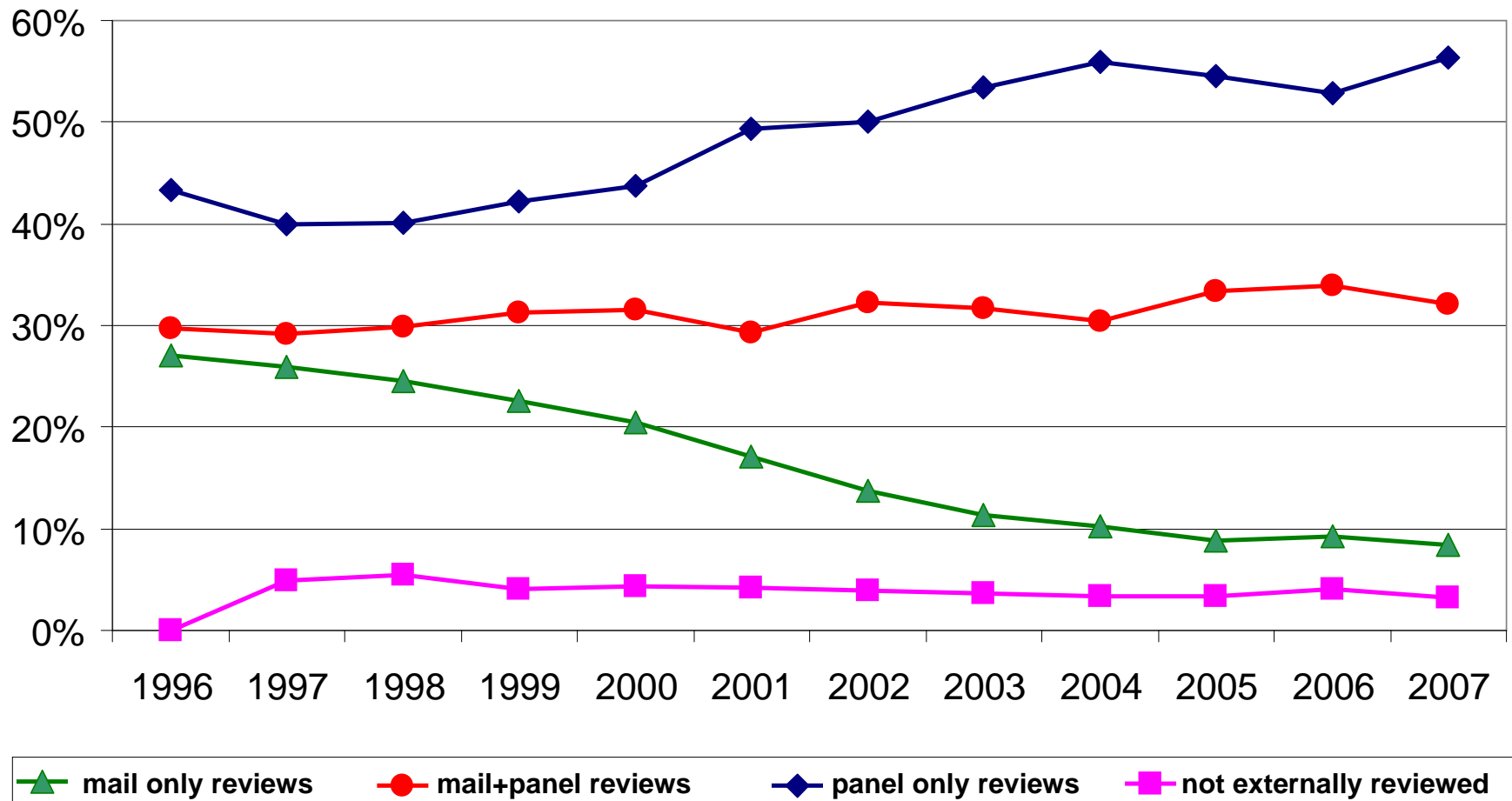


# Broader Impacts (Continued)

- Potential considerations include:
  - Will the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding?
  - What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society?



# NSF Review Methods



# Selection of Reviewers

Optimally, reviewers should have:

- Special knowledge of the science and engineering subfields involved in the proposals to be reviewed. to evaluate competence, intellectual merit, and utility of the proposed activity.
- Broader or more generalized knowledge of the science and engineering subfields involved in the proposals to be reviewed to evaluate the broader impacts of the proposed activity.
- Broad knowledge of the infrastructure of the science and engineering enterprise, and its educational activities, to evaluate contributions to societal goals, scientific and engineering personnel, and distribution of resources to organizations and geographical areas.
- To the extent possible, diverse representation within the review group. The goal is to achieve a balance among various characteristics. Important factors to consider include: type of organization represented, reviewer diversity, age distribution and geographic balance.



# Sources of Reviewers

- Program Officer's knowledge of the research area
- References listed in proposal
- Recent professional society programs
- Computer searches of S&E journal articles related to the proposal
- Reviewer recommendations included in proposal or sent by email - proposers are invited to either:
  - Suggest persons they believe are especially well qualified to review the proposal.
  - Identify persons they would prefer not review the proposal.



# Role of the Peer Reviewer

- Review and consider all proposal materials.
- Make independent written comments on the quality of the proposal content.
- Each proposal is reviewed by at least *three* individual peer reviewers.





# Role of the Peer Review Panel

- Discuss the merits of the proposal with other panelists who reviewed the proposal.
- Write a summary proposal review based on discussion.
- Make a panel recommendation to NSF on whether the proposal should be funded.
- *Some panels may be supplemented with ad hoc reviewers if additional expertise is needed.*





# Managing Conflicts of Interest in the Review Process

- Primary purpose is to remove or limit the influence of ties to an applicant institution or investigator that could affect reviewer advice
- Second purpose is to preserve the trust of the scientific community, Congress, and the general public in the integrity, effectiveness, and evenhandedness of NSF's peer review process



# Funding Decisions

- The peer review panel summary provides:
  - Review of the proposal and a recommendation on funding
  - Feedback (strengths and weaknesses) to the proposers
- NSF Program Officers make funding recommendations guided by program goals and portfolio considerations.
- NSF Division Directors either concur or reject the program officer's funding recommendations.
- NSF's Grants and Agreements Officers make the official award - as long as:
  - The institution has an adequate grant management capacity.
  - The PI does not have overdue annual or final reports.
  - There are no other outstanding issues with the institution or PI.



# Reasons for Declines

- The proposal was not considered competitive by the merit review and the program office concurred.
- The proposal had flaws or issues identified by the program office.
- The program funds were not adequate to fund all competitive proposals.



# NSF Reconsideration Process

- Explanation from Program Officer
- Written request for reconsideration to Assistant Director within 90 days of decline
- Request from organization to Deputy Director



# NSF Merit Review Website

- A new merit review website is now live on the NSF Homepage.
- The goal of the Merit Review website is to help you better understand the NSF merit review process as well as identify resources for additional information (including applicable chapters in the GPG).







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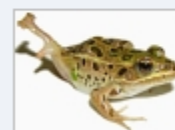
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[NSF Announces \\$26 Million Solicitation for Projects That Advance Innovative Computational Thinking](#)  
Released October 1, 2008



[NSF and Department of Homeland Security Partner to Drive Frontier Research in Nuclear Detection](#)  
Released September 24, 2007

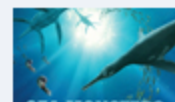


[Nutrient Pollution Drives Frog Deformities by Ramping Up Infections](#)  
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[NSF supports great television, inspiring museum exhibits, breathtaking IMAX films, and compelling radio.](#)



[Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure](#)  
"Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure" is a giant-screen film that brings dinosaurs of the late Cretaceous period to life.

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## Merit Review



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- [Grants.gov Application Guide](#)

[Award Administration](#)

- [Award Administration Guide](#)

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## Merit Review Process

Click the square buttons to find out more information about the review process.

Download a printable version of the Merit Review Process Illustration. [PDF](#) (21K)

### PHASE I

PROPOSAL  
PREPARATION  
AND  
SUBMISSION  
90 DAYS



### PHASE II

PROPOSAL  
REVIEW  
AND  
PROCESSING  
6 MONTHS



### PHASE III

AWARD  
PROCESSING  
30 DAYS



#### 9 - Award Finalized

The award itself is comprised of an award notice, budget, proposal, applicable NSF conditions, and any other documents or requirements incorporated by reference into the agreement.

Each NSF award notice specifically identifies certain conditions that are applicable to, and become part of, that award. When these conditions reference a particular Award and Administration Guide (AAG) section, that section becomes part of the award requirements through incorporation by reference.



# Accessing Documents on the NSF Website

- [www.nsf.gov](http://www.nsf.gov)
- Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide
  - Proposal Preparation & Submission
    - Grant Proposal Guide
    - Frequently Asked Questions
  - Award Administration
    - Award & Administration Guide
    - Grant & Agreement Conditions
    - Frequently Asked Questions

