

Scientists from minority-serving institutions are underrepresented in grant peer review

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While numerous studies have described the funding discrepancies faced by scientists at minority-serving institutions (MSIs), there is a relative paucity of information available about MSI-based scientists'

participation in grant review, the process used by research funders to allocate their budgets. A new article from the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) sheds further light on grant review and the factors that underlie scientists' ability to participate in it.

Writing in the journal *BioScience*, AIBS scientists Stephen A. Gallo, Joanne H. Sullivan, and DaJoie R. Crosland describe the results of a survey disseminated to thousands of MSI-based scientists aimed at elucidating discrepancies in [grant review](#) participation between MSI-based scientists and those who work at traditionally White institutions (TWIs). The survey questions addressed a range of topics, including the scientists' recent funding and peer review experiences, as well as their motivations for engaging in the grant [review process](#). Uncovering differences in grant review participation is particularly important, say the survey authors, because of its close linkage with eventual funding outcomes. "Bias will remain embedded in the review process until the composition of those who review is sufficiently more diverse," they say.

The [survey results](#) point to serious issues in grant review: Only 45% of respondents from MSIs reported participating in the grant review process, compared with an earlier survey's finding that 76% of scientists from TWIs were. This mismatch cannot be accounted for by differences in frequency of grant submission (which is roughly the same) or in scientist preferences, say the authors—76% of MSI scientists reported an interest in taking part in grant review.

To illuminate the causes of the grant review gap, the study authors posed a series of free-text and multiple-choice questions. In their responses, the participants noted a lack of invitations to review, as well as time pressures from teaching and service obligations, as principal obstacles to participation. One respondent noted, "Seems like you had to be a member of some club to get invited to participate. Although I am a successful [principal investigator] on several well-funded government

and foundation grants over my 34 years in [[higher education](#)], I was invited only once to serve on an external grant panel."

The authors argue that grant review disparities may even play a key role in perpetuating deleterious feedback loops that hamper efforts to increase inclusion and equity in science: "URM [underrepresented minority] scientists are underfunded and are therefore underrepresented on peer review panels, because funding success is often a requirement of review participation, which leads to future funding disparities." Only through more inclusive grant review recruiting and training, they say, will it be possible to break the "cycle of exclusion" presently beleaguering URM scientists.

More information: Stephen A Gallo et al, Scientists from Minority-Serving Institutions and Their Participation in Grant Peer Review, *BioScience* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/biosci/biab130](https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biab130)

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