

## Handling Rejection

Grants and fellowships are highly competitive. Your (strong) application has a good chance of being declined. So, what do you do? It is normal/human to experience the following reactions. That's OK. Just don't get stuck in the early stages – move towards acceptance and action.

**Denial.** No, this can't be happening! I worked so hard!

- Let yourself feel this disappointment and frustration. It's natural.
- Don't take it personally – most applications are rejected.
- Failure is part of life and learning. You don't learn very much if you always succeed (and who does?)
- Send a thank you to the funder – they gave you the opportunity to submit a proposal and be considered for funding. It shows maturity and professionalism and helps retain the relationship.

**Anger.** The reviewers are incompetent! They can't see the obvious value of this work!

- Again, let yourself feel this.
- Mind your ego.
- Be careful who you express your feelings to – be mindful of your professional reputation.
- It may be more about communication than about the concept. Did you assume too much knowledge on the part of the reviewers? Did you connect the dots in ways appropriate for this particular grant?
- This opportunity may not have been the right fit. Keep looking.

**Bargaining.** I bet I can call the Project Officer, explain things, and convince them to accept my proposal. I'll make a few changes and re-submit.

- Don't. It won't work and you'll damage your reputation and relationship with that Project Officer/funder.
- Show respect for the funder's decision.
- The Project Officer likely does not have the authority to override decisions.
- Think about how you respond when a student fails a test and comes to talk with you. What kind of conversation do you find productive and appropriate? Do that with the funder.
- Do revise and resubmit if/when it is appropriate.

**Depression and Futility.** Oh, I don't know if I can go through this again. It's too much work.

- You've already done much of the work – the first time is the hardest.
- Think of all the growing and learning you'll do if you keep trying!
- Nothing worth doing in life is easy.
- You've earned your degree, you've been published, you can get grants. too.
- Set a good example for your students. There's a lot of talk about "grit" and "resilience" for first-gen and minoritized students. Model what that looks like and share your story with your students.

**Acceptance and Action.** The reviewers had some good feedback. I understand that the funder received far more applications than they could fund and they declined many good proposals. What can I do to improve my chances for the next time?

- Use the reviewers' feedback to change and improve.
- Get others' feedback on your rejected proposal and your ideas for changing it.
- Examine changes/advancements in your field and the landscape.
- Talk with the Project Officer, if possible.
- It's good to let it sit for a while and come back to it. Time and distance can help you gain perspective.
- Start on the next application as early as possible.