FREE GUIDE

Grant Rejection Response Guide (Free PDF)

What to do after a grant is declined: first-week steps, a short feedback request email, a log for reviewer comments and a section for deciding whether to resubmit.

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> This guide walks you through what to do after a grant application is declined: the first week, asking for feedback, logging reviewer comments and deciding whether to revise, resubmit or move on. Funders differ on whether they give feedback and whether they accept resubmissions, so the funder's own instructions come first.

Keep it in proportion

A decline is a decision about one application in one round. Most funders receive more good requests than they can pay for, so strong proposals are declined for lack of funds as well as for weaknesses. The useful question is what you can learn and where the project should go next.

Application details

Proposal title:

Funder and program:

Amount requested:

Date submitted:

Date of decision:

How we were told (letter, email, portal, call):

The first week

- [ ] Read the decision notice in full and file it with the application
- [ ] Tell leadership, the program team and any partners named in the proposal
- [ ] Send the funder a short, courteous thank-you. Do not argue with the decision
- [ ] Check the notice and the funder's guidelines for whether feedback is offered and how to ask
- [ ] If scores or reviewer comments were provided, save them and share them with the team
- [ ] If feedback is offered on request, send the request below
- [ ] Check whether the funder allows resubmission, and when the next round opens
- [ ] Wait a few days before deciding what to change

What the notice says about feedback:

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What the guidelines say about applying again:

Next deadline, if there is one:

Feedback request email

Send this only where the funder offers feedback or says it welcomes questions after a decision. If the funder says it does not give feedback, respect that. Keep the message short and ask for nothing else.

Subject line:

Addressed to (name and role):

Suggested wording, to adapt:

Thank you for considering our application, [proposal title], submitted to [program name] on [date]. We understand the decision and appreciate the time the reviewers gave to it.

If you are able to share feedback, we would be grateful for anything that would help us strengthen future applications, such as reviewer comments, scores or the areas that were weakest. A short call or a written note, whichever is easier for you, would be welcome.

Thank you again for your time.

[Name, role, organization, phone and email]

Date sent:

Reply received on:

Notes from the reply or call:

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Reviewer comment log

Enter each comment separately, in the reviewer's words where you have them. Group similar comments. Plan a response to each one, including those you disagree with.

Comment or weakness	Section it relates to	Do we agree?	Planned response	Who

Strengths the reviewers noted, to keep:

Comments raised by more than one reviewer:

Reading the comments

- A comment that shows a reviewer misunderstood something still points to a real problem: the proposal was not clear enough on that point.
- Comments raised by more than one reviewer deserve the most attention.
- No comments does not mean no weaknesses. Ask a colleague outside the project to review the proposal against the funder's criteria.

Revise, resubmit or move on

Fill in each line before deciding.

Whether the funder accepts resubmissions, and under what rules:

Whether the main weaknesses can be fixed before the next deadline:

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Where the weakness was (the writing, or the project design, evidence or capacity):

Whether this funder is still a good fit for the project:

Staff time we have to revise properly:

Other funders that could suit this project:

Reading your answers

If	Consider
The fit is good, the weaknesses are fixable and the funder accepts resubmissions	Revise and resubmit to the same funder
The proposal is sound but the fit with this funder was weak	Adapt it for a funder whose priorities match
The weaknesses are in the project design, evidence or capacity	Strengthen the project first, then apply
The funder does not accept resubmissions or the program has closed	Move on, and keep the relationship courteous

Our decision

Decision (revise and resubmit, adapt for another funder, strengthen first, or move on):

Reasons:

Target funder and deadline:

Person leading the revision:

If you resubmit

- [ ] Follow the funder's current instructions for resubmissions, including any required response to reviewers
- [ ] Address every comment in the log, and make the changes easy for a reviewer to find
- [ ] Update data, letters, budget figures and dates

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- [ ] Ask someone outside the project to review the revised draft against the funder's criteria
- [ ] Do not assume the same reviewers will read it. The proposal must stand on its own

> **Want help with this?** The Complete Grant Architect is a free 16-week grant writing course, and you can hire a grant writer for your next proposal. Both are at subthesis.com.

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