Some negative proposal review comments

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Each of the comments below came from a review of a proposal that I worked hard on. I share these to show that everybody has failures. Your colleague or role model that you think is doing so great has almost certainly gotten critical feedback like this as well. You should not take negative feedback on your work as evidence that you have no good ideas. Further, while many of these criticisms were fair, I think some of them were misguided. Critical comments are food for thought but are not always proof that the reviewer is right and you are wrong.

I roughly grouped these comments into categories, and each bullet point is a verbatim quotation from a review. I made a few very minor edits for clarity, but left reviewers' typos unchanged to soothe my bruised ego.

You generally did a bad job

- The proposed activities are not creative and the research plan is not well thought out.
- I do not think this project can advance scientific knowledge.
- The proposed activities under this planning grant are insufficient to advance knowledge substantially.
- Strong emphasis on applied knowledge with a lack of basic scientific developments and generation of new knowledge.

You picked a good problem, but someone else should solve it

- I am convinced of the relevance of your problem but not fully about your proposed solutions.
- The proposal could do a better job explaining why this is the right team.
- There should have been somebody with Mechanical Engineering background to handle work in this area.

You didn't have a good plan

- The proposal does not map the hypotheses of the proposal on to its objectives. As a result, it's difficult to understand how research objectives serve to confirm or reject the hypotheses.
- The PI did not justify why this tool is appropriate, and why not coupling information from existing tools and studies would yield a better outcome.

- The project will essentially just use existing models without advancing them or developing them further, except to a fairly incremental extent.
- However, the proposal seems too broad and the reviewer isn't convinced about specific outcome of the project.
- Several components of the project seem more applied and nonresearch tasks.

You didn't describe your plan well

- The details on what will actually be done are few, which is a problem.
- The project description lacked specificity; methods were described in very little detail, and the aims of the project were repeated many times.
- Research objectives are broad, vague, and include terminology that is poorly defined
- The title should reflect the scope. It takes several pages for the reviewer to determine that only a small subset of the title and project summary will be addressed.
- The panel placed the proposal in the category of Not Competitive because it lacks details on methodology and the integration between engineering and social sciences is not clear with weak stakeholder involvement.
- The proposal does not provide sufficient detail on the nature of the research that will be conducted.
- While the research plan presents a number of goal, the proposal lacks details on the methodological approaches that will be used to ensure project success.
- The proposal is too broad and lacks clarity as to what specific outcomes can be expected from the study. Some example problems that will be tackled during the course of the study are highlighted. However, with few exceptions, the broad themes into which the research plan is organized seem disconnected and independent.

Your scope is too narrow

- The proposal tackles narrow aspects of a broad problem.
- The proposal's premise of fitting a large-scope problem into a simplified static solution approach is not technically supported.

Your scope is too broad

- The panel found this proposal somewhat difficult to review because there are so many different components proposed that very limited details were provided regarding the technical aspects of any one component.
- This proposal would be better served by focusing one aspect rather than promising a complete reinvention of water supplies as currently known.

- The level of effort required to create the infrastructure model and initial implementation may be too onerous to allow for a number of other applications.
- A serious concern is the ability to coordinate all this proposed work amongst the large research team in only a one year period. The budgets all show only one year for all this work to be accomplished.

The software you propose to share will be bad

- Open source software have several quality issues and support issues making them almost not useful.