

# CHAPTER 4

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## ***APPRECIATE WHOM YOU ARE WRITING FOR: THE REVIEWERS***

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Once you have developed and refined the idea for your proposal, and once you have identified the funding agency (or, preferably, agencies) to which you will submit that idea for support, but before you even begin to think about writing, you will need to consider several issues in order to give yourself the strongest possible starting point. Often these issues are not stressed in manuals that discuss the grant-writing process; however, we are convinced that these issues are the key to approaching your grant-writing responsibilities with the greatest degree of understanding as to what is required in order to be maximally successful. This understanding will be invaluable to you in thinking about how you can develop and present your ideas so that they will actually be read by the individuals who will pass judgment on their relative merits.

Because there are so many different funding opportunities available to you, the actual review process to determine the relative merits of your idea will not be identical for all funding agencies. It is important to consider how you will write your application to know how its review will occur and what criteria will be applied. Therefore, for each potential funding agency you have identified, determine both the *process* and the review *criteria* that will be applied. In terms of process, this can vary rather substantially, depending upon funding agency. For some foundations, the foundation board may be very influential in the decision-making process. More frequently, external consultants (reviewers) are recruited into the process, either to provide individual reviews (by email or regular mail) or to assemble as a group and discuss proposals (usually having reviewed them in preparation for the review panel meeting). In general, with most federal funding agencies, a program officer is present and contributes to the discussion in the ranking of proposals (the National Institutes of Health [NIH] is an exception to this general rule).

In most instances, you will not have direct access to information concerning exactly who your reviewers are or what the makeup of the review panel will be. There are exceptions to this rule, with the NIH being notable in this respect. This funding agency actually lists the membership of more than 100 specific review panels (Study Sections) on the Center for Scientific Review web site (<http://www.csr.nih.gov/refrev.htm>) as well as the actual areas or disciplines that these various review panels have been charged with reviewing. It is therefore possible with this funding agency to hand pick the review panel that you want to review your proposal.

Some funding agencies may give you the opportunity to recommend individuals to serve as reviewers of your proposal. If you have this opportunity, take advantage of it; however, there are certain constraints on whom it would be appropriate to recommend. Obviously, you would not