

American Astronomical Society (AAS) and
NASA Astronomy and Astrophysics Advisory Committee (AAAC)
Survey on Grant Proposal Pressure
February 2015

*** DRAFT ***

I. Introduction

=====

The major federal agencies that provide competitive grant funding to US astronomers -- NASA, NSF, and DOE -- all report declining proposal success rates in recent years. For example, the proposal success rate in NSF's Astronomy and Astrophysics Research Grants (AAG) program dropped from a peak of 50.4% in 1990 to a low of just 15.4% in 2003 [...insert more vital stats, examples here...]. Such low grant success rates are widely believed to be detrimental to the overall health of the profession. Potential effects include rejection of many or most excellent science proposals; excessive workloads for grant reviewers; and the departure of talented young astronomers to other fields.

The AAS Committee on Astronomy and Public Policy (CAPP) has prepared this survey jointly with the NASA Astronomy and Astrophysics Advisory Committee (AAAC) as part of an investigation of the causes and effects of declining grant proposal success rates. Data from NSF AST, NASA, and DOE show that, despite a relatively stable total number of US astronomers, much of the increase in proposal pressure results from more individual PIs, as opposed to more multiple proposals from a few PIs. But a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the increasing pressure requires additional information.

Your participation is needed...
Responses are anonymous...
Data will be used for...
Survey will take approximately xx minutes...

II. Career Info

=====

What is your current employment status?
(grad student, postdoc, research staff, tenure-track faculty, tenured faculty)

At what kind of institution are you employed?
-- Research university with graduate department
-- Primarily undergraduate institution
-- Private observatory
-- NASA center
-- National observatory
-- Industry (aerospace; optics; detector technology...)

More demographic info:
-- How long since PhD?
-- Looking for permanent job?
-- If postdoc, how many previous postdoc positions?

Is any of your regular salary currently from PI grant support? Do not include academic summer salary.

If yes,
-- What is the funding agency or agencies?
-- What percent of your salary comes from those grants?
-- Were you a PI, a Co-I, or neither (for each grant)?

If your salary is a 9-month academic salary, do you currently (or within last xx years?) have grant support for summer salary?

If yes,
-- what is the funding agency or agencies?
-- what percent of your summer salary comes from those grants?
-- Were you a PI, a Co-I, or neither (for each grant)?

III. Grant application history: =====

On how many grant applications to each of the following have you served as PI during the last 5 years? How many were approved?
[Include formula-driven grants such as HST, Spitzer...?]

Agency	Requests	Approved
-----	-----	-----
NSF AST		
NASA [div/branch?]		
DOE		

On how many grant applications to each of the following have you served as CoI during the last 5 years?
[Include formula-driven grants such as HST, Spitzer...?]

Agency	Requests	Approved
-----	-----	-----
NSF AST		
NASA [div/branch?]		
DOE		

[Solicit explicit \$ amounts requested/approved?]

(If N>0 PI or CoI grant applications:)
What was the main reason or reasons you sought grant support?
-- To pay your own regular salary
-- To pay your own summer salary
-- To support a graduate student researcher
-- To support a postdoctoral researcher
-- ???

Is writing grant applications an unspoken but implicit expectation for your position?

Is writing grant applications an explicit expectation for your position?

How many times have you served on a grant review panel for each of the following agencies during the last 5 years? How many proposals did you read for each panel?

NSF AST:

NASA:

DOE:

[How to capture temporal trends better?]

IV. Effect of grant proposal success rate on your career

=====

I feel that my career has been negatively impacted by low proposal success rates at NSF, NASA, and/or DOE:

(strongly agree <--> neutral <--> strongly disagree)

I am seriously considering leaving astronomy because of low proposal success rates:

(strongly agree <--> neutral <--> strongly disagree)

NSF AST, NASA, and DOE are all considering or have begun limiting applicants to 2 or fewer PI or CoI proposals per year. I believe such limits are a good solution for addressing low success rates.

(strongly agree <--> neutral <--> strongly disagree)