

Prayers for Scientists

by Lloyd Fricker (with help from Brian Cox and Jim Zadina)

Most scientists think that once the grant application is sealed in its packaging and waiting for the mail pickup, there's not much to do to influence the outcome. In contrast to scientists, if a "normal" person were submitting an application for a million dollars they would probably say a prayer or two, light some candles and incense, sacrifice a chicken, and say some incantations. Here are some sample prayers and rituals, borrowed from several Eastern and Western religions:

A prayer for the morning of the application deadline:

Our peers, who art in study section, anonymous be thy name. Thy deadline come, I will be done, although heaven knows I could have used another week or two.

A prayer upon sealing the package:

Bless thou this package

Bless thou the words I have written in the application - all 28,412 of them

Bless thou my spouse and children who I have not seen for the past 3 months while I've been writing this application and who may not recognize me when I returneth home tonight.

A prayer to be said when dropping off the package at the express mail pickup point:

O, powerful Express Mail Person. Deliver faithfully these words of truth, or mostly truth, or even a little truth plus a whole lot of speculation, for even this wild speculation may be truth.

Nay! Even if these words be total bull****, they may yet suffice if only the reviewers shall believe them for just 15 minutes - even 5 minutes for some review panels.

May your path be swift and leadeth straight to the Agency blossoming most with funds - not diverted to the Fiji Islands or lost forevermore in the Bermuda Triangle.

Avoid ye those Agencies whose funds have been stricken, verily, by a sick Congress abetted by the Agent of Evil from Texas, who would take from the poor and sick to giveth to the rich, so that his coffers might grow mightily that he win truly at least one election.

Hear ye, our words and go forth.

A ritual to be performed the day after you submit your grant application:

Gather all rough drafts of your grant application, notes, scraps, extra glossy photos, and all the paperwork that's been accumulating for the past month while you focused exclusively on your grant application. Place these in a pile in the center of your office. Light on fire. Remove your clothes and dance naked around the bonfire, chanting the following rhyme:

Oh spirits of the plants and tree
I make this offering to thee.

Oh spirits rise, oh spirits soar
And help me get a smokin' score.

A prayer to be said daily for the 40 days and nights following submission of your application, at which time your grant application is being assigned to a study section and then to the reviewers:

Oh almighty Grant Review officials, who are powerful and wise, and know who are the kind and generous reviewers that look favorably on innovative grant applications, and who should be sent my humble application, and not the reviewers who are anal-retentive and find fault with everything, for they are unjust and wicked and will not giveth me a good score.

A prayer to be said daily during the third and fourth months after submitting your application, at which time your application is possibly being read by the reviewers:

Forgive me reviewers, for I have skimmed the surface of the topic due to the page limitations, and have probably missed citing many of your insightful publications that are key contributions to the field.

Focus not on the problems, for there are many, but focus instead on the brilliant ideas, for there are certainly a few. Or maybe only one. Or maybe less. But rest assured that brilliant studies will be done if the application is deemed worthy of a superb score.

For thine is the power to see brilliance where there is none. And thine is the glory of being listed on the roster of grant reviewers. Forever. Or at least until your term is up, at which point you become a normal scientist groveling for a good score on your applications like the rest of us.

A prayer to be said on the exact day that your grant application is being reviewed:

Give us this day, five years of bread

Forgive us our trespasses, for which we're contrite
Remember, we may review the next grant you write.

Give us not a marginal score
That will put us into purgatore
The venial ways in which we fell
Surely don't warrant triage hell

Lead us not into aggravation
But deliver us from the evil of reapplication

*An incantation to be said daily until you get the letter of grant award
(Note: this is supposed to be in Latin, but since we didn't study it in school, it's in Pig-Latin):*

Undingfay, Undingfay
Eway Eednay Undingfay

*(translation: funding, funding we need funding)
repeat 100 times*