

Common Reasons R Grant Applications Get Criticized In Review

Based on experience with a wide range of review panels, here are the most common reasons that R proposals fail to receive more positive reviews (see also the document by Professor Stuart Tolnay in the section on NIH Grant Proposal Development). These are NOT listed in order of importance.

1. The project attempts to do too much – it is too ambitious
2. A case for innovation needs to be stronger – the project is too mundane
3. The problem being addressed is not an important one
4. The target population is not high risk
5. The research team lacks experience in the topic area
6. The publication record of the research team is weak
7. For an R01, there is no pilot data to indicate the intervention is likely to be effective
8. A better case needs to be made for feasibility of the research
9. The sampling strategy is weak – the sample will be biased and generalizability of results is limited
10. For longitudinal studies, there is not convincing evidence that the team will have low attrition rates nor are there tests for attrition bias
11. The intervention is impractical and not realistic in real life settings
12. The psychometric properties of the measures are not well documented
13. The sample is not well justified in terms of being high risk
14. The sample size is too small - there is not sufficient power
15. The statistical analyses are not appropriate – no mention is made of issues like missing data, assumption violations, model misspecification, outliers, familywise corrections for multiple contrasts, etc.
16. For qualitative research, the section on data analysis is underdeveloped