

## No. 33: Grant Clinic: How Can I Preserve My Data When Re-Submitting a Rejected Grant?

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GRANT CLINIC

### How Can I Preserve My Data When Re-Submitting a Rejected Grant?

**Reader Question:** My RO1 grant was rejected, not because the experiments were flawed but because the topic didn't "click" with some study section reviewers. I will submit it to a different study section, but because the rejected grant is already the A2 version it must be greatly revised and submitted as a new grant. What can I do to "rescue" these experiments?

#### Expert Comments:

When one receives less than a laudatory score for an application, it is easy to conclude that the panelists "didn't get it." In that case, it follows that all one needs to do is move the application to a review panel or a different funding agency.

Despite the limited number of times when this has worked (even for this author on one occasion), there are many more when it doesn't.

In order to plan your next move, you should read the roster sheet for the panel that reviewed your grant and do a Medline search on the panelists to determine their specific research areas. If none has published in your area, then it is possible that they might not have the expertise to appreciate the significance of your work.

Typically, the study section's Scientific Review Officer will work hard to ensure that every application gets at least one and perhaps two expert reviewers. If there truly are no experts, and you can identify another study section that has more specific expertise, then specifically requesting that alternative panel when you resubmit might be advantageous.

However, it is also possible that, if your topic didn't "click" with the reviewers, they might have detailed knowledge of your field but have been unconvinced about the significance of either your central question or hypothesis. This can lead to good scores for approach and investigator but low scores for significance and overall impact.

Read the comments carefully and discuss with your program officer to confirm whether that scenario applies. An analysis of the comments also may help to determine whether the readers understood what you were trying to do.

To "rescue" this project, consider holding on to the experiments and data that you've collected. If it's novel, accurate, and informative, it still might form the basis of a new application. Then

go back and challenge all the assumptions that went into the initial question and hypothesis: Are they still appropriate and timely through all the revisions? Has your field moved on since your first submission? Consider significant revisions to your central question and hypotheses, and then use these to re-craft your title and aims (additional experiments might be required).

Float it by a disinterested (but friendly) colleague to see if they find it intriguing. These changes will certainly constitute a new application.

Splitting your original grant into pieces and then submitting each as a new grant brings significant risk of diluted impact. (It might make sense if the reviewers felt your original grant too broad and sweeping.)

At the end of the day, what matters most is building a case that your question and hypothesis are truly at the leading edge of the field: Anything less, and you are likely to fall short of a successful application.

*Comments by **Christopher Francklyn, PhD**, a former study section chair and veteran reviewer for NIH and NSF study sections. He is a professor at the University of Vermont.*

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