

What happens at panel?

Cait MacPhee
cait.macphee@ed.ac.uk

@sciorama

Funding panels

- Each funding panel for each funding agency is different
- Beyond submitting your proposal and responding to referees, you have no control
- Write the best proposal you can - excellent science, well articulated
- Respond positively and constructively to referees' comments
- And wait ...

Before panel

- Panel members assigned a number of proposals as first, second or third “introducing members” (IM)
- Ideally first IM has some background in relevant research area, second and third IM may not
- IMs read proposals, referees’ reports and rebuttals for their assigned proposals *carefully*
- Also read other proposals/reports/rebuttals for which they are not IM
- Some weeks in which to do this, but time dedicated to reading proposals can vary
- IMs write a short report (under headings) and give a score
- Initial ranking of proposals happens offline

Before panel

- Importance given to panel member's own viewpoints varies by funder
- EPSRC does not allow “re-review” by panel members
- Pre-panel report focuses on referee's comments (issues raised, rebuttal, discrepancies)
- General comments about resources requested
- Specific feedback to the applicant
- Quality of referee's reports, reviewers and rebuttals is of vital importance

Sidebar

- In some panels, proposals initially given low scores are discussed only briefly
- In other panels, low-scoring proposals are not discussed at all (depends on number)
- In some panels, scores applied by IMs are compared and discussed in advance
- Purely for efficiency (not personal!)

At panel

- Any additional papers (referees' reports and rebuttals) are tabled
- Programme manager introduces scheme, reiterates “rules” and raises any issues
- Proposals are ordered for discussion based on initial IM scores
- Discussion order determined by panel Chair (top, middle, bottom)
- Allows comparison of proposals of similar quality

At panel

- First IM introduces proposal - background, aims, method (to give context); referees' comments and rebuttals summarised
- Second/third IMs add any information omitted by first IM
- First and second IMs focus on (referee's assessment of) quality, third focuses on impact/ national importance
- Very different types of proposals will be compared and ranked

At panel

- Discussion opened up to rest of panel
- Initial (arbitrary) aggregate score decided by the panel
- Move onto next proposal
- Time spent discussing each proposal can vary
- Each proposal is placed in rank order relative to other proposals already discussed
- Rank order changes in light of later discussions
- After all proposals discussed, relative rank order agreed by whole panel

Sidebar

- Panel operations depend on funder
- BBSRC panels operate very differently
 - IMs can and do “re-review”
 - Pre-report form different
 - After discussion of science, resources are considered for competitive proposals
 - Outcome of panel is still a rank-ordered list

So what?

- If you can't do anything about happenings at panel, why should you care?
 - You are writing your proposal *for the referee*
 - Illustrates why a clear proposal is important
 - Illustrates why a clear and compelling lay summary is important
 - Illustrates why a clear rebuttal is important
- None of this is personal

Opportunities

- Referee proposals
- Ask to see other's proposals & referees' reports
- Organise a mock panel
- Talk to people who assess proposals and/or sit on panels
- Talk to the Programme Managers
- Ask for feedback
- Always revisit your rebuttal before submitting

Fellowships

- All of the above, plus an interview
- Remember the three “P’s” - person, project and place. Why you, why this, and why there?
- Panel have a feel for the science (proposal, referee’s comments, rebuttal), now they want a feel for you
- It is almost impossible to prepare for everything
- It is *undesirable* to prepare for everything

Fellowships

- Often asked to prepare a presentation
 - Try and pre-empt their questions (referees' reports, the three "P's")
 - Practice, but be flexible
- You will be expected to blow your own trumpet (ouch!)
 - Independence
 - Ambition/ passion
 - "Leadership": inspiration, innovation, communication, career development, research quality, *potential*

Fellowships - the Vision Thing

- You need to be able to convincingly present the “Big Picture”
 - Where do you want to be in 10 years?
 - Where will the research be in 10 years?
 - What would you do with £5 million?
 - What are the likely impacts of your work?
 - And how will you realise them?
 - How does your research address societal challenges?
 - Who are your competitors?
 - Who is likely to care about your research?

Mock interviews

- Mock interviews do not prepare you for the exact questions you will be asked but:
 - Give you a chance to practice and refine your presentation
 - Prepare you to think on your feet
 - Give you confidence
 - Allow you to think about general responses in advance

Final thoughts

- It may feel personal, but it's not
- Be prepared to ask for (and take) advice
- It's not just about the science, but how you present it
- “Grantsmanship” can be learnt
- Start small but think big
- Try and remember why you are doing this

Good luck!