

Write for the Reviewers

How do reviewers identify the winners?

NSF uses two criteria to review all fellowship applications:

- Intellectual Merit - “the potential to advance knowledge”
- Broader Impacts - “the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific desirable societal outcomes”

NSF tells reviewers to apply these criteria by considering whether:

- you show potential to advance knowledge and achieve desired societal outcomes
- you explore creative, original or transformative concepts
- your research plan is well reasoned, organized and justified
- you are qualified to conduct proposed research
- you have access to necessary resources

Regarding intellectual merit, reviewers especially look to see whether you:

- have a record of progressive and goal-oriented preparation
- present a research project generated by you (not your advisor)
- deploy a clearly-defined and appropriate methodology

Regarding broader impacts, reviewers especially look for:

- *demonstrable* impacts, not merely intentions
- focus on bigger projects and goals to which specific research contributes
- community outreach
- drive, perspective, and commitment needed to solve the problem
- a contribution to making science more diverse

Taken together, reviewers are convinced by:

- deep thought (emphasizing minutiae without a sense of the big picture won't win)
- a vision for the future of your field, its value, and a commitment to your project
- the connection between your career goals and motivation
- your ability to communicate science to scholars and the public
- progressive mastery of the research skills which the project requires
- a link between your past experiences and your future direction