Resiliency: The Art of Failure, Persistence, and Ultimate Success

Dr. Heather Petcovic
Associate Dean, CAS
About me…

• With WMU since 2004
• Joint appointment in Geological & Environmental Sciences and the Mallinson Institute for Science Education
• Geoscience Education Research

44 total proposals submitted

40 external to WMU (NSF)

28 not funded 😞

11 funded, 1 pending

1\textsuperscript{st}: 2
2\textsuperscript{nd}: 1
4\textsuperscript{th}: 1
How it feels to submit a proposal...
How it feels to get a proposal...
How it feels to get a proposal...
How it feels to NOT get a proposal...

5 Stages of Grief

1. Denial
   “Dear Program Manager, there seems to have been an error...”

2. Anger
   “I will never apply to your lousy, corrupt funding agency again.”

3. Bargaining
   “If you just let me respond to the reviewers... I can fix this...”

4. Depression
   They’re going to make me do more undergrad teaching.

5. Acceptance
   Resubmit same proposal with different title, smaller budget...

https://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/research/grant-writers-handbook/cartoons/
How I deal with grant rejection...

1. Read the reviewer comments.

2. Sulk, get angry, maybe cry a little. Complain loudly to my inner circle (but NEVER online or in writing) about how the reviewers are a bunch of imbeciles who don’t understand my brilliance.

3. Let some time pass.

4. Re-read the reviewer comments with my team:
   a. “They didn’t get it.”
   b. Things we can fix and resubmit.
   c. Things we cannot fix. Is this idea dead in the water?
If they didn’t “get it,” it is MY job to explain it better.
• Look for specific points of confusion.
• See how these could be reframed for clarity.
• Call the program officer and ask!
How I persist and resubmit...

Things that are fixable:

• Was my idea a good fit to the solicitation? If not, is there another opportunity for this work? Or can I modify my proposal to better fit what the funding agency is looking for?

• Did I miss a key part of the solicitation? Can I reorganize the proposal to follow the solicitation precisely?

• Where are the key problems? The methodology? The theory or lit review? Importance and impact of the work? The budget, timeline, or logistics?

• Do I have the right people on this project? Am I missing key expertise?
To admit or not to admit...

On a resubmission, should I address prior reviewer comments? It depends...

• Will it strengthen the proposal?
• Will it go to the same program officer and/or same reviewers?

“Is it just me or are these review panels getting a lot tougher?”

https://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/research/grant-writers-handbook/cartoons/
In summary...

Do:

- Allow yourself to feel disappointed, angry, or sulky.
- Call the program officer if comments are unclear.
  - Email first with specific questions and a request for a call.
- Address specific concerns in the revision and (maybe) call out that the proposal is a resubmission.
- Have a “critical friend” review the revised version.
- Use the reviewer and program officer comments to improve the next version of the proposal.
- Realize that one (or two, or three) rejection(s) is not the kiss of death.