

# Review the Announcement Criteria

*“Essential things to know for a competitive STEM proposal”*

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SpSt 570: Writing proposals for STEM grant opportunities - September 2025

# Objective: Winning STEM Proposals

*“Great science **alone** doesn’t get funded. **Compliant, criteria-driven** science does.”*

Our goal is simple: **turn good ideas into fundable plans** by writing exactly to how reviewers grade.

Today we **read like engineers** (decoding the call, mapping the criteria) and **write like reviewers** to win the points.

**SOLID PROPOSAL + SMART STRATEGY** Funded

- ✓ Exact fit to review criteria
- ✓ Fully compliant
- ✓ Clear, testable aims
- ✓ Evidence right there
- ✓ Credible team

| Criterion | Where | Evidence |
|-----------|-------|----------|
|           |       |          |
|           |       |          |
|           |       |          |

**FUNDING**

**BREAKTHROUGH IDEA + POOR STRATEGY**

- ✗ Misfit
- ✗ Non-compliant
- ✗ Vague aims
- ✗ Scattered evidence
- ✗ Team/story mismatch

**RETURNED WITHOUT REVIEW**

# Metrics: Why proposals win ?

## Funding is competitive:

- **NSF** funded **28.8 %** of proposals in FY 2023 (11,056 awards / 38,340 proposals) – similar to **28 %** in 2022 and **26 %** in 2021.
- **NIH Research Project Grants (R01, R21)** had a **21 %** success rate in 2023 and **19 %** in 2024.

**Compliance is non-negotiable:** Non-compliant NSF proposals are **returned without review**, resulting in **0 % chance of funding**.

## Key takeaway:

- Winning **isn't about having the flashiest science. it's about meeting every requirement** and making it effortless for reviewers to award points.
- Write exactly to the criteria, stay within every rule, and **present a feasible, defensible plan**.

# Review the Announcement Criteria: Steps

| Step                  | Time to Spend | What to Do                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Quick Scan         | 0–2 min       | Skim the call for deadline, eligibility, budget, and “Review Criteria.” Use <i>Ctrl+F</i> for words like <i>shall</i> , <i>must</i> , <i>required</i> .                         |
| 2. Deep Scan          | ~10 min       | Read these in order: 1)Deadlines & submission system → 2) Eligibility → 3) Budget cap & project period → 4) Required docs/templates → 5) Review criteria → 6) Formatting rules. |
| 3. Identify your Team | ~10 min       | Decide who must be on the proposal (co-PIs, collaborators). Begin outreach so letters and biosketches aren’t last-minute.                                                       |
| 4. Capture Criteria   | ~10 min       | Copy each review criterion, copy the words exactly as they appear in the announcement.                                                                                          |
| 5. Build Outline      | ~30 min       | Turn each copied review criterion into a section header in your proposal outline.                                                                                               |

# Review the Announcement Criteria: Steps (Continued)

| Step                              | Time to spend | What to Do                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>6. Draft Key Points</b>        | ~30 min       | Under each header, write three short lines: Claim (what you will achieve), Evidence(data/figures/past results), and Why It Matters(tie back to the call). |
| <b>7. Re-Check Compliance</b>     | ~30 min       | Confirm eligibility, budget, scope, and formatting still match the call after outlining.                                                                  |
| <b>8. Write White Paper/Pitch</b> | ~60 min       | Prepare a concise, one-page white paper/ brief pitch summarizing your idea and fit to the call.                                                           |
| <b>9. Contact Program Officer</b> | ~10 min       | Send a concise one-page white paper and summary email to the PO to confirm fit (before you spend weeks writing).                                          |

# Call Markup

## Basics

- Program / FOA #: \_\_\_\_\_
- Due date & time (TZ): \_\_\_\_\_
- Submission portal: \_\_\_\_\_

## Can I apply?

- Eligibility (PI/org): Yes / No
- Budget cap: \$\_\_\_\_\_ | Duration: \_\_\_\_\_ months

## Team

## Review criteria

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Format rules

Pages: \_\_\_\_ | Font/size: \_\_\_\_ | Margins/spacing: \_\_\_\_ | File type: \_\_\_\_

## Must-have files (checklist)

- ☐ Project narrative (limit: \_\_\_\_ pages)
- ☐ Biosketch (SciENCv)
- ☐ Other required section specific to the call
- ☐ Current & Pending
- ☐ Budget + justification (Any cost share approval)
- ☐ Facilities/Resources
- ☐ Letters of collaborations / any other type of letter (Y/N)
- ☐ Data/Management plan/Mentoring Plan
- ☐ Compliance items (IRB/DEIA)

**Email/Call PO:** Questions and 1-page white paper

## Red flags

- Missing document / wrong template.
- Over page limit / formatting violation.
- Budget > cap / ineligible costs.
- Ineligible PI/org.

## Score Boosters

- **Write to the criteria:** reuse their exact words
- **Stay compliant:** pages, fonts, templates, file type
- **Show feasibility:** clear plan, Team roles, one strong piece of proof

# Thank you!

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Any questions ?

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