

Discussant: Dr. Wayne Lutters, UMBC and QEM Consultant

- While I had no involvement with the MRI program while at NSF, I did receive a collaborative award in 2006 for an eye tracker enhancement to our usability lab.
- There is tremendous wisdom in Dr. Bramwell's 12 step plan. I am sorry that he had to zip through the final slides as they contained some very critical points. Please re-read these, and Dr. Jones' process slides, before preparing any proposal.
- To start I would like to recap a discussion from lunch yesterday. If you follow the advice you have received you will have spent a tremendous amount of time planning and organizing your proposal before you write a single word. Now that it is time to put that down on paper there is one pitfall you must avoid. When you have a new student in your class taking their first essay exam or term paper, what is the most common error they make? Trying to "brain dump" everything they know, cramming it all into the paper in the hopes that the instructor will find all that they are looking for. While we can chuckle at that, trust me, many, many, PIs do the same thing – try to cram every possible fact, figure, citation, or plan detail into their 15 page description. Do not do this! Give the reviewers the right information, not all information. A simple, clear, elegant proposal is ALWAYS more successful than an encyclopedic one.
- As Dr. Phelps mentioned, pay serious attention to all of the details of the solicitation. Print it out. Mark it up. Read it. Read it again. And again. Everything you need to know is contained in there and the GPG (PAPP).
- Make it clear that your project clearly fits the solicitation, but realize this is not a keyword matching game.
- Follow all guidelines, ensure that your proposal is compliant and will not be "returned without review". (My favorite sad question while serving on the CCC "statistically, what is the most successful font?" If you are worried about that more than your research, please do not submit a CAREER!)
- In CISE we talked a lot about good risk (it has never been done before and may not work, but could be transformative if it does) versus bad risk (the PI team does not know what they are doing). Remove all doubt in reviewers minds that you are a potentially bad risk.
- Do not worry about your budget details. Know the limits of the program (upper and lower), ask for precisely what you need, and clearly justify the rationale for each expense. While review panels love to pick apart budgets, this is not their job and program officers will remind them of that. They are to evaluate the quality of the scientific effort and the likelihood of its success. NSF staff will worry about the budget, line by line, later if the proposal is recommended for an award. Know that NSF

values funding students above all else. Many programs will not fund personal equipment, faculty release time, extensive travel, etc.

- Avoid all letters of support (“this is a great researcher, I hope you fund this project, can’t wait to read the results”) ONLY letters of collaboration or partnership (“I will provide this researcher access to my instrumentation lab for six months in 2011 for the purpose of...”). If these make it past compliance check, they always backfire. Don’t do it. (Chair’s letter for CAREER is the lone exception I can think of and that should focus on your role in the department and their support of your professional growth, not a recommendation.)
- We have heard much from EHR and BIO this week. This is important as both cover programs that span many of the disciplines represented here, but spend the time in your breakout groups to get to know your own directorate. There is great diversity within the Foundation and it is key that you understand what opportunities, especially those focused on HBCUs and MSIs, are available to you.