Abstract

This report reviews the theoretical and empirical research on the effect of deadlines across a wide range of domains. It also examines the results of interviews with National Science Foundation (NSF) staff and other contributors to the NSF grant process, along with the results of staff interviews from and website reviews of other relevant organizations. The study's goal is to provide insights into future evaluations of the offer of grant opportunities that do not impose a fixed submission deadline (referred to as a "no-deadlines approach") by understanding how and why no-deadlines approaches are implemented, their theory of change, their possible intended and unintended effects, and their likely effects according to current empirical evidence. NSF staff hypothesized that a no-deadlines approach could make its rigorous merit review process more efficient and now uses a no-deadlines approach in five of its directorates. At least 173 other organizations have offered funding opportunities without deadlines. However, the literature has not examined the implementation and outcomes of no-deadlines approaches in the context of grant solicitations beyond NSF's internal assessments. Theory and empirical evidence generally support the idea that task completion rates are higher in the presence of deadlines than in the absence of deadlines, but there is inconsistent empirical evidence about how deadlines may affect task quality and the characteristics of those completing the task.