

Tips for Nailing the AmeriCorps Proposal Review Process



The following are some key takeaways from the [Inside the Mind of the AmeriCorps Grant Reviewer](#) workshop led by McMahon Consulting Group and hosted by America Learns in December 2024.

Access the complete presentation recording and slide deck [here](#).

1. Understand the Review Process

- **Excellence:** The best way to be successful is to run a great program!
- **Total Scoring:** Proposals are scored on a 100-point scale.
- **Follow the NOFO:** Carefully adhere to the instructions in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).
- **Eligibility Checks:** A vendor (*not* the Agency) conducts initial eligibility assessments.
- **Proposal Scoring:** A panel of citizen reviewers score proposals (experts and Office of Research and Evaluation staff assess evidence).
- **Neutrality:** While reviewers strive to be neutral, it's important to consider common reviewer biases when writing your proposal.

2. Make the Reviewers Happy 😊

- **Clarity and Organization:** Proposals should be clear, well-organized, and detailed.
- **Engaging Content:** Avoid unnecessary complexity. Focus on providing clear, engaging narratives.
- **Audience Consideration:** Ensure your proposal resonates with both experts and those unfamiliar with the program. Never assume people know anything about anything you're writing about.
- **Define Technical Terms:** Clearly define any technical terms to ensure understanding.
- **Organizational Identity:** Ensure your proposal reflects your organization's identity, mission, and values.
- **Evidence-Based:** Feel free to use technical detail to describe evals and demonstrate impact.
- **Member Stories & Quotes:** Blend member stories with your data to add emotional engagement.
- **Headings & Structure:** Present information in an orderly format with clear headings. Use the NOFO's language for the headings to make things easy for reviewers; don't create new language.
- **Update Content:** Don't reuse the last cycle's proposal without significant revisions.

3. Components to Include in the Story You're Sharing

- **Establish Your Value Proposition:** Show your program is effective, efficient, and unique.
- **Be Compelling:** Use clear, compelling data, social math, and context to make your case.
- **Appeal to Both Emotion and Logic:** Balance emotional and logical appeals to capture reviewers' attention.

4. Avoid Common Mistakes

- **Typos & Incomplete Answers:** Ensure thorough and accurate responses.
- **Acronyms & Misrepresentation:** Avoid improper use of acronyms and misrepresenting your organization's strengths.
- **Oversimplification or Over-technicality:** Strike a balance; avoid both dumbing down and using overly technical language.
- **Follow the NOFO's Order:** Adhere to the order of questions outlined in the NOFO to avoid confusion and use the right amount of space for each section.