

Written Review Quality Perceived Higher Among Applicants Who Also Reviewed Proposals

Insights from the 2021 Merit Review Survey

In fall 2021, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) administered the Merit Review Survey, a biennial web-based survey of persons who submitted proposals (i.e., applicants) and/or reviewed proposals (i.e., reviewers) between October 1, 2018, and September 30, 2020. Over 66,000 people were invited to complete the survey, with responses from over 17,000 people.

The survey questions were designed to better understand critical elements of the merit review process, including the quality of written proposal reviews. For example, one question on the survey asks applicants to respond to the statement, "Based on your experience submitting proposals to NSF, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement[s]? Written reviews are of high quality." Results from a regression analysis that accounted for demographic and other observable characteristics estimated that, overall, 33% of applicants agreed that written reviews are of high quality.

Further examination of the regression estimates indicated that applicants' responses to this question differed depending on whether they had experience as reviewers. Specifically, 37% of applicants who submitted a proposal but also served as a reviewer agreed that written reviews are of high quality, compared to 29% of applicants who submitted a proposal only.

To learn more about the 2021 Merit Review Survey, review the Evaluation and Assessment Capability (EAC) report, [Assessment of Stakeholder Experiences With NSF's Merit Review Process](#), published in October 2023.

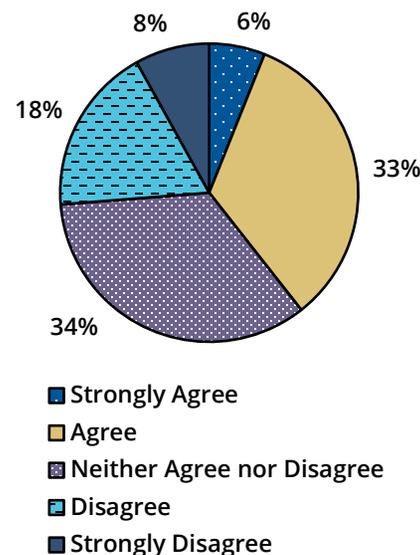
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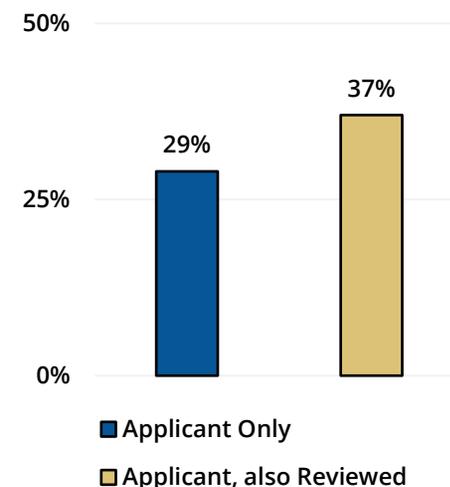
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Written Review Quality in the Merit Review Process, FY 2021

A) Estimates on Written Review Quality



B) Estimates on Written Review Quality by Applicant Experience (Agree Responses Only)



Note: In A) and B), applicant perceptions of written review quality are based on responses to Q20C and controlled for the following characteristics: race and ethnicity, gender, disability status, NSF directorate/office, institution type, early career status, and NSF experience.

Source: Bowman, Marietta, Andrew Bryant, Richard Griffiths, Amanda Hare, Lyndsay Huey, James McCall, Jeffery Scanlon, and Breanna Wakar. 2023. *Assessment of Stakeholder Experiences With NSF's Merit Review Process: Findings From the 2021 Merit Review Survey*. Alexandria, VA: U.S. National Science Foundation.



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