

Blinded Grant Reviews

HRA Members Meeting
Reducing Bias in Peer Review
session
October 7, 2022

Donaghue Overview

The Foundation supports a diverse portfolio of research projects, from understanding the mechanisms of disease, to improving clinical treatments, to public health initiatives that prevent illness—all founded on excellent science.

Donaghue strives to adhere to these Guiding Principles:

- *Practical benefit*
- *Engagement*
- *Inclusivity*
- *Integrity*
- *Innovation*

What got us started?



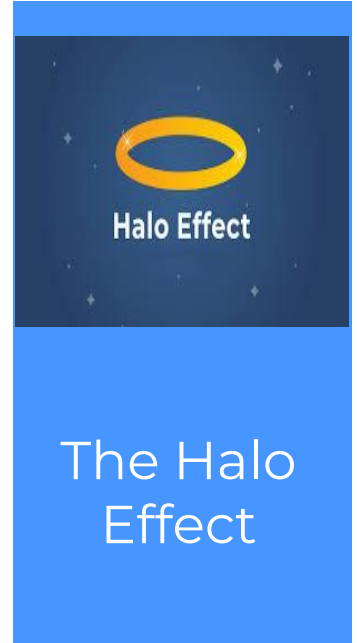
NSF's Big Pitch



National Expansion



The Idea Only



The Halo Effect

What got us started?

The National Science Foundation's Program *The Big Pitch's* goal to encourage innovation.

- Two types of grant submissions-shorter, anonymized applications and standard full application
- Different review panels scored each submission type
- Virtually no overlap in results

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National Expansion

- With the launch of new grant offerings, geographic scope expanded
- Signal that the Foundation's process was equitable

The Idea Only

- Focus the review criteria on the core research idea
- Identifying information about the PI and institution not shared or considered by the reviewers

The Halo Effect

- Blinding LOIs could reduce the potential for factors other than the core research idea to be considered
- Lessen the ability to rate or score the LOI on a particular attribute (i.e. the PI or institution) that is influenced by a general impression that can be both positive or negative

Our Blinding Process



LOI
Stage



Applicants



Staff



Reviewers

Our Blinding Process

LOI stage

- Letters of intent are reviewed for the research idea only.
- LOIs are reviewed by an external LOI review committee
- Applicants' names and their institutions will not be seen by the science review committee members who are participating in this phase of the review process
- Approved LOIs will be invited to submit a full application
- When the full applications are reviewed, however, all information contained in the application including applicants' bios and their institutions will be a part of the review process.

Applicants

- Applicants must develop their LOI and describe their proposed study without any identifying information
- Instruction provided to applicants- ***Do not provide any identifying information about you, your institution, your partnering organization, or key personnel while describing your proposed study. All identifying information is to be provided on a separate page at the end of this form.***

Our Blinding Process

Staff

- Ensure the applicant and applicant's institution meet the eligibility requirements prior to moving the LOI forward to the review committee
- May need to work with the applicant on the anonymizing process
- Some redaction may need to be handled by staff
- In 2020, the Foundation added a demographic section on the identifying information page of the LOI that collects gender, race, and ethnicity information that states:

This section is not mandatory but will help the Foundation assess its success in attracting a diverse pool of letter of intent submissions.

Reviewers

- Evaluation is based on the alignment to the grant program goals, research methods, knowledge transfer and integration activities
- Instruction provided to reviewers-***The LOI process is a blinded review, so no identifying information about the applicant or their institution is sent to reviewers. At this stage, we want to focus only on the research ideas being presented.***
- Reviewers are asked to disclose if they are able to identify the author the LOI assigned to them based on the specific work or topic area described- we will reassign the LOI to another reviewer

A Few Final Thoughts

After almost a decade, the Foundation has found the blinding mechanism valuable to the review process.

Focused reviewers on the research idea- not the institution or PI

Blinding will not eliminate bias in the review process, but it has been a helpful tool..

Halo Effect-Some researchers may be eliminated at the LOI stage that would not be in other review processes.

Thank you

Any questions, please email Stacy
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