# DOE-HEP Comparative Review Process

## DOE-HEP Office Hours · August 20, 2024

*https://science.osti.gov/hep/officehours*

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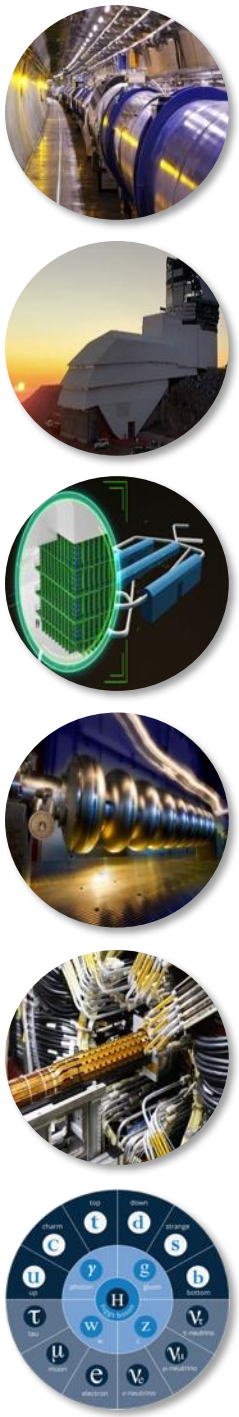

# Office of Science Statement of Commitment and Other Guidelines

- **DOE's Office of Science (SC) Statement of Commitment:** SC is fully and unconditionally committed to fostering safe, diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible work, research, and funding environments that value mutual respect and personal integrity. *https://science.osti.gov/SW-DEI/SC-Statement-of-Commitment*

- **Expectations for Professional Behavior:** SC's expectations of all participants to positively contribute to a professional, inclusive meeting that fosters a safe and welcoming environment for conducting scientific business, as well as outlines behaviors that are unacceptable and potential ramifications for unprofessional behavior. *https://science.osti.gov/SW-DEI/DOE-Diversity-Equity-and-Inclusion-Policies/Harassment*

- **How to Address and Report Behaviors of Concern:** Process on how and who to report issues, including the distinction between reporting on unprofessional, disrespectful, or disruptive behaviors, and behaviors that constitute a violation of Federal civil rights statutes. *https://science.osti.gov/SW-DEI/DOE-Diversity-Equity-and-Inclusion-Policies/How-to-Report-a-Complaint*

- **Implicit Bias:** Be aware of implicit bias, understand its nature – everyone has them – and implicit bias if not mitigated can negatively impact the quality and inclusiveness of scientific discussions that contribute to a successful meeting. *https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/article/understanding-implicit-bias*

# University HEP Comparative Reviews

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- **Since FY 2012, DOE/HEP has been using a process of comparative reviews for university research proposals and grants — those scheduled for renewal *or* any new proposals**
  - The upcoming FY 2025 comparative review will mark the 14th year of the process
  - Each HEP subprogram at the DOE national laboratories is also reviewed approximately every ~ 4-6 years
- **Process supported by several DOE advisory committees, including the 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2020 HEP Committee of Visitors (COV)**
  - 2010 COV: *"In several of [past] cases … grants are being evaluated based on the historical strength of the group rather than the current strength or productivity of the group. This is of particular concern when considering whether new investigators, new science, or high-risk projects can be competitive. Comparative reviews can be a powerful tool for keeping the program in peak form."*
    - **Recommended the use comparative review panels on a regular basis**
  - 2013 COV: Continue comparative reviews.
  - *2016 and* 2020 COV: Continue comparative reviews; and DOE/HEP continue communicating with PIs the program priorities in HEP and the overall process at annual DOE/HEP PI Meetings
  - *Ref. 2024* COV for HEP facilities (operations & projects): ensure coordination between facilities and research

**Goal: improve overall quality and efficacy of the HEP research program by identifying the best proposals with highest scientific impact and potential**

# FY 2025 HEP Comparative Review

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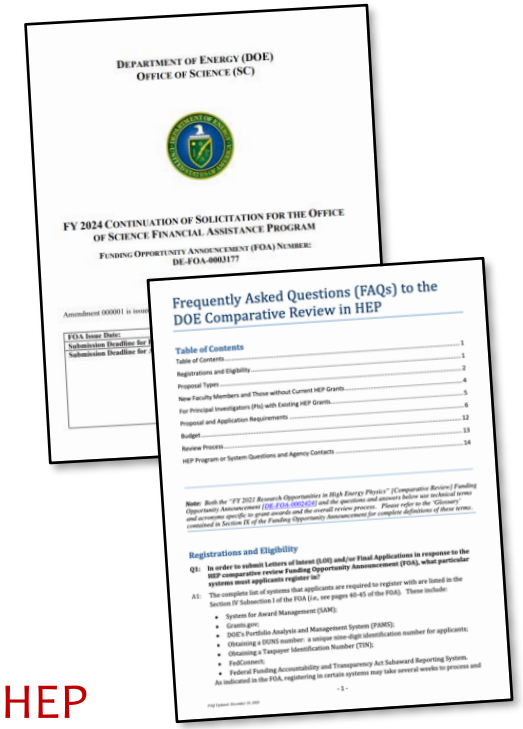
- **Call for applications (*i.e.*, proposals) to be reviewed under the FY 2024 *and* FY 2025 HEP comparative review process is part of the FY 2024 Office of Science (SC) open call**
  - DE-FOA-0003177; see "HEP" section of the FOA, pages 47-56
  - Applications for support of HEP research activities in any of the 7 areas identified below could be submitted for the FY 2025 comparative review process
  - HEP plans to convene comparative merit review panels for both "new" and "renewal" applications devoted to these research activities
- **HEP research activities or subprograms under the comparative review process:**
  - Experimental HEP: Energy Frontier, Intensity Frontier, Cosmic Frontier
  - HEP Theory
  - Technology R&D: General Accelerator R&D (GARD), Detector R&D, and Computational HEP




- **For more information, including FAQ and webinar, see: *https://science.osti.gov/hep/Funding-Opportunities***
- **Also refer to DOE-HEP program managers' presentations at this year's DPF-Pheno 2024 Meeting (May 2024)**
  - Provides overview of each DOE-HEP subprogram area and corresponding priorities, including information on program-specific comparative processes undertaken by each area

# Key Dates and Anticipated Timeline for FY25 Process

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- **Key dates (for FY 2025 process, these are listed on page 49 of the FOA #3177):**
  - **Aug 1, 2024:** Pre-applications (optional; strongly encouraged)
  - **Sept 5, 2024:** Application deadline
- **Review Process**
  - **Early-Sept 2024:** compliance checks at DOE-HEP of each proposal against FOA requirements
  - **Sept-Oct 2024:** electronic mail-in review phase in DOE's Portfolio Analysis & Management System (PAMS)
  - **Nov 2024:** anticipate convening DOE-HEP merit review panels, one in each subprogram area
- **DOE-agency Processes**
  - **Dec 2024 – Jan 2025:** HEP Program Managers' deliberations and selections under available budgets
  - **Feb-Mar 2025:** Guidance for recommended awards and request revised budgets and abstracts
  - **Mar-Apr 2025:** Processing procurements for recommended awards at DOE Chicago

# Some Reminders for DOE Funding Opportunities

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- **All Research proposals submitted to DOE Office of Science (SC) must have a Data Management Plan (DMP)**
  - Includes HEP comparative review and early career but not proposals for conferences, workshops, operations, or projects
  - A DMP is required to be compliant with SC's associated statement on digital data management
  - Any thrust in a proposal without a DMP will **be declined without review**
  - All DMPs are included as an appendix to the proposal; one that is blank or states "not applicable" is not accepted
- **All Renewal proposals must submit "proposal products" (publications, etc.) *after* the application is submitted**
  - PIs are notified via PAMS and typically have about 7-10 days to respond
  - We cannot review incoming renewal proposals until this step is completed
  - These 'products' are captured with your annual Progress Report, but for this review process, applicants can update their entries prior to merit review process
- **Explicit merit review criterion: Plan for "Promoting Inclusivity and Equity in Research" (PIER)**
  - Supporting narrative in the proposal's appendix that aims to address a PIER plan (*more later in this talk…* )
- **Note: each FOA by DOE has different eligibility, technical requirements, page limits, etc.**
  - **Prior to any proposal submission, please read the relevant FOA carefully for these guidelines and/or requirements**

# Proposal: Project Narrative

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- **Project Narrative comprises the group's *research plan* for the project**
  - Should contain enough background material in the introduction to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the plan
  - Devote main portion describing and justifying the proposed project, including detailing methods to be used to obtain relevant results
  - Indicate which personnel will be responsible for which activities
  - Include timeline for the major activities of the proposed project
- **Must not exceed 9-pages per "Senior/Key Person" (*i.e.*, those listed by name in Section A of the budgets)**
  - Senior ≡ an Investigator ≡ Active tenured or tenure-track faculty member at sponsoring institution
  - Key Person ≡ a non-tenure track faculty (*e.g.*, research scientists) or other senior-level research staff, incl. those with term appointments and emeritus faculty, <u>are</u> also provided 9-pages each – *i.e.*, a new feature under the "open" SC FOA process
  - Faculty members at collaborating institutions that may be listed in the proposal (if any) are <u>not</u> included
- **Investigators encouraged to refer to the "HEP" program subsection and Section IV of the FOA**
  - Includes useful information to guide research groups to prepare better narratives — *for e.g.:*
    - Info for background and introduction; multiple investigators and/or multiple research subprograms or thrusts
    - Common narrative discussing any synergies and connections among any group in different research areas
    - Proposed project objectives and the research methods and resources to accomplish each objective
    - Timetable and level of effort of different activities, …

# HEP Research Activities Supported

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- **What DOE supports**
  - Research efforts (mainly scientists) on R&D, experiment design, data taking, analysis-related activities
  - Some engineering support may be provided through the DOE-HEP Detector R&D subprogram
  - Theory, simulations, phenomenology, computational studies
  - Efforts that are in direct support of our programs; depend on merit reviews, programmatic factors, and available funds
- **Faculty support**
  - Based on merit reviews and/or optimizing the number of research personnel supported by financial assistance awards, support of up to 2-months faculty summer salary
  - Summer support for DOE/HEP support should be adjusted according to %-time the faculty is on research effort
- **Research Scientists**
  - Support may be provided, but due to long-term expectations, are considered on case-by-case basis on merits
  - Determine whether roles and responsibilities are well-matched with individual capabilities and cannot be fulfilled by a tenured or tenure-track position
  - Efforts for 'research' support should be related to research; not *long-term* operations and/or project activities

× **What's not supported by 'Research' grants**

- Any significant HEP operations and/or project-related activities, including equipment or consumables for DOE projects
- Non-HEP related efforts — *for e.g.:* gravity waves (LIGO); heavy-ion research (RHIC or at the LHC)

# Connecting the Narrative to Research Initiatives

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- **Significant HEP funding comes through initiatives – *i.e.*, Congressional, Administration, and/or Agency**

- **Current initiatives in research include Quantum Information Science (QIS), Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML), Advanced Computing, and Microelectronics**
  - AI/ML has significant impact across the entire HEP research program
  - QIS has become a common research tool for parts of the Theory and Detector R&D programs
  - Microelectronics primarily impacts the Detector R&D program

- **Clearly identify those components of your proposed research that may connect to initiative funding**
  - If applications and/or development of initiative-related techniques are a part of your research effort, call attention to them so that they can be properly reviewed
  - Consider adding a dedicated section to your narrative to describe the group's efforts in these directions, their importance to completing the proposed research, and explain associated methods and impacts to advancing results
  - Identify the personnel (e.g., students, postdoctoral researchers, etc.), their training, and effort level to carry out such activities in the proposed research plan

- **Distinguish the initiative-related research scope being proposed from that supported by other Federally-funded research grants (if any) – for example, through QuantISED, or dedicated AI/ML or Microelectronics FOAs**

# Cross-cut, Multi-thrust, or Transitional Proposals

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- **Applications where an investigator is proposing to conduct research across multiple HEP research subprograms during the project period are planned to be considered**

- **PIs are encouraged to submit only one application describing:**
  - Overall research activity, including fractional time planned in each subprogram
  - FY 2025 review process continues to encourage investigators to include a level-of-effort table in the proposal's appendix related to the budget material for such cross-cut or transitions of effort planned in the project period
  - Example effort table for applications with PIs in multiple HEP tasks is given on pages 51-52 of the FOA

- **As part of their overview of the subprogram and review process, DOE PMs will also provide their respective review panel with details regarding such research plans across multiple HEP thrusts**

- **Reviewers with appropriate topical expertise in the research area(s) will assess the full scope, relevance, and impact of the proposed research in the merit review process — *e.g.*, merit review questions consider:**
  - Are plans for such cross-cutting efforts reasonably developed and balanced?
  - Does the full proposed program provide synergy or additional benefits to HEP's mission beyond an individual thrust?
  - Will PI's overall efforts across multiple thrusts add value to HEP program goals and mission and have impact?

# Comparative Merit Review Criteria

[A set of criteria elements listed in Section V of FOA: for Investigators and Merit Reviewers to prepare and evaluate proposals, respectively]

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| MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA | REVIEW CRITERIA SUB-QUESTIONS FOR MERIT REVIEWER'S EVALUATIONS |
|---|---|
| SCIENTIFIC AND/OR TECHNICAL MERIT OF THE PROJECT | • What is the scientific innovation of the proposed research?<br>• What is the likelihood of achieving valuable results?<br>• How might the results of the proposed work impact the direction, progress, and thinking in relevant scientific fields of research?<br>• How does the proposed work compare with other efforts in its field, both in terms of scientific and/or technical merit and originality?<br>• Is the Data Management Plan (DMP) suitable for the proposed research? To what extent does it support the validation of research results? To what extent will research products, including data, be made available and reusable to advance the field of research?<br>• For renewal applications only: Is the proposed work an appropriate outgrowth of, continuation to, or successor of the currently supported research? |
| APPROPRIATENESS OF THE PROPOSED METHOD OR APPROACH | • How logical and feasible are the research approaches?<br>• Does the proposed research employ innovative concepts or methods?<br>• Are the conceptual framework, methods, and analyses well justified, adequately developed, and likely to lead to scientifically valid conclusions?<br>• Does the applicant recognize significant potential problems and consider alternative strategies?<br>• Is the proposed research aligned with the published priorities identified or incorporated by reference in Section I of the FOA such as program strategic plans? *i.e.*, for HEP, the 2023 P5 strategic plan. |
| COMPETENCY OF APPLICANT'S PERSONNEL AND ADEQUACY OF PROPOSED RESOURCES | • What is the past performance and potential of the research team?<br>• How well qualified is the research team to carry out the proposed research?<br>• Are the research environment and facilities adequate for performing the research?<br>• Does the proposed work take advantage of unique facilities and capabilities? |
| REASONABLENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS OF THE PROPOSED BUDGET | • Are the proposed budget and staffing levels adequate to carry out the proposed research?<br>• Is the budget reasonable and appropriate for the scope? |
| QUALITY AND EFFICACY OF THE PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE (PIER) RESEARCH PLAN | • Is the proposed PIER Plan suitable for the size and complexity of the proposed project and an integral component of the proposed project?<br>• To what extent is the PIER Plan likely to lead to participation of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including individuals historically underrepresented in the research community?<br>• What aspects of the PIER Plan are likely to contribute to the goal of creating and maintaining an equitable, inclusive, encouraging, and professional training and research environment and supporting a sense of belonging among project personnel?<br>• How does the proposed plan include intentional mentorship and are the associated mentoring resources reasonable and appropriate? |

# PIER: Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Research

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- **DOE-SC is deeply committed to supporting diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible (DEI&A) work, research, and funding environments that value mutual respect and personal integrity**
- **PIER Plans:** since FY 2023, all DOE SC Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) and DOE National Lab Announcements and other funding solicitations require applicants to submit a PIER plan as an appendix to their proposal narrative.
  - Additional information about the PIER Plan, including (1) FAQs for applicants and reviewers and (2) link to the DOE's public webinar, available at: *https://science.osti.gov/grants/Applicant-and-Awardee-Resources/PIER-Plans*
- **At-a-glance, PIER Plans:**
  - Should describe the activities and strategies proposed by the PI/project team to promote equity and inclusion integral to the research project
  - Should be included as an Appendix to the proposal narrative not exceeding 3 pages
  - Are to be evaluated as part of the merit review process that is used to inform funding decisions by DOE
- **General guidance for applicants is provided in Section IV of the FOA:**
  - Plans may include, but are not limited to, strategies of your institution (and collaborating institutions, if applicable) for enhanced recruitment of undergraduate students, graduate students, and early-stage investigators (postdoctoral researchers and others), including individuals from diverse backgrounds and historically underrepresented groups
  - Strategies for creating and sustaining a positive, inclusive, safe, and professional research and training environment that fosters a sense of belong among all researchers
  - Plans may incorporate or build upon existing DEI&A efforts but should not re-state the standard institutional and broad principles. The complexity and detail of a PIER Plan is expected to increase with size of research team and the # of personnel supported

# Proposal Budgets and Budget Justifications

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- **Applicants encouraged to work with their Sponsored Research/Program Office [SRO/SPO] to develop their budgets and budget justifications with the same care that is devoted to the project narrative**
  - Narrating your budget justification matters! Reviewers evaluate budgets relative to the proposed scope
  - Reviewers and panelists often express frustration and/or confusion about the budget details leading to lengthy panel discussions about what is being requested

- **Points for consideration:**
  - Funds are awarded to the institution. Understand direct and indirect rates, benefits, and restrictions
  - Work with your budget office and/or SRO-SPO team: Remember they submit the proposal for you!

- **Reviewers will notice and call out:**
  - Excessive or inappropriate requests
  - Poorly justified expenses
  - Arithmetic errors or discrepancies between the project narrative and budgeted expenses

- **Worst case: Reviewers will start guessing if items are not adequately explained *or* discrepancies exist**

# Bio-sketch and Current & Pending Support

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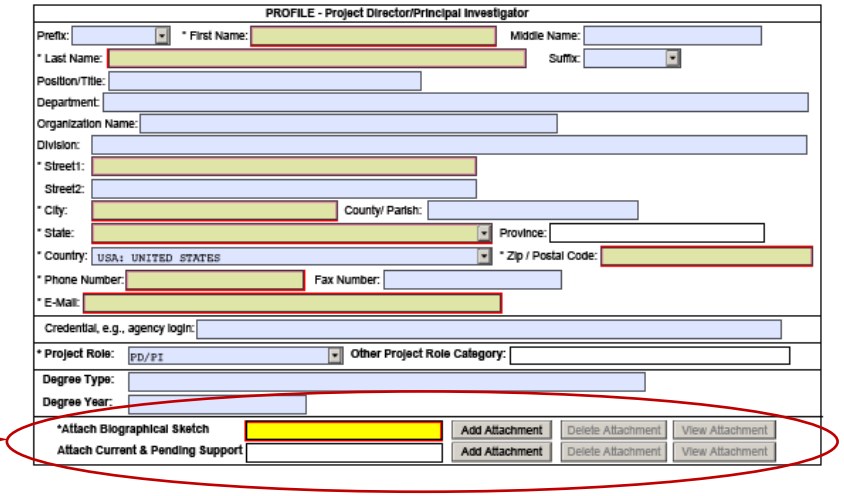
- **SC requires the NSF format in the Science Experts Network Curriculum Vita (SciENcv) system for the Bio-sketch and Current & Pending (C&P) Support details [or fillable PDF available from NSF]**
  - NSF format is not fully compatible with the information required by the FOA.
  - Pages containing non-compatible info can be printed on a separate sheet and appended to the required format without incurring page limit violations.
- **The "Collaborator List" is no longer part of the bio-sketch**
- **The Bio-sketch and C&P are each to be attached to the Senior/Key Person Profile of your application**




- **For the C&P, all foreign government-sponsored talent recruitment programs must be identified**
  - Details of any obligations, contractual or otherwise, to any program, entity, or organization sponsored by a foreign government must be provided on request to either the applicant institution or DOE.
- **HEP strongly recommends using SciENcv over the fillable PDF**
  - It is anticipated that SC will someday participate in a multi-agency effort to develop a common SciENcv Bio-sketch and C&P Support format for future FOAs, and you will already be in the system.
  - The fillable PDF has many pages for a large number of entries. If you opt to use it, please delete unused pages.

# Further Guidance: Review Criteria and Policy Factors

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## For Investigators [YOU]

- Merit review criteria and corresponding questions are given in Section V of the FOA
- Program Policy Factors, which are also used in selections for an award – including those pertaining to the availability of funds – are given in Section V of the FOA
- These serve as an additional guide for PIs to address in their proposal's project narratives
  - Provide a plan! Do not just write paragraphs explicitly answering each [sub-]question.
  - Instead integrate and adapt these, as appropriate, when narrating the group's activities and research plans.

## For Reviewers/Panelists

- The same merit review criteria and corresponding sub-questions are given to all reviewers to input reviews in DOE's Portfolio Analysis and Management System (PAMS)
  - Serves as a guide for reviewers to address each review criteria for written reviews
  - Presented and discussed by individual panelists for each proposal
- Program Policy Factors are also encouraged to be considered in the evaluation
  - *For e.g.*, program alignment with respect to the P5 strategic plan, fostering development of diverse cadre of supported researchers, and opportunity for early-stage investigators and/or early-stage scientific personnel

# Programmatic Considerations

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- **Generally, very useful to have head-to-head reviews of PIs working in similar areas, particularly for large grants**
- **Panels discuss relative strengths and weaknesses of individual proposals *and* PIs**

- **Many factors weigh into final funding decisions**
  - Compelling research proposal [plan] for *next* ~3-4 years in the context of a longer-term program
    - ✓ Interesting? Novel? Significant? Plausibly achievable?
    - ⊗ Incremental? Implausibility ambitious? Poorly presented?
  - Significant *recent* contributions in last ~3-4 years
    - Synergy and collaboration within group (as appropriate)
    - Contributions to the research infrastructure of experiments
  - *Alignment* with programmatic priorities
  - *Availability* of funds

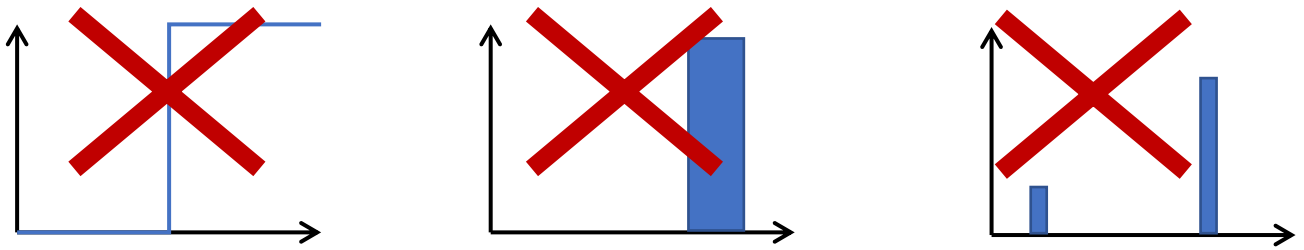
- **Supportive of excellent people, including excellent *new* people, even when times are tough!**
- **Corollary: Some proposals or personnel ranked below average may *not* be funded.**

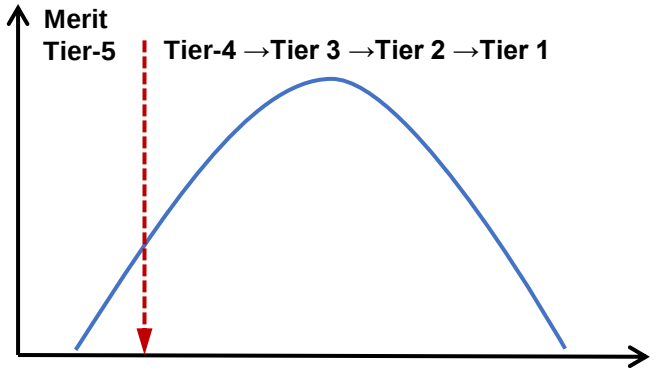
# Comparative Evaluation

- **Panel reviewers are experts representing the global HEP community: labs, universities, and facilities from the U.S. and abroad**
  - Individuals do not participate in the merit review, including in any comparative assessment, of a proposal for which there is a COI

- **Once comparative assessments are completed, DOE program managers then need to determine:**
  - Threshold for funding each proposal
  - Level of support for each funded proposal ⇒ send request to the University/PIs to submit a "revised budget" if DOE recommends proposal for funding

- **A "comparative" evaluation:**
  - Reviewer scores / rankings of the proposal and PIs provide essential (additional) input to DOE's process of optimizing resource allocations for the university research program
  - Not everyone can be "Above Average"





# Other Key Items to Keep in Mind…

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- **Proposed research reviews best if closely aligned with the DOE-HEP mission, its program, and the P5 strategy**
- **Investigators in experimental HEP research frontiers [Energy, Intensity, Cosmic] review best if they are closely integrated into the respective HEP collaborations and have visible roles & responsibilities on those experiments**
- **"Generic" or "blue-sky" R&D that is not to be carried out as part of a targeted HEP experimental initiative or collaboration should be directed to the Detector R&D program, as appropriate**
- **Read each FOA carefully and follow the requirements on content, length, etc.**
  - Several requirements in the FOA are set from outside the DOE/HEP office
    - Non-compliant proposals that do not address FOA guidelines or requirements may not get merit reviewed
  - In past years, ~3-5% of incoming proposals have been declined without review. Requirements often missed include:
    - DMPs, page limits, separate budget sheets (if needed) for each research subprogram or thrust, and inclusion of Personally Identifiable Information (PII)
    - Most declinations occur for "new" proposals ⇒ ask a mentor or experienced PI for help
- **Make sure your documents are Adobe compliant: DOE uses Adobe software tools to combine the documents you submit into the package that is sent for review**
  - Submit early and review your submission to see if any corrections are needed.

# Proposals: What to Do

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## Do Follow the Instructions and Guidelines

- Read the current FOA thoroughly, as well as any supporting materials – e.g., FAQ, HEP PI meeting slides.
- SC rules and procedures as well as HEP program requirements are regularly updated.

## Do seek out advice & support from trusted colleagues & mentors

- Your institution has invested a lot of time and money hiring you. They want you to succeed.

  Let them help you.
- Request a pre-review of the proposal.

  There are resources at most institutions; and/or seek guidance from collaborators.

## Do learn the rules, regulations, and costs of your institution

- Funds are awarded to the institution. Understand direct and indirect rates, benefits, and restrictions.
- Establish a relationship with your budget office and/or sponsored research/ program office;

  Remember they submit the proposal for you!

## Do follow through on any past reviewer feedback

- Give weight to the critical reviews

  Arguing with HEP that 3 out of 5 reviewers thought your proposal was excellent does not address the 2 reviewers who had a different opinion

  Read the Panel Summaries from past reviews. These contain the panel discussions of your proposal, including any strengths and weaknesses.

## Do be clear and follow proper English grammar and composition

- Be clear: avoid reviewers having to guess about your research plans;

  Careless editing will annoy or confuse reviewers.
- Hire someone to proof-read your proposal.

## Do ask for what you reasonably need

- Standard research requests include:
  - Salary (PI and co-PIs)
  - Other Personnel including post-docs, students, etc.
  - Travel (domestic and foreign)
  - M&S, Tuition remission
  - Indirect Costs, Rates
- Realistic funding expectations
  - Early Career >$150k Univ. & >$500k Lab
  - ~50% FTE to proposal
  - Stagger personnel

# Proposals: What Not to Do

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## Do Not submit a proposal late

- You should assume that applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed or considered for award.
- Use the weeks or months after the FOA is made public to prepare and then submit your proposal early.

## Do Not brag or exaggerate

- Be professional and objective.
- Fully list your accomplishments in the bio-sketch; Include your mentoring and leadership roles.
- Accurately and reasonably describe the research plan

## Do Not bury the message

- The narrative should be accessible to a review panel with a wide range of expertise.
- Avoid jargon when possible. Same with acronyms.
- Describe in clear and concise language.

  Tell a story...

## Do Not overly dwell on the past

- General rule of thumb (1/3:2/3).

  No more than one-third of proposal devoted to past efforts;

  Discuss future since DOE investments are meant for the next period.
- Majority of proposal narrative should be forward looking.

## Do Not submit a sloppy budget or budget justification

- The budget sheets and justification should be prepared with the same care as the narrative.
- Reviewers will call out any:
  - Excessive or inappropriate requests
  - Arithmetic errors
  - Poorly justified expenses
  - Start guessing if not adequately explained

## Do Not be discouraged

- Competition is strong.

  Some very good proposals are declined due to limited resources.

  That first feedback is so valuable.

# Closing Remarks

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- **The HEP comparative review process is competitive and hard choices must be made based on the reviews and our available funding.**
  - As this is a comparative process, some proposals / PIs will be ranked at the top while others will be in the middle or at the bottom.
- **It is understood that most applicants work hard, and their efforts are in support of the HEP program.**
- **Due to the rankings and comments by reviewers and our constrained budgets, some whose research activities and level of effort are ranked lower — in terms of priority and impact relative to others in the field — may not get supported.**
  - This does not necessarily mean the person cannot continue to undertake research; they are not being funded by the grant to do it.
  - It could be that the person has a critical role in the program, but it did not come out in the proposal or review process.
  - **This is why it is imperative to respond to elements of the FOA and detail each person's effort.**
- **Reviewers see the entire proposal, and each provides input and rankings relative to the others. When a panel member is faced with comparing efforts, impacts, and limited budgets, rather than rank the entire proposal low, they may provide guidance regarding details of the proposal.**
  - *For e.g.,* Section A looks good, but Section B is weaker and shouldn't be supported at the requested level.


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