

# *Tips for Competitive Proposal Writing*

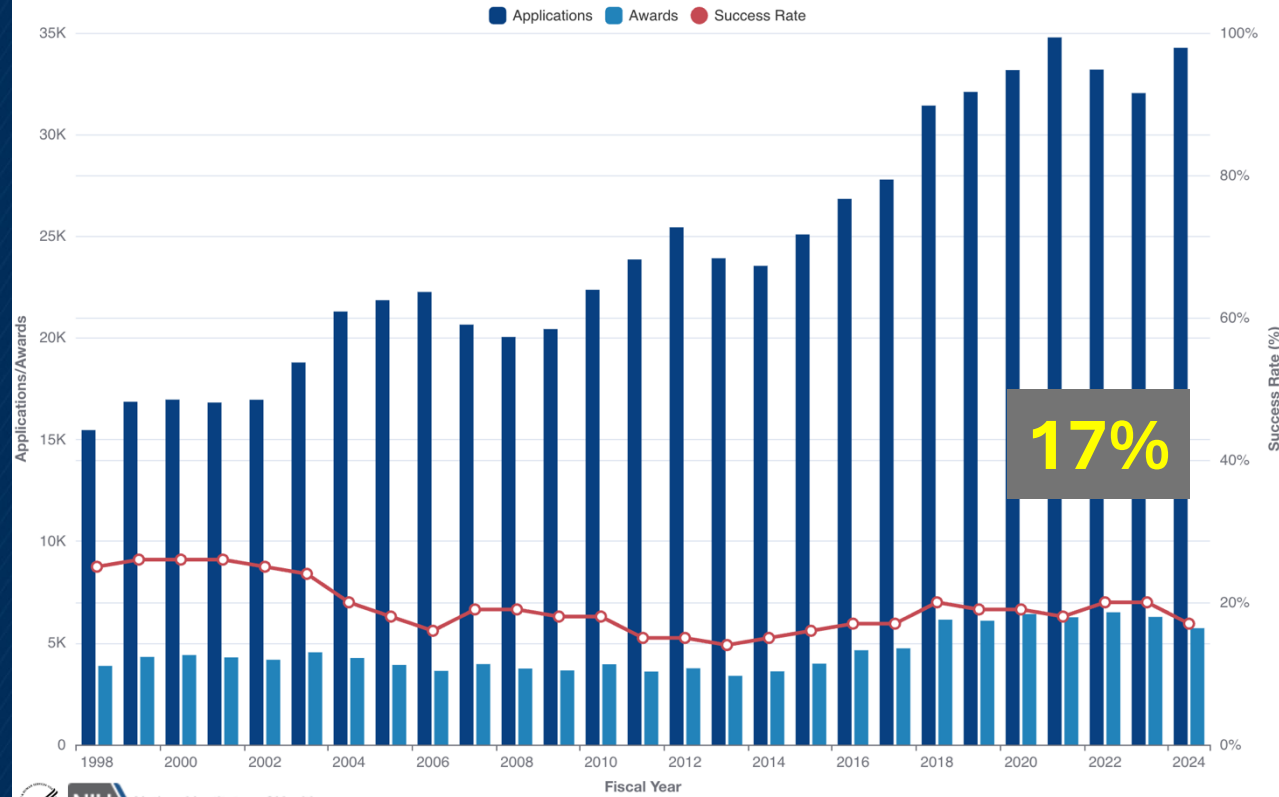
*10/20/2025*

*Sheena Murphy*  
*Assoc. VP for Research Development*

# Proposal success rates NIH and NSF in 2024

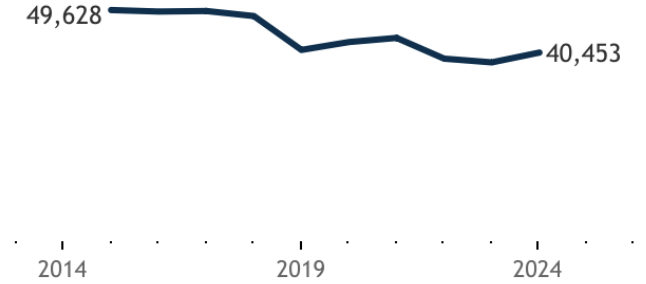
## R01-Equivalent Grants, New (Type 1): Competing Applications, Awards, and Success Rates, by Career Stage of Investigator

### All Applications

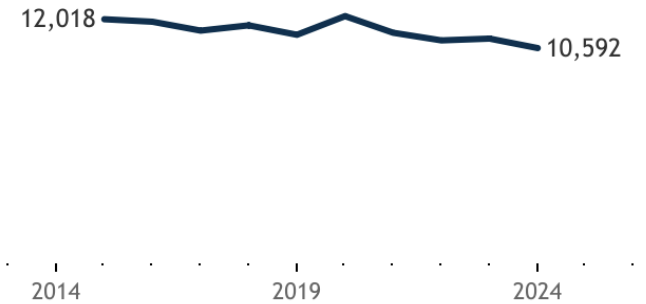


17%

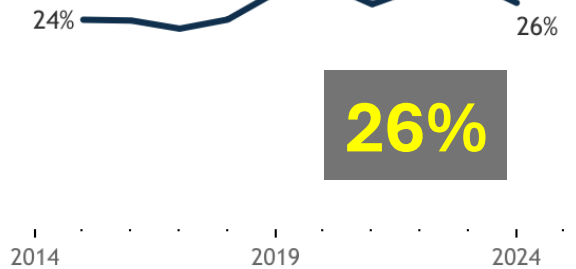
### Proposals Evaluated



### New Awards Funded



### Funding Rate



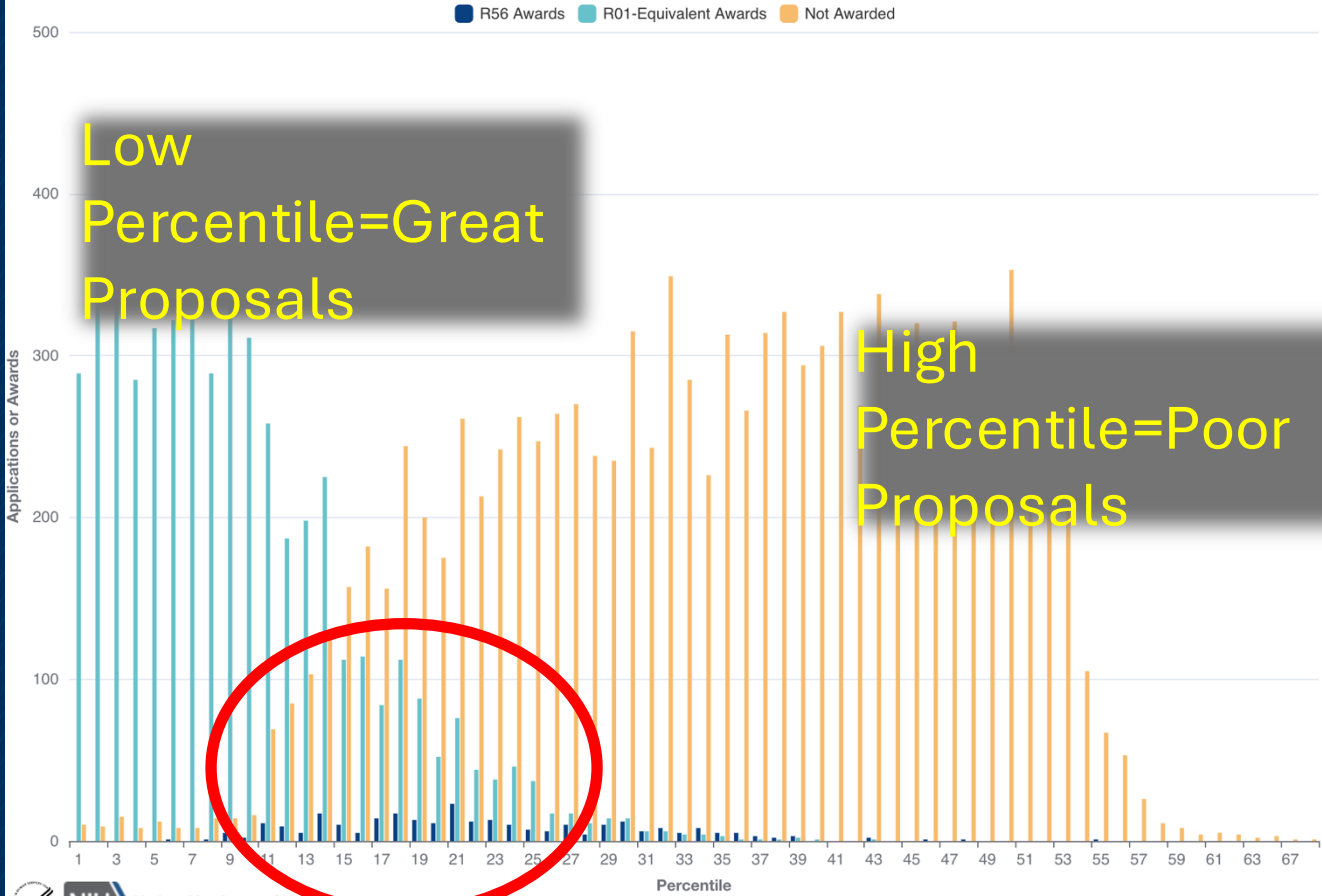
26%

<https://report.nih.gov/nihdatabook/category/10>

<https://www.nsf.gov/about/about-nsf-by-the-numbers>

# Close But No Cigar

Funding Patterns by Institute or Center (IC)  
ALL NIH, 2024



Low  
Percentile=Great  
Proposals

High  
Percentile=Poor  
Proposals

Same story at NSF where Ratings range from 5-Excellent, 4-Very Good, 3-Good, 2-Fair, 1-Poor

In 2024, 3,900 with an average score of 4 or better were declined.

## Factors influencing a program officer's discretion

After receiving and analyzing input from external peer reviewers, a program officer can consider additional factors, including:

- **Portfolio balance:** They may recommend proposals that explore different approaches to research questions or fill a gap in a program's overall portfolio.
- **High-risk, high-reward proposals:** A program officer may choose to fund proposals with potential for "transformational advances," even if the peer reviewers were not unanimous.
- **Programmatic objectives:** They can consider proposals that address special program objectives, such as capacity-building in a specific research area.

<https://research.wvu.edu>

- Infoletter
- Funding
- Proposal Development Tools
  - Thinking like a reviewer
  - Heilmeier Catechism
  - External Review

## The Heilmeier Catechism

- 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 you are successful, what difference will it make?
- What are the risks?
- What are the mid-term and final “exams” to check for success?
- How much will it cost?
- How long will it take?

## From an NSF Program Officer

### Two types of non-competitive proposals

- Poor quality proposals
  - Fair or Poor ratings, Triaged, Unscored
- Great ideas but not yet ready
  - Usually because of methodological flaws

### Competitive or Medium/Low Competitive

- Solid proposal but not the most innovative
- Some flaws but not fatal – fundable but not at top

# Getting back on the horse



- Read reviews carefully
- Email Program Officer
- Write up a concept paper
- Get feedback
- Try again

## University and College Resources

<https://research.wvu.edu>

<https://health.wvu.edu/research-and-graduate-education/research/>

<https://www.wvctsi.org/programs/education-mentoring-career-development/>

<https://eberly.wvu.edu/research/research-office-staff>

<https://landgrant.wvu.edu/about/directory/research-evaluation-and-compliance>

<https://research.statler.wvu.edu/about/meet-our-team>