

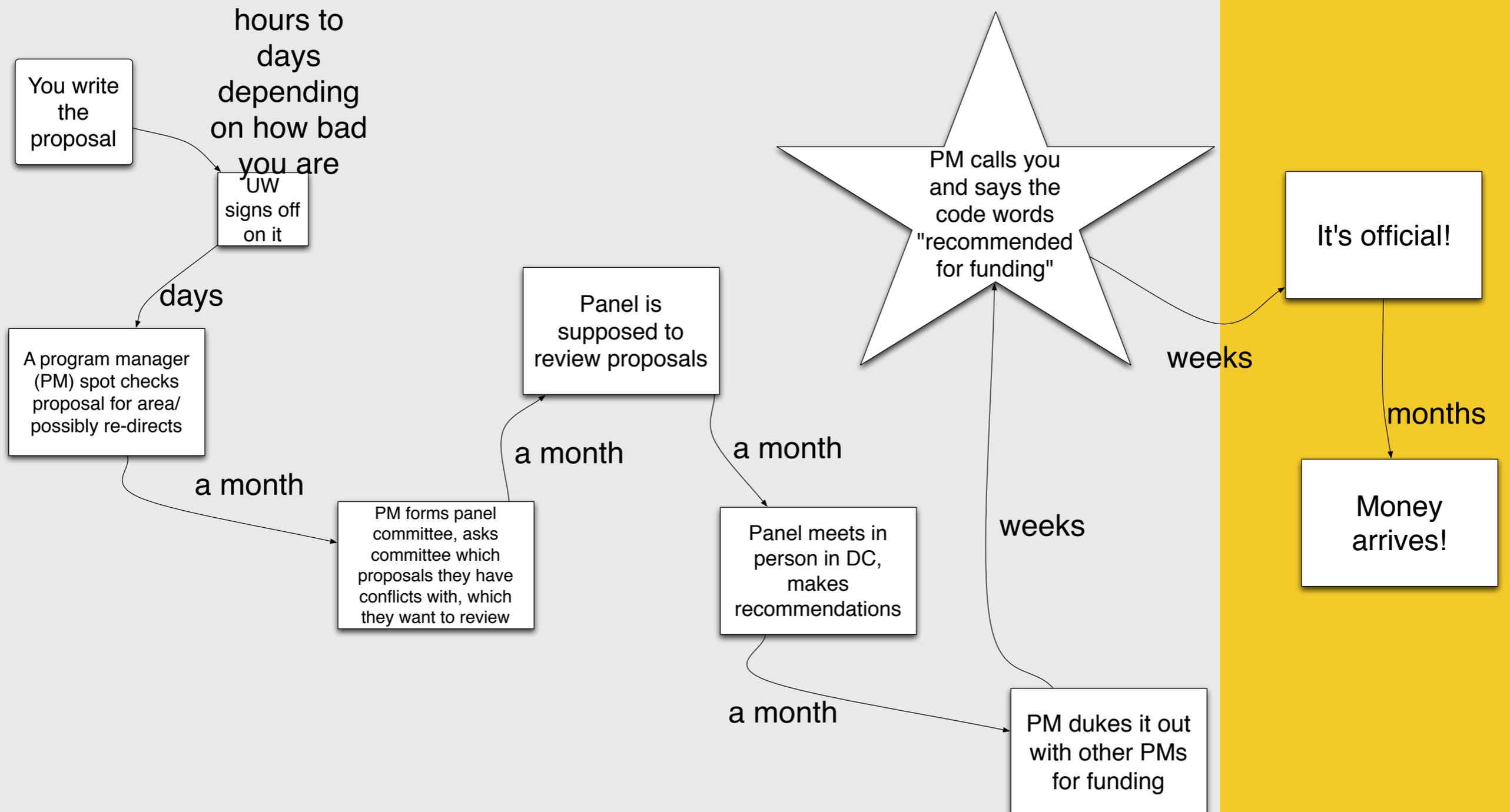
Proposal Review

Mark Oskin, A view from the other side

I may / may not have served on a CAREER panel

- It is *confidential* which panel you serve on
- It is not confidential that you served on a panel (in fact it is a government record subject to FOF)

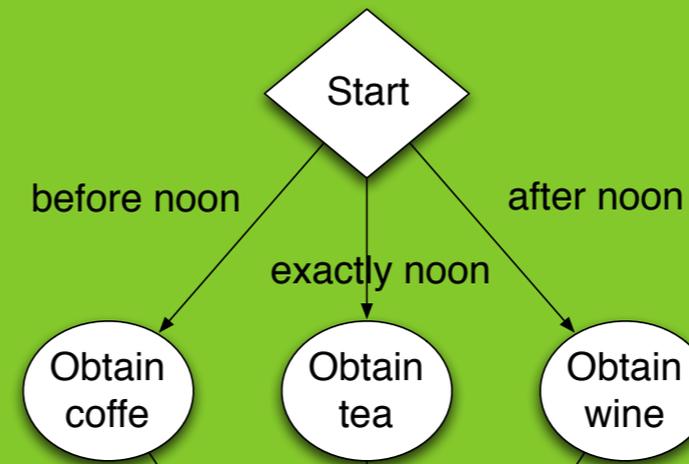
The approximate path of a proposal



How NSF chooses Reviewers

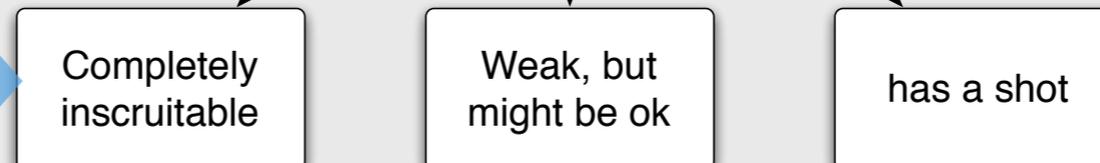
- Reviewers seem to be people who have successfully obtained funding from NSF / that program before
- Must not have applied to the same RFP
- PM's seem to have a "favorite" set of people they always use
 - There *is* history in the process from year to year because of this

Reviewing



Step 1: Form opinion

Easy ways to end up here: poor grammar, incoherent, repetition, bad idea or been done before, off-topic for the panel

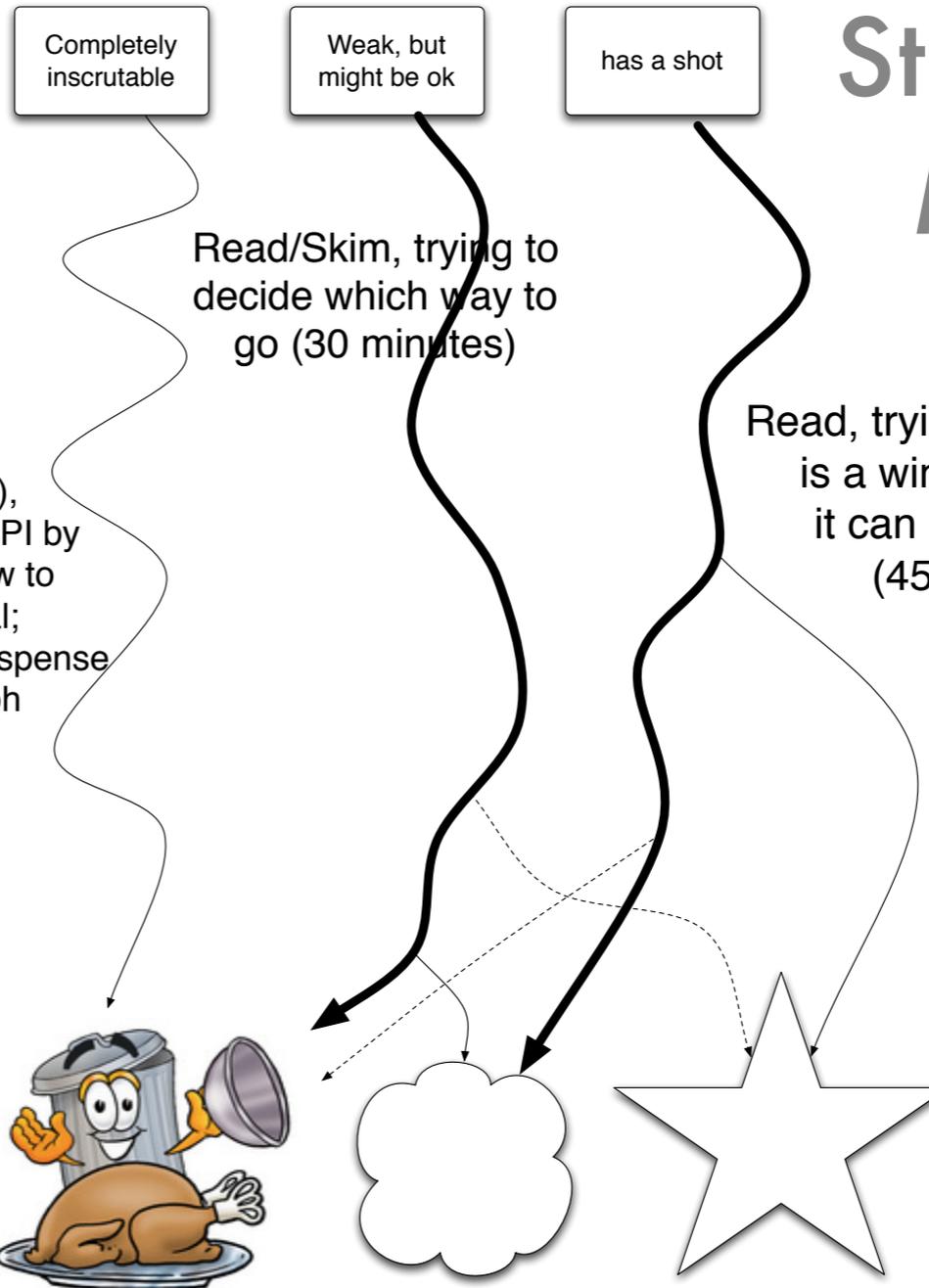


How much time does a reviewer look at your proposal?

Step 2: Inscrutable
Quickly end the pain

Step 2: Weak, read
trying to make sure
your judgement was
right

Skim (10-15 minutes),
if CAREER, try and help PI by
providing advice on how to
write a good proposal;
if other program, quickly dispense
with a short paragraph



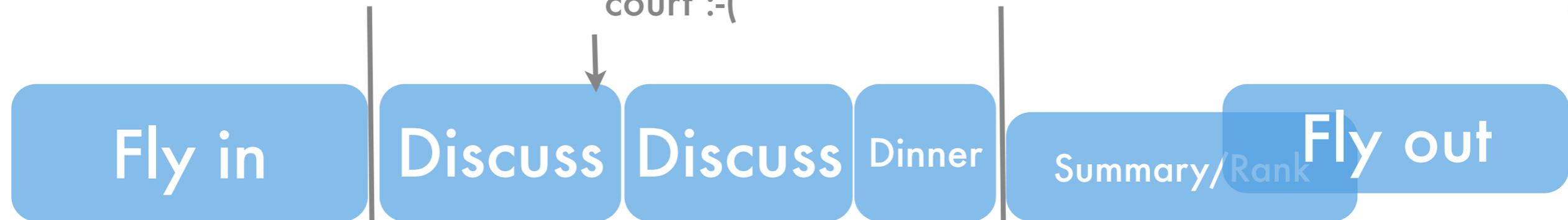
Step 2: Good
Make sure
its good

Is it callous?

- I've served on 5 or 6 NSF panels so far. Each and every one was a very positive experience
- Reviewers are far more thoughtful than a conference program committee
- NSF and reviewers try hard to be fair and select the right proposals
- Panelists are from *your* community and they aim to extract more funding for your community => Motivated to like proposals
- I have rarely seen a proposal unfairly rejected
 - I have seen good proposals go down for every reason under the sun, but in the end, it was fair, given the constraints
- If you are rejected, pay particular attention to the panel summary. **You were not rejected callously.**

The Panel itself

Eat together in the mall food court :-)



Typically do 1-2 bottom, then 1-2 top, then depending on PM either start from bottom, top, or "discussion order"

Typical panel ~ 30 proposals, try and have only 3-6 HC; rank sort 2-3 C's, all the other C's and NC's are actually rejects

Initial judgements of HC, C, NC are made here

Panel Summary

- When your proposal is reviewed in the panel, a “scribe” is assigned to capture the discussion to text.
- The scribe may / may not have read your proposal
- The scribe is instructed to write the summary in a given format, and, even for the best and worst proposals, find good and bad things to say
- In day 2, these summaries are revised for the HC proposals, making the case for why NSF should fund them. For non-fundable proposals, the summary is checked to make sure its not too positive
- Summary is read aloud (laboriously) to the panel and everyone signs off on it. Even nitpicking its sentence structure.

Advice for PIs

- **Make sure your proposal is well written -- hire an editor if you have poor writing skills**
- **Don't send in a crappy proposal -- *there is memory***
- In my field, better to be far reaching than solid.
- But you better have preliminary data
- Read the RFP closely. You **WILL** be rejected if you don't address *all* aspects. Don't just write about your idea
- Understand that reviewers are pressed for time, and need to make a quick decision => use document structure and good presentation to your advantage
- **Don't send in two proposals at the same time with nearly the same / same sounding content**

Advice specific to CAREER

- In addition to the above requirements, you will be rejected if you:
 - Don't take education seriously
 - Don't take outreach seriously
 - Don't write a proposal about an idea that is "CAREER worthy" (will it get you tenure?)
 - Yes we know \$500K is not enough