

NSF CAREER Proposals: The reviewers point of view

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Outline of Content

- What are you trying to do? (Articulate your objectives using absolutely no jargon.)
- How is it done today, and what are the limits of current practice?
- What is new in your approach, and why do you think it will be successful?
- Who cares? If it is successful, what difference will it make?
- What are the risk and the payoffs?
- How much will it cost? How long will it take?
- What are the midterm and “final” exams to check for success?

From G.H. Heilmeier’s “Catechism” for evaluating a research project.

Reviewer time constraints

- 17 proposals (~30pp), 7 reviewers in panel, 2 weeks lead time (that's not much)
- Reviewers are assigned 10, but may have to read more to render final opinions
- Clarity of presentation means that the reviewer is more likely to understand what you are doing (clearly label sections, highlight important points, state the plan clearly and succinctly, do no ramble).

Presentation counts

- Proofread, proofread, proofread.
- Bad grammar does not mean the ideas are bad, but it opens the door.
- Do not use the words “hopefully”, “likely”, etc. Word choice and grammar have psychological impact.
- Do not be repetitive
- Do not be vacuous
- Curb your enthusiasm

More on content

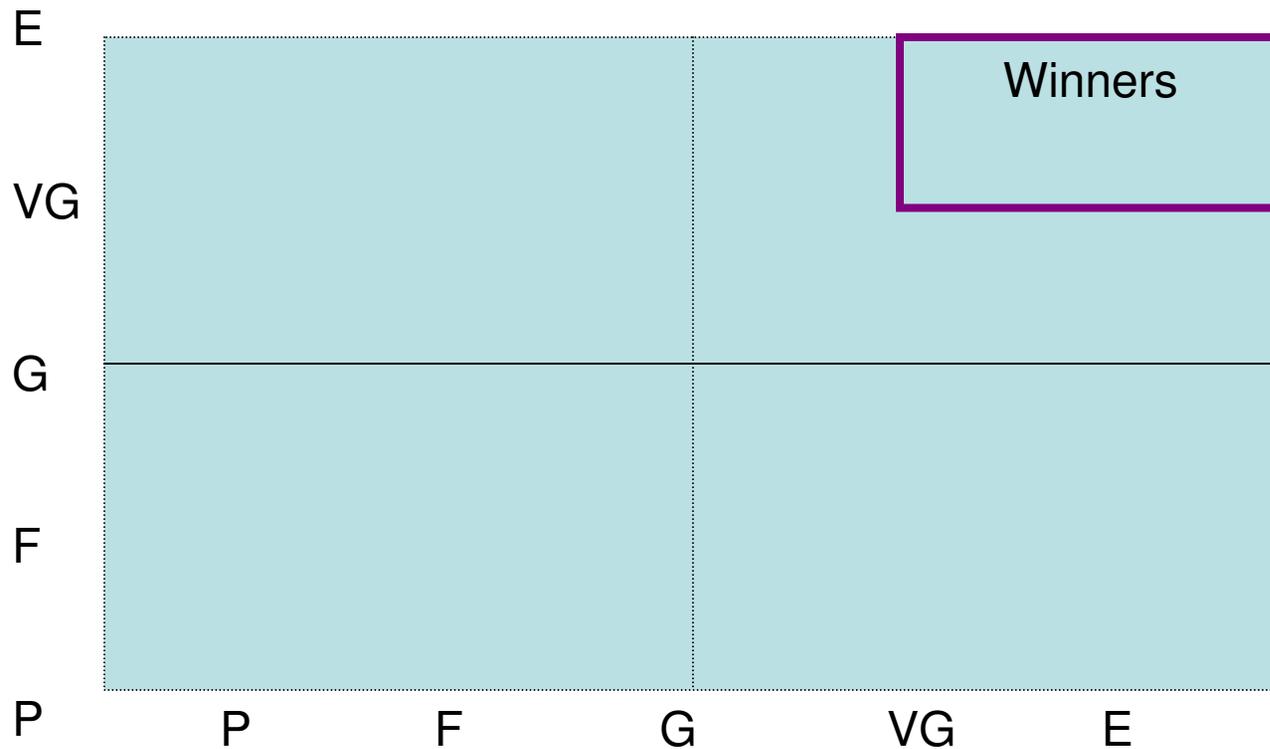
- Know your subject area
- Cover the background thoroughly
- Know the expertise of your reviewers (contact the program manager)
- For the CAREER panel, probably someone on the panel is quite familiar with your work, knows you and/or knows your advisors
- Target the program interests specifically

Budget

- Be realistic (most reviewers have a good idea of a reasonable budget)
- Number of summer months
- Grad student costs
- Hardware costs
- Cost sharing
- Leverage REUs/RETs

Intellectual Merit and Broad Impact

- Both are required and both must be meaningful



Broad Impact

- MUST BE INTEGRATED
- Diversity
- Course development
- Societal impact
- Link to existing university resources
(leverage, leverage, leverage)
- Do not go overboard

Letters of support

- Department
- University partners (internal/external)
- Industry
- Letters must have specifics, be meaningful, and well thought-out