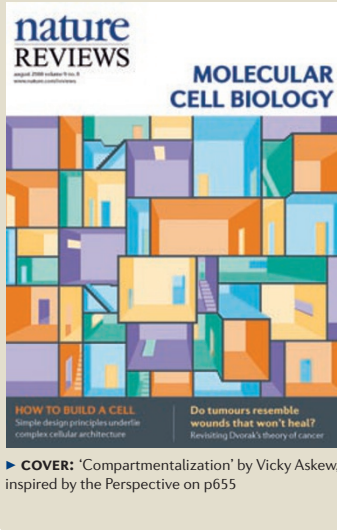




nature publishing group



► **COVER:** "Compartmentalization" by Vicky Askew, inspired by the Perspective on p655



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Applying for a grant from the United States National Institutes of Health (NIH) has recently become a rather complicated and tedious process for both applicant and reviewer. First-time applicants compete with thousands of new and established scientists, an experience that can be intimidating and frustrating. The level of detail required for the majority of applications — for example, the exhaustive budgetary specifications — has been a burden not only for applicants, but also for reviewers. Moreover, a grant proposal can take up to 18 months to pass through the system, waiting in line behind older applications, most of which must go back and forth to applicants for amendments before approval. Of course, funding is not guaranteed: the NIH receives between 35,000 and 40,000 proposals a year, of which only 25–30% will eventually be funded.

On the basis of feedback solicited from the life sciences community on the current peer-review system, the NIH plans to revamp the grant-review process to encourage innovative research and reward quality science (see <http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov> for details). The new practice involves shortened applications that should improve the value and transparency of the review process and ensure balanced, fair reviewing across scientific fields and scientific career stages. Recruiting, training and rewarding the best reviewers is also a priority. The new process allows reviewers to focus more on the science presented and less on the details of financial requests, and compensates them for their time and effort.

Hopefully, the NIH's changes will not only foster new innovative research efforts, but they will also free up some of scientists' precious time — allowing them to spend more time planning experiments, on the bench and writing and reading scientific papers.

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