



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

NSF Regional Grants Conference Merit Review

October 17-18, 2011

Hosted by: The University of Texas at Austin • Austin, TX



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

Panelists

Thomas Baerwald

Senior Science Advisor, Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences, Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences

Theresa Maldonado

Division Director; Directorate for Engineering; Division of Engineering Education & Centers

Karen Santoro

Designated Agency Ethics Official; Office of the Director; Office of the General Counsel

Judith Verbeke

Acting Division Director; Directorate for Biological Sciences; Division of Biological Infrastructure

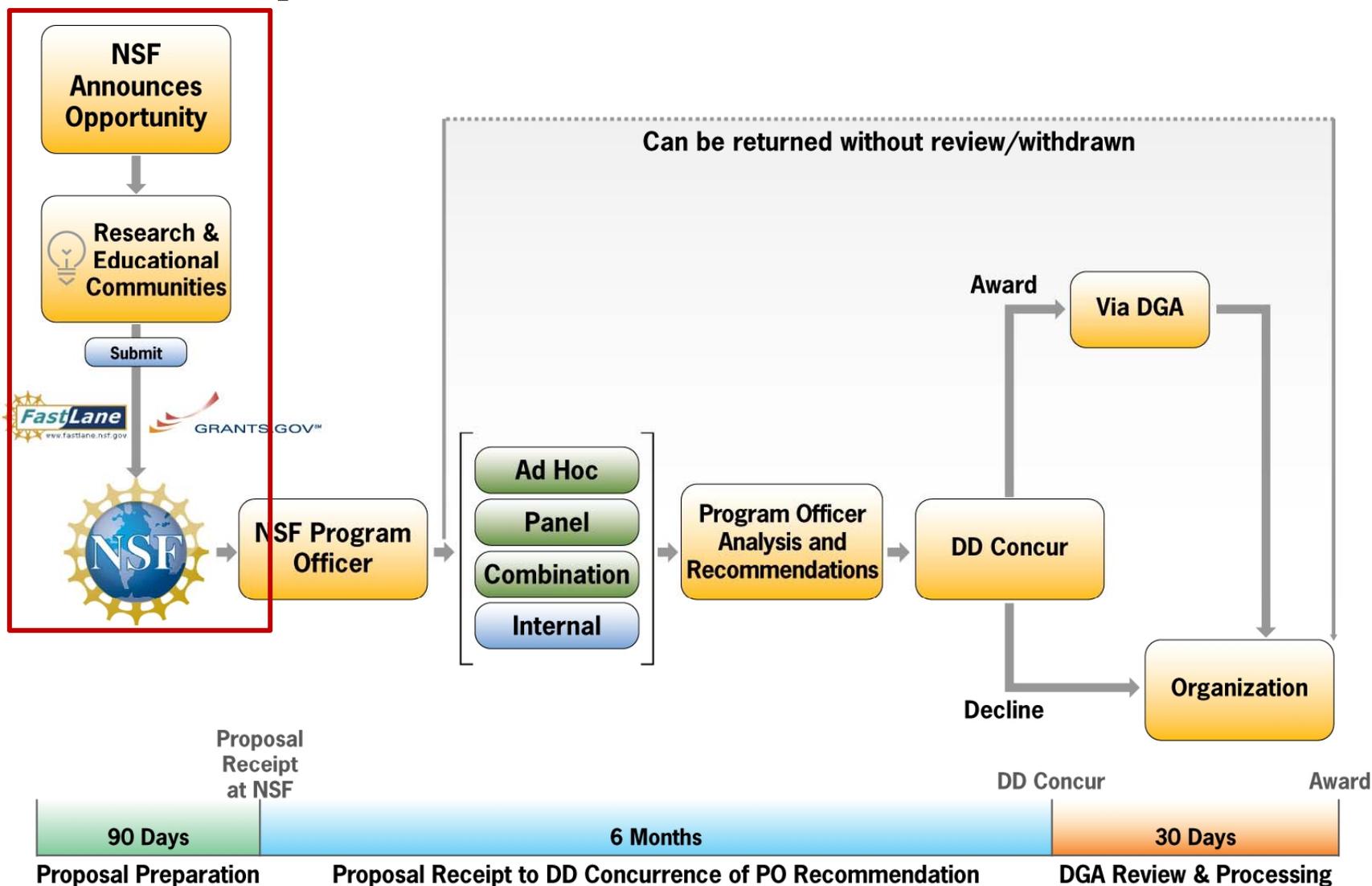


Topics Covered

- **Proposal and Award Timeline**
 - **Proposal Preparation and Submission**
 - Reminders When Preparing Proposals
 - **Proposal Review and Processing**
 - Program Officer Review
 - Proposal Review Criteria
 - Types of Reviews
 - Becoming a Reviewer
 - Managing Conflicts of Interest
 - Funding Decisions
 - **Award Processing**
 - Issuing the Award
 - **Conclusion**
-



NSF Proposal & Award Process Timeline



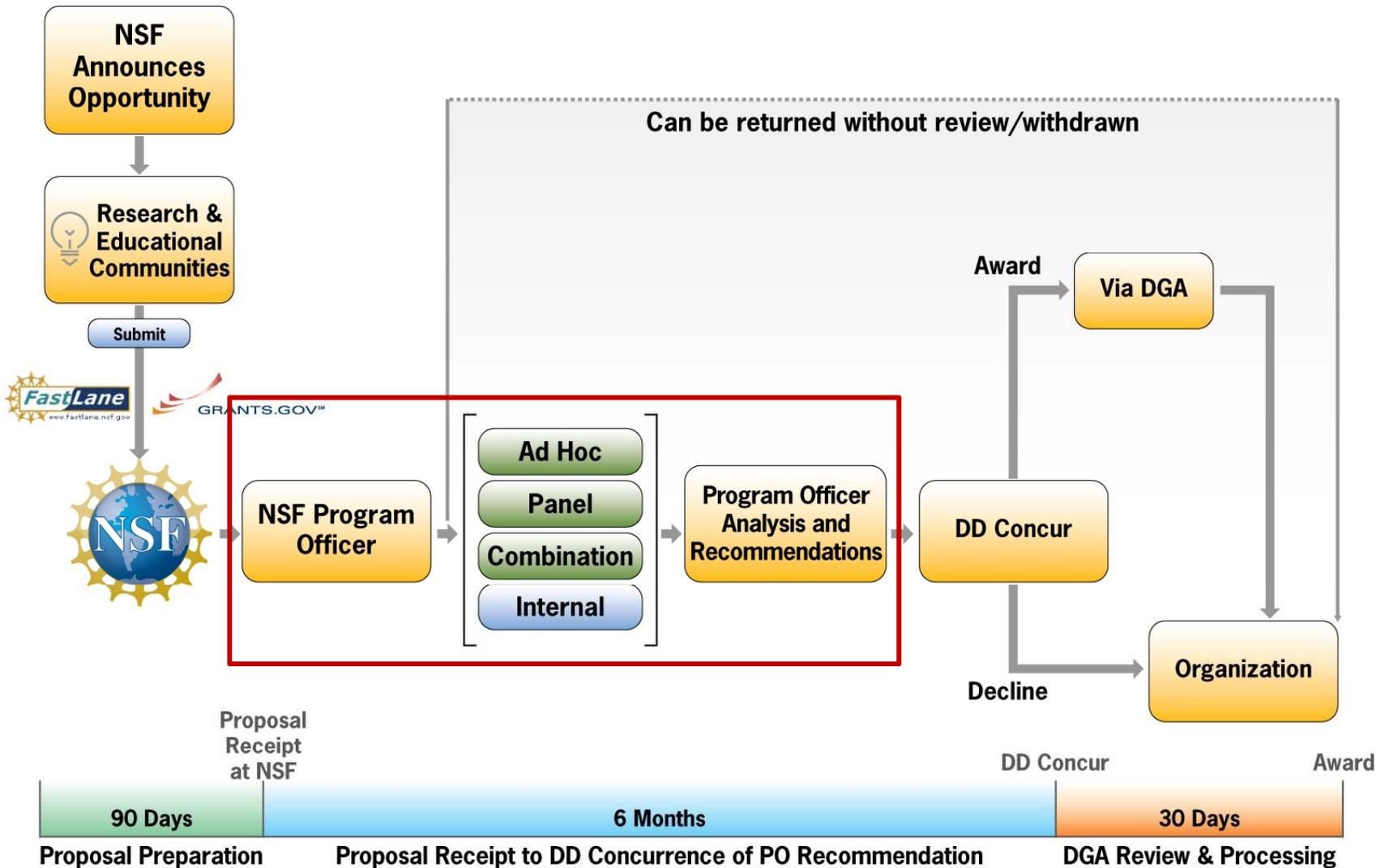


Reminders When Preparing Proposals

- **Read the funding opportunity; ask a Program Officer for clarifications if needed**
 - **Address all the proposal review criteria**
 - **Understand the NSF merit review process**
 - **Avoid omissions and mistakes**
 - **Check your proposal to verify that it is complete!**
-



Proposal Review and Processing





Program Officer Review

- **Upon receipt at NSF, the Proposal Processing Unit routes proposals to the correct program office.**
 - **The Program Officer conducts a preliminary review to ensure they are:**
 - Complete;
 - Timely; and
 - Conform to proposal preparation requirements.
 - **NSF may return a proposal without review if it does not meet the requirements above.**
 - The return without review process will be discussed in greater detail later in the session.
-



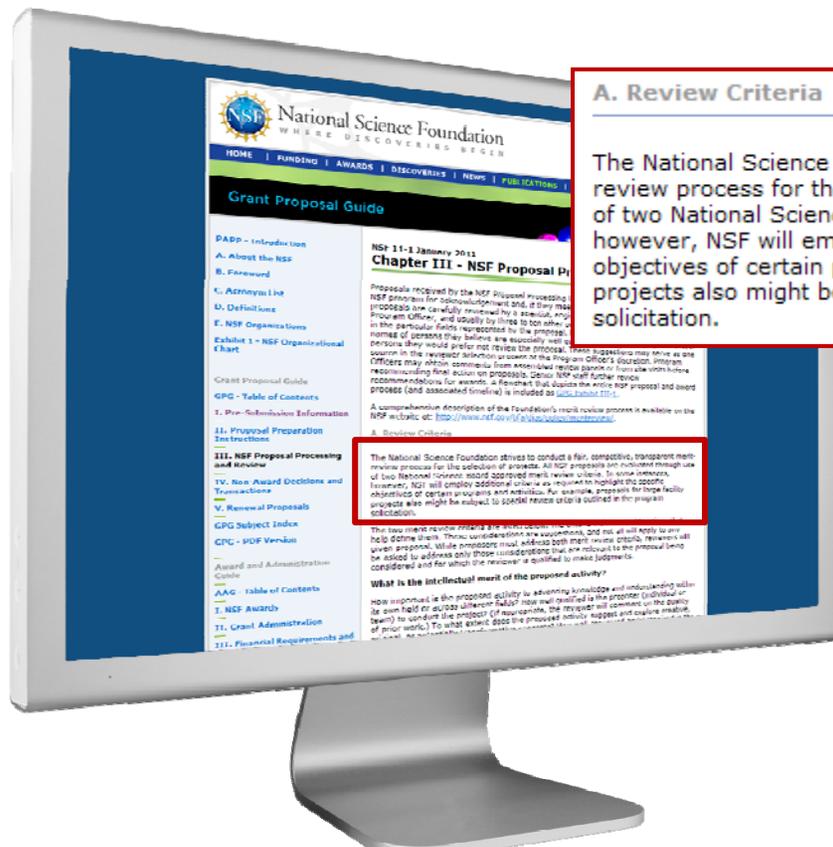
Proposal Review Criteria

- **Throughout the review process, proposals are evaluated against:**
 - **National Science Board approved merit review criteria:**
 - What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?
 - What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?
 - **Program specific criteria (stated in the program solicitation).**
-



Merit Review Criteria

The Grant Proposal Guide (GPG) contains a description of the Merit Review Criteria



A. Review Criteria

The National Science Foundation strives to conduct a fair, competitive, transparent merit-review process for the selection of projects. All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of two National Science Board approved merit review criteria. In some instances, however, NSF will employ additional criteria as required to highlight the specific objectives of certain programs and activities. For example, proposals for large facility projects also might be subject to special review criteria outlined in the program solicitation.

The National Science Foundation strives to conduct a fair, competitive, transparent merit-review process for the selection of projects. All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of two National Science Board approved merit review criteria. In some instances, however, NSF will employ additional criteria as required to highlight the specific objectives of certain programs and activities. For example, proposals for large facility projects also might be subject to special review criteria outlined in the program solicitation.

The two merit review criteria are:

- 1. Intellectual Merit: This criterion assesses the quality of the proposed activity by examining knowledge and understanding within the field or discipline and the applicant's qualifications to conduct the project.
- 2. Broader Impacts: This criterion assesses the potential of the proposed activity to benefit society and advance the field.

What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?
How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within the field or discipline? How well qualified is the proposer (individual or team) to conduct the project (if applicable, the reviewer will comment on the quality of prior work)? To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and evaluate creative and/or innovative approaches to the proposed activity?



Intellectual Merit Considerations

- **How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields?**
 - **How well-qualified is the proposer (individual or team) to conduct the project? (If appropriate, the reviewer will comment on the quality of prior work.)**
 - **To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original or potentially transformative concepts?**
 - **How well-conceived and organized is the proposed activity?**
 - **Is there sufficient access to resources?**
-



Broader Impacts Considerations

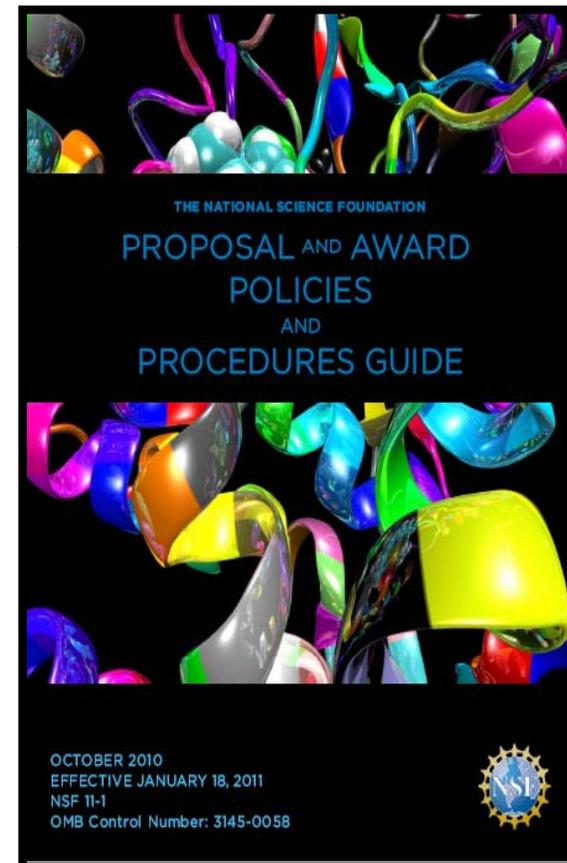
- How well does the activity advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training, and learning?
 - How well does the activity broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic)?
 - To what extent will the activity enhance the infrastructure for research and education, such as facilities, instrumentation, networks, and partnerships?
 - Will the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding?
 - What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society?
-



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

Examples of Broader Impacts

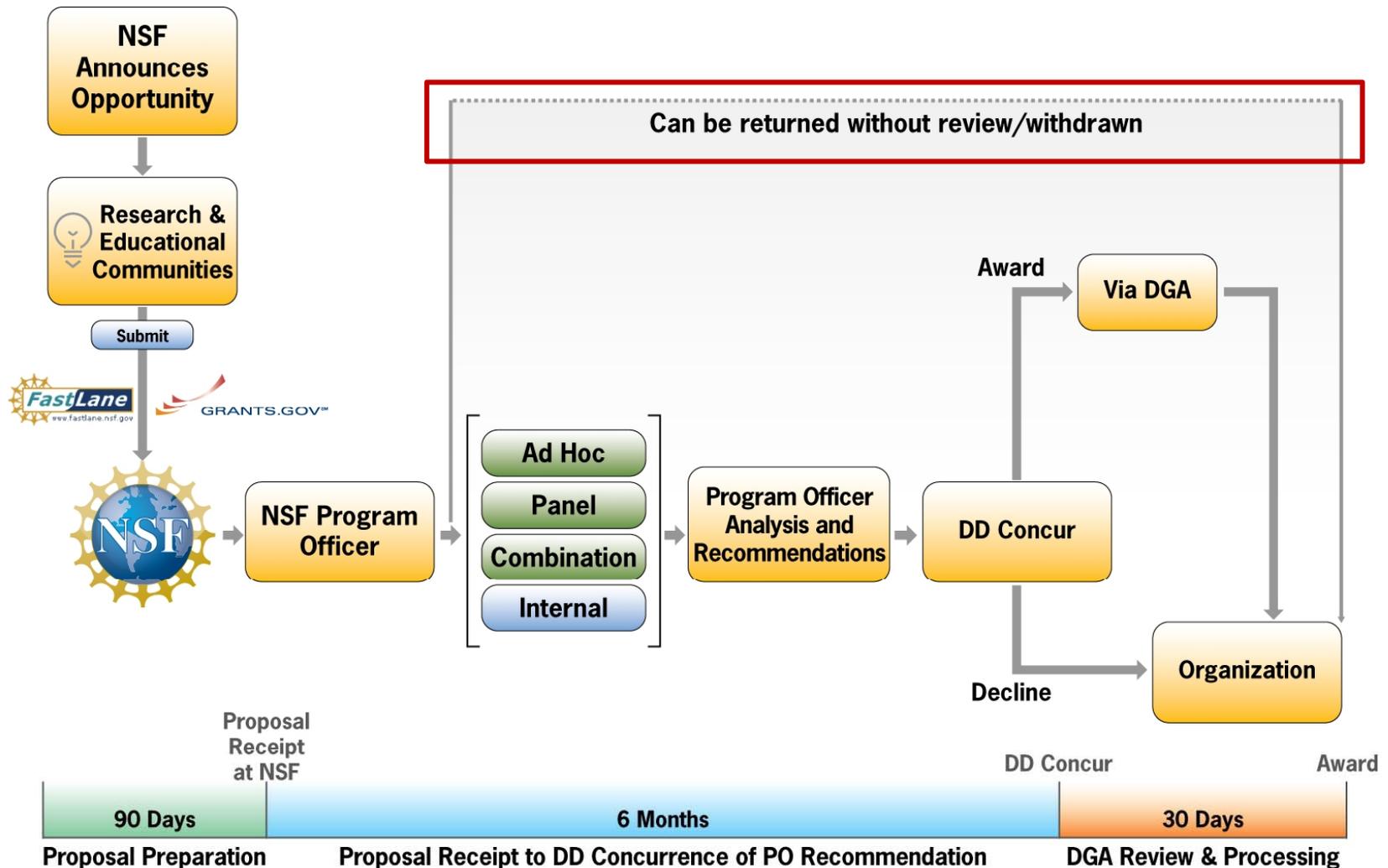
The GPG contains examples of Broader Impacts. For further information, visit:



<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/broaderimpacts.pdf>



Proposal Review and Processing





Return of Proposals Without Review

- **Per Important Notice 127, *Implementation of new Grant Proposal Guide Requirements related to the Broader Impacts Criterion*:**
 - Proposals that do not separately address both criteria within the one-page Project Summary **will be** returned without review.
 - **Per the GPG postdoctoral researcher mentoring requirement:**
 - Proposals that include postdoctoral researchers must include, as a supplementary document, a description of the mentoring activities that will be provided for such individuals.
 - The mentoring plan must not exceed one page per project.
-



Other Reasons for Return of Proposals Without Review

- It is inappropriate for funding by the National Science Foundation.
 - It is submitted with insufficient lead time before the activity is scheduled to begin.
 - It is a full proposal that was submitted by a proposer that has received a “not invited” response to the submission of a preliminary proposal.
 - It is a duplicate of, or substantially similar to, a proposal already under consideration by NSF from the same submitter.
-

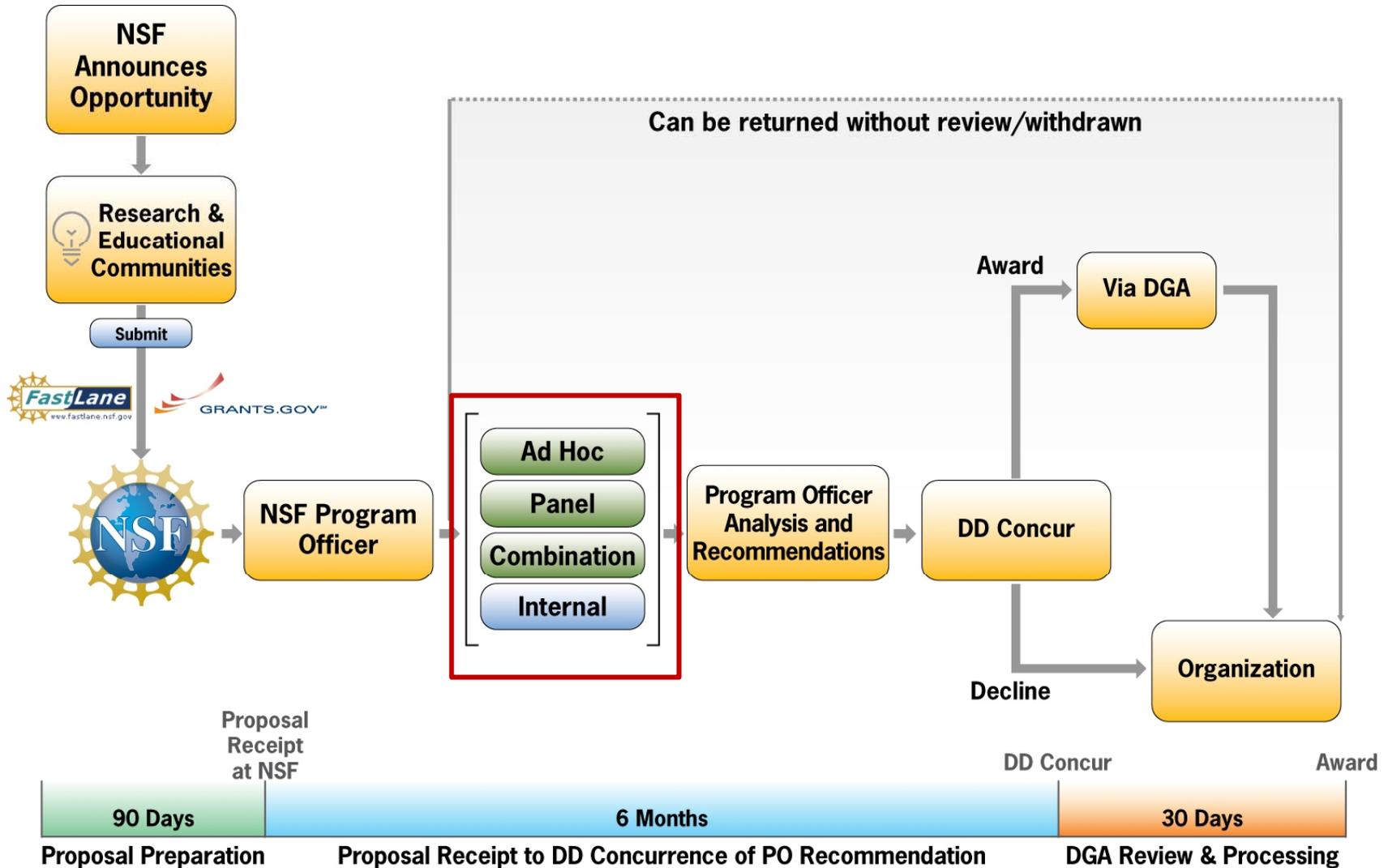


Other Reasons for Return of Proposals Without Review

- It does not meet NSF proposal preparation requirements, such as page limitations, formatting instructions, and electronic submission, as specified in the GPG or program solicitation.
 - It is not responsive to the GPG or program announcement/solicitation.
 - It does not meet an announced proposal deadline date (and time, where specified).
 - It was previously reviewed and declined and has not been substantially revised.
 - It duplicates another proposal that was already awarded.
-



Proposal Review and Processing





Types of Reviews

- ***Ad hoc*: proposals sent out for review —**
 - *Ad hoc* reviewers usually have specific expertise in a field related to the proposal.
 - Some proposals may undergo *ad hoc* review only.
 - **Panel: review conducted by peers at NSF —**
 - Panel reviewers usually have a broader scientific knowledge.
 - Some proposals may undergo only a panel review.
 - Some proposals may undergo reviews by multiple panels (especially for those proposals with cross-cutting themes).
-



Types of Reviews

- **Combination: some proposals may undergo supplemental *ad hoc* reviews after a panel review.**
 - **Internal: review by NSF Program Officers only—**
 - Examples of internally reviewed proposals:
 - Proposals submitted to Rapid Response Research Grants (RAPID)
 - Proposals submitted to EARly-concept Grants for Exploratory Research (EAGER)
 - Proposals for conferences or workshops
-



How are Reviewers Selected?

- **Types of reviewers recruited:**
 - Reviewers with specific content expertise
 - Reviewers with general science or education expertise
 - **Sources of Reviewers:**
 - Program Officer's knowledge of the research area
 - References listed in proposal
 - Recent professional society programs
 - Computer searches of S&E journal articles related to the proposal
 - Former reviewers
 - Reviewer recommendations included in proposal or sent by email
 - **Three to ten external reviewers per award are selected.**
-



How Do I Become a Reviewer?

- **Contact the NSF Program Officer(s) of the program(s) that fit your expertise:**
 - Introduce yourself and your research experience.
 - Tell them you want to become a reviewer for their program.
 - Ask them when the next panel will be held.
 - Offer to send a 2-page CV with current contact information.
 - Stay in touch if you don't hear back right away.
-



What is the Role of the Reviewer?

- **Review all proposal material and consider:**
 - The two NSF merit review criteria and any program specific criteria.
 - The adequacy of the proposed project plan including the budget, resources, and timeline.
 - The priorities of the scientific field and of the NSF program.
 - The potential risks and benefits of the project.
 - **Make independent written comments on the quality of the proposal content.**
-



What is the Role of the Review Panel?

- **Discuss the merits of the proposal with the other panelists**
 - **Write a summary proposal review based on that discussion**
 - **Provide some indication of the relative merits of different proposals considered**
-



Why Serve on an NSF Panel?

- **Gain first-hand knowledge of the merit review process**
 - **Learn about common problems with proposals**
 - **Discover proposal writing strategies**
 - **Meet colleagues and NSF Program Officers managing the programs related to your research**
-



Managing Conflicts of Interest in the Review Process

- **The primary purpose is to remove or limit the influence of ties to an applicant institution or investigator that could affect reviewer advice.**
 - **The secondary purpose is to preserve the trust of the scientific community, Congress, and the general public in the integrity, effectiveness, and evenhandedness of NSF's merit review process.**
-



Examples of Affiliations with Applicant Institutions

- **Current employment at the institution**
 - **Other association with the institution, such as being a consultant**
 - **Being considered for employment or any formal or informal reemployment arrangement at the institution**
 - **Any office, governing board membership, or relevant committee membership at the institution**
-

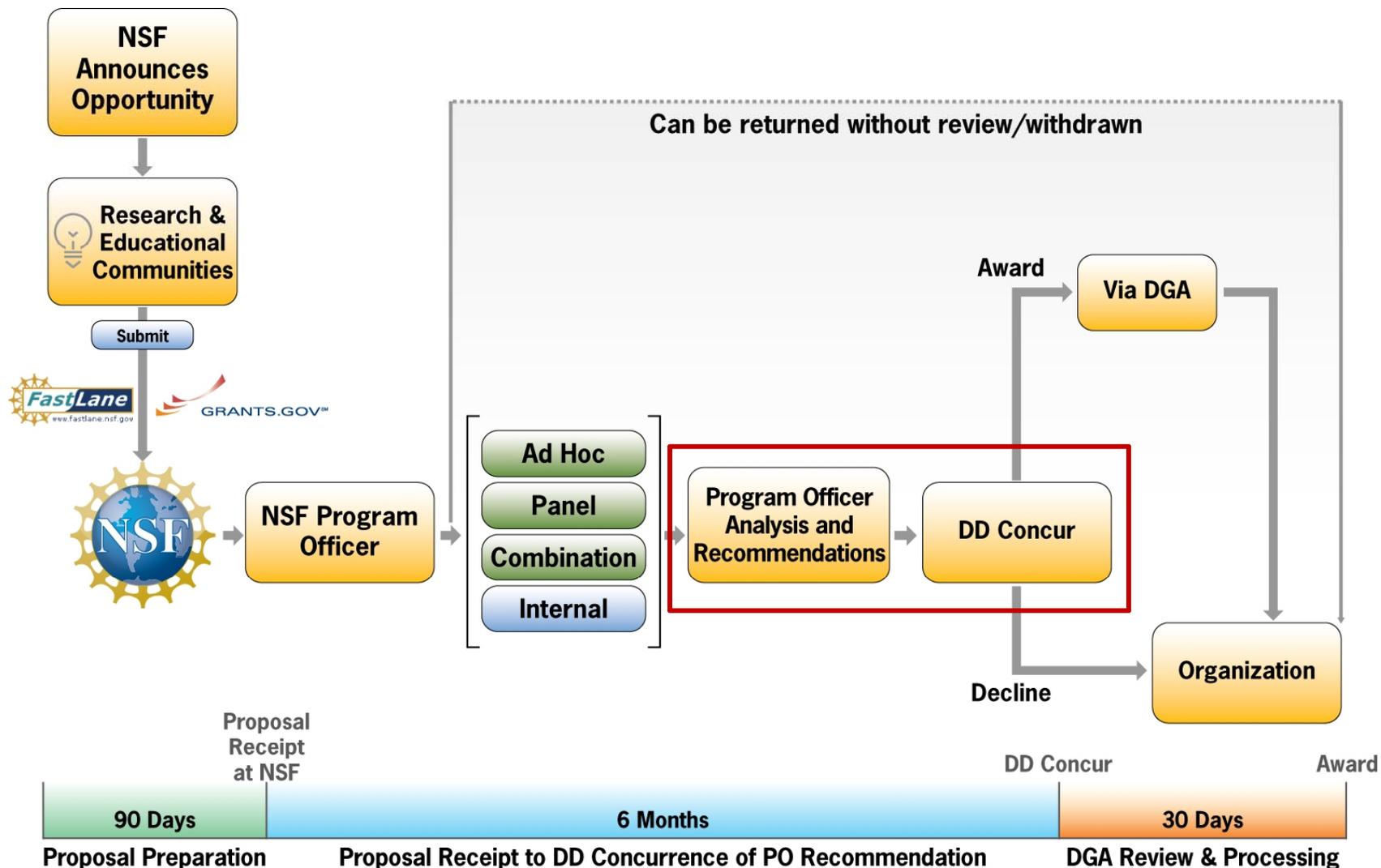


Examples of Personal Relationships with Investigator or Project Director

- **Known family or marriage relationship**
 - **Business partner**
 - **Past or present thesis advisor or thesis student**
 - **Collaboration on a project or book, article, or paper within the last 48 months**
 - **Co-edited a journal, compendium, or conference proceedings within the last 24 months**
-



Proposal Review and Processing





Funding Decisions

- **The merit review panel summary provides:**
 - Review of the proposal and a recommendation on funding.
 - Feedback (strengths and weaknesses) to the proposers.
 - **NSF Program Officers make funding recommendations guided by program goals and portfolio considerations.**
 - **NSF Division Directors either concur or reject the Program Officer's funding recommendations.**
-



Feedback from Merit Review

- Reviewer ratings (such as: E, VG, G, F, P)
- Analysis of how well proposal addresses both review criteria: Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts
- Proposal strengths and weaknesses
- Reasons for a declination (if applicable)

If you have any questions, contact the cognizant Program Officer.



Documentation from Merit Review

- **Verbatim copies of individual reviews, excluding reviewer identities**
 - **Panel Summary or Summaries (if panel review was used)**
 - **Context Statement (usually)**
 - **PO to PI comments (written or verbal) as necessary to explain a declination (if applicable)**
-



Reasons for Declines

- **The proposal was not considered to be competitive based on the merit review criteria and the program office concurred.**
 - **The proposal had flaws or issues identified by the program office.**
 - **The program funds were not adequate to fund all competitive proposals.**
-



Revisions and Resubmissions

- **Points to consider:**

- Do the reviewers and the NSF Program Officer identify significant strengths in your proposal?
- Can you address the weaknesses that reviewers and the Program Officer identified?
- Are there other ways you or your colleagues think you can strengthen a resubmission?

As always, if you have questions, contact the cognizant Program Officer.



NSF Reconsideration Process

- **Explanation from Program Officer and/or Division Director**
 - **Written request for reconsideration to Assistant Director within 90 days of the decision**
 - **Request from organization to Deputy Director of NSF**
-

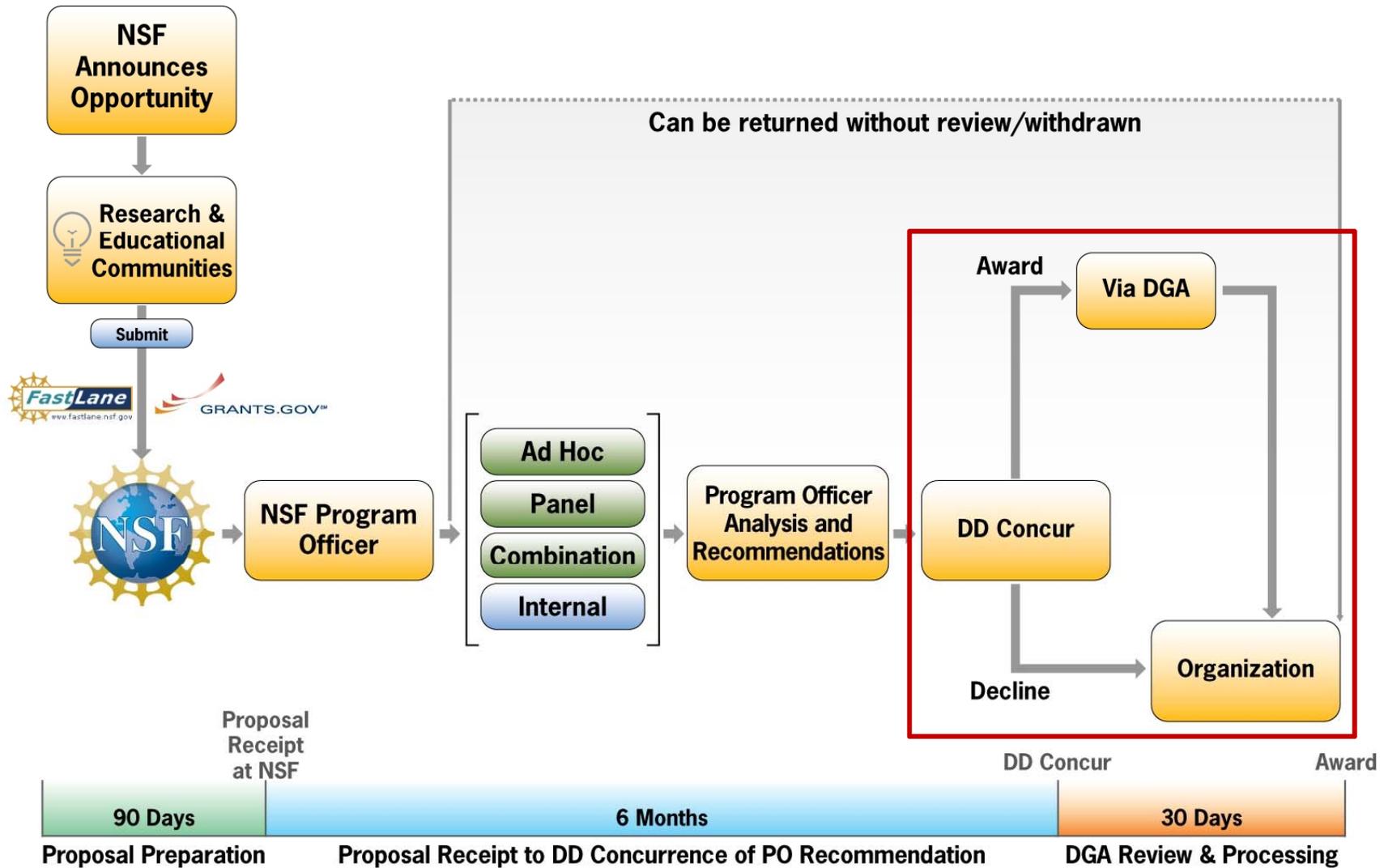


Possible Considerations for Funding a Competitive Proposal

- Addresses all review criteria
 - Likely high impact
 - Broadening participation
 - Educational impact
 - Impact on institution/state
 - Special programmatic considerations (e.g. CAREER/RUI/EPSCoR)
 - Other support for PI
 - “Launching” versus “Maintaining”
 - Portfolio balance
-



Award Processing





Issuing the Award

- **NSF's Division of Grants and Agreements (DGA) reviews the recommendation from the program office for business, financial, and policy implications.**
 - **NSF's grants and agreements officers make the official award as long as:**
 - The institution has an adequate grants management capacity.
 - The PI/Co-PIs do not have overdue annual or final reports.
 - There are no other outstanding issues with the institution or PI.
-



For More Information

Go to NSF's Home Page (<http://www.nsf.gov>)

The image shows a computer monitor displaying the NSF website's 'Merit Review' page. The page content is shown in a larger, semi-transparent overlay on the right side of the image. The overlay includes the NSF logo, navigation menu, search bar, and the main content area titled 'Merit Review'. The main content area includes a diagram of the merit review process, a list of links, and a paragraph of text.

Merit Review

Through its merit review process, the National Science Foundation (NSF) ensures that proposals submitted are reviewed in a fair, competitive, transparent, and in-depth manner. The merit review process is described in detail in Part I of the NSF [Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide \(PAPPG\)](#); the [Grant Proposal Guide \(GPG\)](#). The GPG provides guidance for the preparation and submission of proposals to NSF.

The goal of this Merit Review website is to help you better understand the NSF merit review process as well as identify resources for additional information (including applicable chapters in the GPG). Sections of this website include:

- [Director's Statement on Merit Review](#)
- [Phase I: Proposal Preparation and Submission](#)
- [Phase II: Proposal Review and Processing](#)
- [Phase III: Award Processing](#)
- [Non-Award Decisions and Transactions](#)
- [Merit Review Facts](#)
- [Why You Should Volunteer to Serve As An NSF Reviewer](#)
- [Additional Resources](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

An overview of the NSF Proposal and Award Process is presented in the diagram below. The text in the following sections correspond to the different areas on the diagram.



National Science Foundation
WHERE DISCOVERIES BEGIN

For More Information

Ask Early, Ask Often!

[nsf.gov/staff](https://www.nsf.gov/staff)

[nsf.gov/staff/orglist.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/staff/orglist.jsp)

[nsf.gov/about/career_opps/rotators/index.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/about/career_opps/rotators/index.jsp)
