

The rat race of getting funded

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I had a dream ... a dream that one day, the grant review process would be revolutionized to allow applicants to orally defend their research plans.

After all, aren't most people better at talking about their research than writing about it? The all-time low funding lines have made getting funding for research ideas a nightmare. Not only is developing a solid research idea a must, but a grant can get rejected for not

having the "little" things, like a reasonable budget justification or all possible letters of support. Indeed, navigating the grant process seems like being a participant in one of those extreme endurance physical challenges. Just a few nights ago, I was thinking about the upcoming review of a submitted grant. My dreams took over where my thoughts left off, and I was quickly transported to my "ideal" review scenario. Each applicant goes before the review panel and orally defends his/her ideas. The catch: if you have inadvertently missed a key component of the application or if there is a fatal flaw in your experimental design, you have to face an unconventional challenge ... at 2am. The night before, one of the other applicants, who had not submitted a detailed description of how he was going to use mice, was thrown into a basement filled with the exact number of mice he had proposed to use. His challenge was to ethically sacrifice the hungry mice before he was eaten himself, and without causing undue distress to his study subjects. The night before that, someone who's research was "descriptive, not mechanistic" had to figure out how her iPhone worked at the "molecular level." Her designated tools were an ice pick and a spork

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because, in her grant, she justified not investigating mechanism by stating that no appropriate tools were currently available. Tonight was supposed to be my night, and I kept thinking of possible scenarios based on what I saw as the weaknesses in my grant application. As I heard the knock on the door, I braced

myself for the upcoming challenge with a determination that, by God, I will get my grant funded! Then I realized that the knock was actually my alarm going off. I got out of bed feeling drained but with a new appreciation for our current review process. Perhaps it's not such a rat race after all.