

NBIF Review Process

For every application that comes to NBIF, regardless if it is submitted with a round based program, or as an individual application, NBIF performs a rigorous review. While this is not a technical review, we do solicit the expertise of individuals in our ecosystem who can provide a level of technical expertise, but more importantly, are able to evaluate on the potential for impact that any given proposal may have. The expectation when you submit to NBIF is that you are submitting an application that is scientifically valid; the evaluation of a proposal will correspond to each program's review criteria and the overall potential for innovation and impact.

Review Committee Selection

To support the review of incoming applications, NBIF solicits a committee of individuals with experience and expertise in the applied research space. The composition is typically a representative from NBIF, a representative from PETL, and several technical experts external to the organization. These experts typically are trained at the graduate level and have specialized expertise from a wide variety of backgrounds. To mitigate potential conflicts of interest, these are typically individuals who are not able to receive NBIF funding in their current capacity. The identities of review committee members will always remain anonymous. Review committee members themselves are also subject to strict confidentiality rules, and in fact sign Non-Disclosure Agreements prior to joining a review committee. It is understood that they are legally bound to not share anything they read or discuss during these reviews, as proposals may contain proprietary information related to the research program or industrial relationships.

Prior to beginning the review process, review committee members are briefed on the program for which they are reviewing, including the overarching goals and the review criteria. They are also provided with training to mitigate bias in the review process.

Review of Applications

Once applications have been reviewed, they are sent to the review committee. At this time, the review committee members are able to declare a conflict of interest if it exists, and recuse themselves if needed. Reviewers access applications via our online portal, and are able to review them there. They will provide a score between 1 and 10 according to this[link] rubric against each review criterion. At this time, they will also provide any relevant comments. These are intended to provide context as to the scores provided, but will also serve as helpful feedback to applicants later on in the review process. This process of reviewing applications is dependent on the volume of applications being reviewed, but can take between 3-6 weeks.

The Alignment Meeting

Once a reviewer has completed their reviews, the scores and corresponding comments are delivered to NBIF via our portal. Once all reviewers have completed this process, the scores are compiled together in one document for all applications in preparation for our alignment meeting. The average score between reviewers is listed on this document. A statistical normalization is applied to this average score to account for skew in how each reviewer may score. This normalization is called a z-score, and results in a numeric value for each application that falls between 1 and 100 with the centre being approximately 50. Based on this normalized score, applications are assembled on a ranked list from highest to lowest. Divergent scores between reviewers are flagged so that a discussion may take place to understand the perspectives of why reviewers have scored an application differently.

During the alignment meeting, reviewers and the NBIF program manager will discuss applications, starting with those ranked highest. During this meeting, reviewers are able to adjust their scores if new information yielded during the review meeting prompts them to do so. The reviewers are able to share their thoughts and recommendations around funding during this meeting, or request conditions be applied to awards if appropriate.

Decisions and Next Steps

Following this meeting, the ranked list is adjusted to account for any possible score changes. Based on available funds and the ranking of the final score sheet, NBIF will be able to put forward a proposed decision on which proposals to approve and which ones to decline. It's important to note that the number of meritorious projects often exceed available budget; thus declined applications are still worthy projects that are welcome to re-apply.

This proposal to approve and decline applications is put forward for final approval. Depending on the level of funding required to approve a request, this may go to the Director of Research, the CEO, or the NBIF Board. These proposals are rigorously reviewed, as no NBIF funding decision is taken lightly. Once a final approval to approve and decline proposals is approved by the appropriate authority, final steps are taken internally to prepare for this process.

Prior to sending out notices of decision, reviewer scores and comments are consolidated into one space in the portal. Reviewer comments are checked for appropriateness. In the rare event that a reviewer comment is inappropriate or unhelpful, it is deleted and the reviewer is contacted and removed from our review roster if needed.

Finally, Notices of Decision are sent electronically to both applicants and their institutions. Review scores and comments are made visible to applicants on the online portal so they may incorporate this feedback into future decisions.