

National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration



# EXPLORE SCIENCE

## **NASA Dual-Anonymous Peer Review**

Earth Science US Participating Investigator Program  
Aura Science Team/ACMAP Programs  
Virtual Community Town Hall  
June 30, 2022, 1pm-2pm ET

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Atmospheric Composition Focus Area  
Earth Science Division  
Science Mission Directorate

**Please submit any questions you have during this presentation via the following link:**

**<https://nasa.cnf.io/sessions/bykn/#!/dashboard>**

**You may also upvote questions already posted.**



# Overview of Dual-Anonymous Peer Review (DAPR)

<https://science.nasa.gov/researchers/dual-anonymous-peer-review>

**Goal:** Reduce implicit (unconscious) bias in the evaluation of the intrinsic / scientific merit of proposals.

**Approach:** In addition to the proposers being unaware of the review panel member identities, the reviewers are now also not told the identities of the proposers until after the evaluation of intrinsic / scientific merit.

## Process for Proposers:

- Proposals are written to exclude any personally or organizationally identifying information of the proposers.
- Proposers must upload a separate "Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized" document, which contains all of the personally or organizationally identifying information.

## Process for Reviewers:

- Reviewers evaluate intrinsic / scientific merit of anonymized proposals without knowing proposing team qualifications.
- After the scientific evaluation is finalized for all proposals, panels review "Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized" documents to assess whether qualifications / capabilities of team are sufficient to successfully execute proposed work.

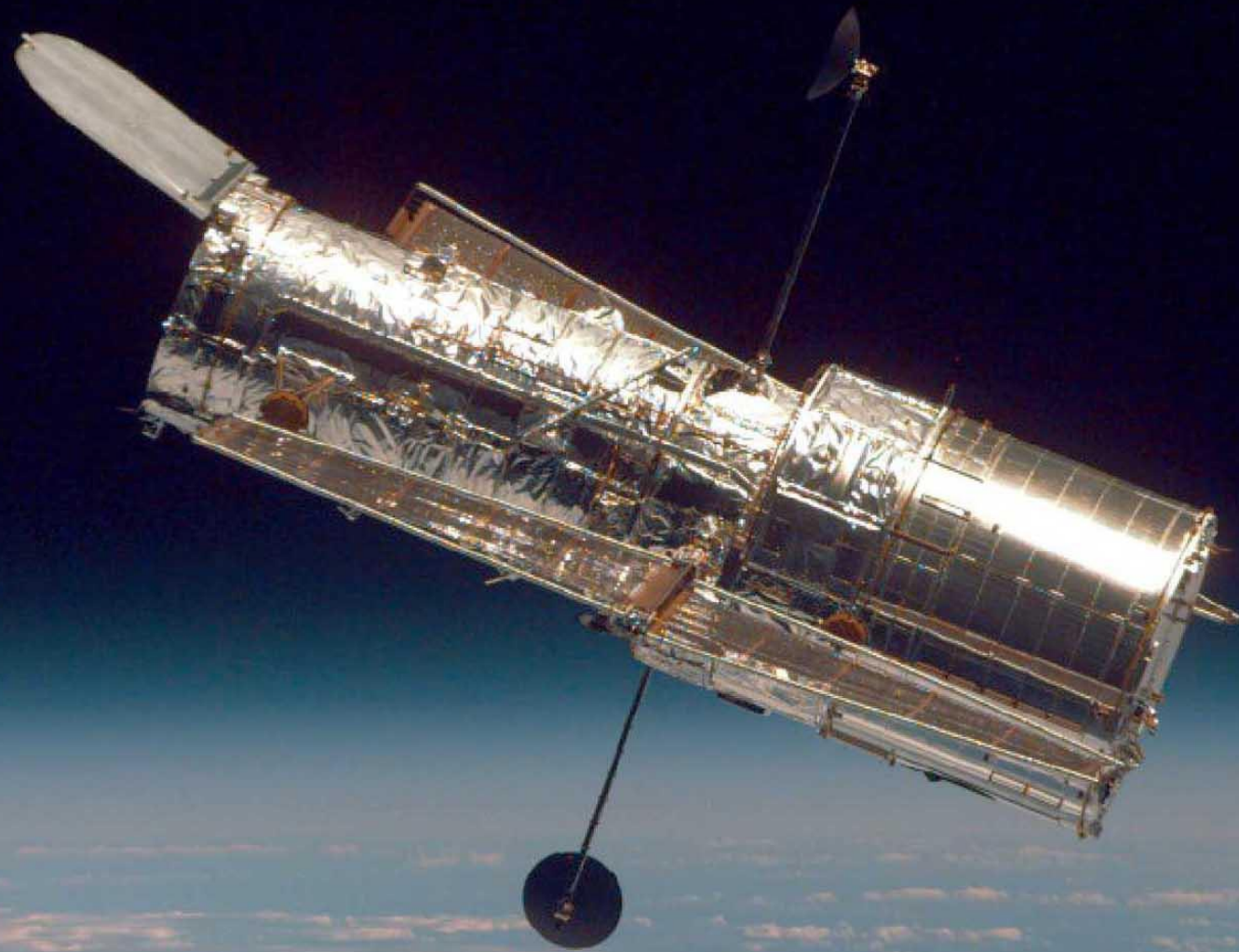


The background of the slide is a cosmic image featuring a blue nebula in the upper right and an orange/yellow nebula in the lower left, with a gradient band across the middle. 

# Motivation: What is Dual-Anonymous Peer Review?

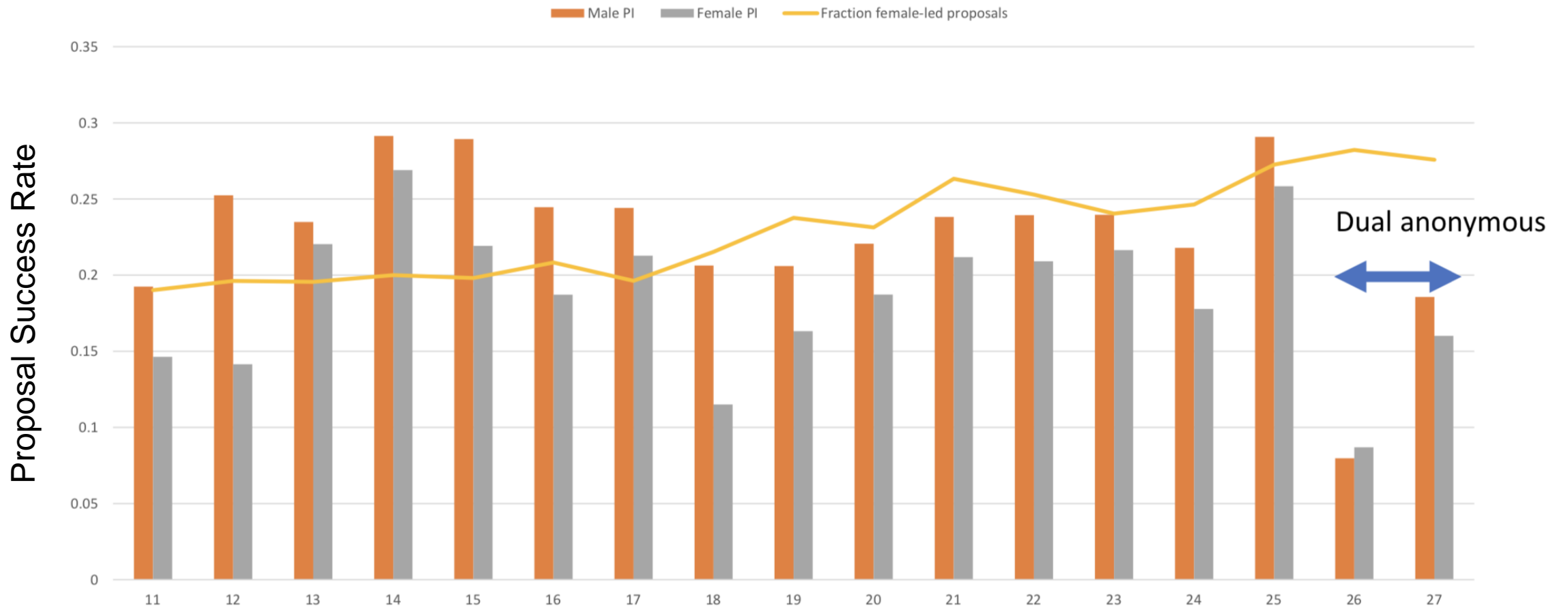






Thanks to the Hubble Space Telescope team for  
pioneering dual-anonymous peer review

# Overall Statistics





**Gender**







## Feedback from Hubble Panelists

- Proposal discussions were characterized as more collegial and efficient
- Focus was squarely on the science rather than the scientists
  - *“There was a noticeable shift in the depth of discussions as well. It was clear that reviewers had read the proposals very diligently, and that without the distraction of names and institutions, there was no recourse but to focus on the proposed science.”* (P. Natarajan, chair of the Cycle 26 TAC)
- *“Discussions at both the panel level and TAC level focused predominantly on whether the science was novel, impactful, and feasible with HST, and not on whether the proposers had the expertise to carry out the proposals.”*
- *“Several TAC members noted that they felt that the discussions at both the panel and TAC level seemed more collegial and less emotionally charged than previous TACs, perhaps because either positive or negative feelings about the people involved in the proposal were largely removed.”* (R. Somerville, chair of the Cycle 27 TAC)

**A key goal of dual-anonymous peer review is to level the playing field for everyone.**



# What is Dual-Anonymous Peer Review?

In dual-anonymous peer review, not only are proposers unaware of the identity of the members on the review panel, but the reviewers do not have explicit knowledge of the identities of the proposing team during the scientific evaluation of the proposal.

- The primary intent of dual-anonymous peer review is to eliminate “the team” as a topic during the scientific evaluation of a proposal, not to make it absolutely impossible to guess who might be on that team.
- This creates a shift in the tenor of discussions, away from the individuals, and towards a discussion of the scientific merit of a proposal.





Dual-anonymous peer review is not completely a ‘blind’ process.

Proposers submit (1) an anonymized proposal, and (2) a not-anonymized “Expertise and Resource” document.

The “merit” of the proposal (assessed anonymously) will be determined separately from the (not-anonymized) qualifications of the team.

Nevertheless, the qualifications, track record and access to unique facilities will form part of the evaluation.

The background of the slide is a cosmic scene featuring a dark blue and black space filled with numerous stars of varying brightness. In the upper right, there is a bright blue nebula with wispy, ethereal structures. The lower half of the image transitions into a warm, golden-yellow and orange glow, suggesting a distant star or a different nebula. The overall effect is a sense of vastness and wonder in the universe.

# How Do I Make My Proposal Compliant With Dual-Anonymous Peer Review?

# Detailed Guidance



The program element text contains specific instructions on how to prepare an anonymized proposal for that program. In addition, the NSPIRES page of each program element contains a document entitled “Guidelines for Anonymous Proposals” describes in detail the specific requirements of anonymous proposals.



A quick-start tutorial, as well as frequently asked questions, may be found at:

<https://science.nasa.gov/researchers/dual-anonymous-peer-review>





# Submission of Anonymized Proposals

1. Exclude names and affiliations of the proposing team, including in figures and references to personal websites.
2. Do not claim ownership of past work, e.g., “my previously funded work...” or “our analysis shown in Baker et al. 2012...”
3. Cite references in the passive third person, e.g., “Prior analysis [1] indicates that ...”.
4. Do describe the work proposed, e.g., “We propose to do the following...” or “We will measure the effects of...”
5. Include a separate not anonymized “Expertise and Resources” document (details later on).

# How Do I Reference Unpublished Work?

## How Do I Reference Proprietary Results?



It may be occasionally important to cite exclusive access datasets, non-public software, unpublished data, or findings that have been presented in public before but are not citeable



Each of these may reveal (or strongly imply) the investigators on the proposal



In these instances, proposers must use language such “obtained in private communication” or “from private consultation” when referring to such potentially identifying work



Recall that the goal of dual-anonymous is to shift the tenor of the discussion, not to make it absolutely impossible to guess the team members



# Institutional Access to Unique Resources

Another common situation that occurs in proposals is when a team member has institutional access to unique facilities (e.g., an observatory or laboratory) that are required to accomplish the proposed work. An anonymized proposal does not prohibit stating this fact in the Scientific/Technical/Management section of the proposal; however, the proposal must be written in a way that does not identify the team member. Here is an example:

*“The team has access to telescope time on the W. M. Keck Observatory, which will enable spectroscopic follow-up of the galaxies in the sample.”*

Note: in this situation, NASA recommends that the team provide detailed supporting information to validate the claim in the “Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized” document (see later).





# Example of Anonymization

*In Rogers et al. (2014), we concluded that the best explanation for the dynamics of the shockwave and the spectra from both the forward-shocked ISM and the reverse-shocked ejecta is that a Type Ia supernova exploded into a preexisting wind-blown cavity. This object is the only known example of such a phenomenon, and it thus provides a unique opportunity to illuminate the nature of Type Ia supernovae and the progenitors. If our model from Rogers et al. (2014) is correct, then the single-degenerate channel for SNe Ia production must exist. We propose here for a second epoch of observations which we will compare with our first epoch obtained in 2007 to measure the proper motion of the shock wave.*

Here is the same text, again re-worked following the anonymizing guidelines:

*Prior work [12] concluded that the best explanation for the dynamics of the shockwave and the spectra from both the forward-shocked ISM and the reverse-shocked ejecta is that a Type Ia supernova exploded into a preexisting wind-blown cavity. This object is the only known example of such a phenomenon, and it thus provides a unique opportunity to illuminate the nature of Type Ia supernovae and the progenitors. If the model from [12] is correct, then the single-degenerate channel for SNe Ia production must exist. We propose here for a second epoch of observations which we will compare with a first epoch obtained in 2007 to measure the proper motion of the shock wave.*



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**Q. But... how is the capability of the team to execute the investigation taken into account?**



# One Addition: Expertise and Resources Document

Proposers are also required to upload a separate “**Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized**” document, which is not anonymized. It will be distributed to panelists for a subset of proposals (typically the top third, according to the distribution of assigned grades and the projected selection rates.)

The document must contain the following elements:

1. A list of all team members, together with their roles (e.g., PI, Co-I, collaborator).
2. Brief descriptions of the scientific and technical expertise each team member brings, emphasizing the experiences necessary to be successful in executing the proposed work.
3. A discussion of the contribution that each team member will make to the proposed investigation.
4. A discussion of specific resources (“Facilities and Equipment”, e.g., access to a laboratory, observatory, specific instrumentation, or specific samples or sites) that are required to perform the proposed investigation.
5. A summary of work effort, to include the non-anonymized table of work effort. Given that the program element requires an anonymized version of this table in the main proposal body, the table here should be identical, but with the roles now also identified with names (e.g., Sandra Cauffman – PI; Nicky Fox – Co-I-1; Lori Glaze – Co-I-2).
6. Bio sketches, if required by the solicitation (limit 2 pages for the PI, 1 page for each Co-I).
7. Statements of Current and Pending support, if required by the solicitation.
8. Letters of resource support, if required by the solicitation.

The “Guidelines for Anonymous Proposals” document includes an example.

# Other Requirements (see “Guidelines for Anonymous Proposals”)

Item	Requirement
Submission	All proposals are submitted through NSPIRES or grants.gov.
References	References should be in the [1], [2] format.
Proposal length	Refer to the solicitation, but note that one additional page is allotted for the Proposal Summary. Depending on the solicitation, up to two additional pages may be allotted for the Data Management Plan.
Proposal Summary	Enter as part of the NSPIRES cover page <u>and</u> as a separate page in the main body of the uploaded proposal PDF file.
Bio Sketches	The program element will specify whether Bio Sketches must be included in the separate “Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized” document; or alternatively whether Bio Sketches must not be submitted at all.
Current and Pending support	Refer to the solicitation.
Budget narrative	Include in main proposal document in an anonymized format.
Summary of work effort, including Table of Work Effort	Include in an anonymized fashion (e.g., PI; Co-I-1; Co-I-2) in the main proposal document, and in non-anonymized fashion in the separate “Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized” document.
Facilities and Equipment	Do not include in main proposal document. A shortened version of this information is gathered in the separate “Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized” document.
Letters of Resource Support	Place in the separate “Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized” document.
Data Management Plan	Include in main proposal document in an anonymized format. Depending on the solicitation, up to two additional pages may be allotted for the Data Management Plan. Data Management Plans will be assessed as part of the Intrinsic Merit criterion.
High End Computing request	Submit non-anonymized PDF HEC form as document type “Appendix” in NSPIRES.
Separate “Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized” document	Submit as document type “Appendix” in NSPIRES. This document provides a list of all team members, their roles, expertise, and contributions to the work. The document should also discuss any specific resources that are key to completing the proposed work, as well as a summary of work effort. Statements of Current and Pending Support must also be included if required by the solicitation. Letters of support from, e.g., facilities or archives must be included in this section, if required by the solicitation.



## Return without Review for Unanonymized Proposals

- NASA understands that dual-anonymous peer review represents a major shift in the evaluation of proposals, and as such there may be occasional slips in writing anonymized proposals. However, NASA reserves the right to return without review proposals that are particularly egregious in terms of the identification of the proposing team.
- NASA further acknowledges that some proposed work may be so specialized that, despite attempts to anonymize the proposal, the identities of the Principal Investigator and team members are readily discernable. As long as the guidelines are followed, NASA will not return these proposals without review.



The background of the slide is a cosmic image featuring a blue nebula in the upper right and an orange/yellow nebula in the lower left, with a central light blue band where the text is located.

# **How Will My Proposal Be Reviewed?**

# Flow of the Review



The anonymized scientific review takes place. All assessments are complete, grades finalized, and panel summaries written.



The “Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized” document is distributed to panelists for a subset of proposals (typically the top third). Panelists assess the team and resource capability to execute the proposed investigation.



# Instructions to Panelists

1. Consider proposals solely on the scientific merit of what's proposed.
2. Do not spend any time attempting to identify the PI or the team. Even if you think you know, discuss the science and not the people.
  - NASA-appointed Levelers are present in each panel room to ensure this doesn't happen
3. Keep in mind that language can be very important in discussing proposals. Utilize the appropriately neutral pronouns (e.g., "what they propose", or "the team has evaluated data").






# Monitoring the Panel Discussion

- NASA-appointed Levelers are present in every panel in addition to panel support staff
- Their role is to ensure that the panel discussions focus on scientific merit. Unlike the chairs, they are not listening for issues pertaining to the science, rather they are focused on the discussion itself.
- If the discussion veers to comments on the proposing team, their past work, their validity, or their identities, the leveler's job is to refocus that discussion.
- Levelers have the authority to stop the discussion on a proposal.

# Discussion of “Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized” Document

1. Scientific evaluation of the all proposals is completed.
2. The “Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized” document is distributed to panelists for a subset of proposals (typically the top third, according to the distribution of assigned grades and the projected selection rates.) PMEFs are also distributed to the review panels, if the program requires them.
3. Panelists assess team capability to execute proposed investigation using a three-point scale, e.g.:

Vote	Overall Team and Resources Capability	
	Uniquely qualified	The E&R document demonstrates that the team is exceptionally capable of executing the proposed work, <u>and</u> has singular access to resources upon which the success of the investigation critically depends. Appropriate allocations of team members’ time are included. A comment from the panel must be written that clearly justifies the choice of this grade.
	Qualified	The team has appropriate and complete expertise to perform the work, and appropriate allocations of their time are included. Any facilities, equipment and other resources needed are available to execute the work. <u>NASA sets the expectation that the vast majority of proposals will fall into this category.</u>
	Not qualified	The E&R document demonstrates severe deficiencies in the necessary expertise and/or resources to execute the proposed investigation. A comment from the panel must be written that clearly justifies the choice of this grade.

# Discussion of “Expertise and Resources - Not Anonymized” Document

1. The assessment of the "Expertise and Resources" document must be based on what's written in the text.
2. In other words, do not say "Oh, [first name] is clearly qualified".



# DAPR Review Experiences To Date





# DAPR Experience So Far

- Only three egregious violations of anonymization guidelines, which resulted in the proposal being returned without review.
- Common (minor) pitfalls we see in proposals about 10-15% of the time:
  1. Claiming ownership of past work (e.g., "our previous analysis", "PI has an established record").
  2. Including metadata (e.g., PDF bookmarks) that reveal the name of the PI.
  3. Recycling proposals prepared prior to dual-anonymous peer review and not carefully anonymizing the text.
  4. Providing the names of investigators on the contents page.
  5. Providing the origin of travel for professional travel (e.g., conferences).
  - 6. Mentioning the institution name in the Budget Narrative.**
  - 7. Including the PI or co-I names in budget tables.**

From the panelists:

- Reviewer surveys indicate that DAPR discussions are more focused on the science content than non-DAPR reviews.
- Overwhelming support from reviewers to continue DAPR in future reviews.

The background of the slide is a composite image of space. The top half features a dark blue and black nebula with bright, star-like points of light. The bottom half is a gradient of orange and yellow, also filled with numerous small, bright stars. A light blue horizontal band with rounded ends is centered across the middle, containing the title text.

# Some Answers to Questions

**Q. If the identify of the "proposing teams and institutions" is shrouded in secrecy, how then are proposing teams and institutions to discuss their track-record, ongoing work, complementary endeavors, institutional assets? For example, if an institution has been working closely with NASA for 40+ years on one specific topic (say, radar over ice), wouldn't all the programmatic, institutional, and PI experience that goes with that be [lost from the review process]?**

## Answer:

- The anonymized proposal has no prohibition on discussing these aspects, merely that they be discussed without attribution to a particular investigator or group.
- In situations such as this, we recommend writing “previous work” instead of “our previous work”; or using “obtained in private communication”.
- Proposers should be able to make their case through their description of their proposed program of observations and analysis that they have the necessary skills to achieve success; if specific skills are required, the panel will flag that and will be able to verify this when they consult the “Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized” document.
- The panel will provide a full analysis of the “Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized” document and vote on using a three-point scale (uniquely qualified; qualified; not qualified).
- Remember that the goal of dual-anonymous peer review is to not make it completely impossible to guess the identities of the investigators, but to shift the focus of the discussion away from the individuals and toward the proposed science.



**Q. Assuming that the institution also has to be anonymous, how do reviewers determine if there are sufficient institutional resources to do the research?**

**Q. Researchers who perform laboratory work often have access to unique, custom-built facilities. How can their proposals ever be truly anonymous?**

**Q. How does the proposing team's ability to accomplish the research get evaluated? The importance differs based on type of task.**

# Answer:

- It is entirely appropriate that the context and motivation of the research be addressed, as well as unique methodologies, references, etc.
- The main difference is that these aspects should be discussed without attribution to a particular investigator or group in the main body of the proposal.
- In situations such as this, we recommend writing “previous work” instead of “our previous work”; or using “obtained in private communication”.
- Similarly, the track records of the proposing team will be addressed in the “Expertise and Resources – Not Anonymized” document and voted on using a three-point scale (uniquely qualified; qualified; not qualified).
- Remember that the goal of dual-anonymous peer review is to not make it completely impossible to guess the identities of the investigators, but to shift the focus of the discussion away from the individuals and toward the proposed science.

## **Q. What do you expect the unintended consequences of this action to be? Does this really serve the meritocracy?**

- Experience with the Hubble Space Telescope dual-anonymous process indicates that there are few unintended consequences.
- However, NASA is proactively taking steps to ensure:
  - The SMD programs in the pilot lend themselves to dual-anonymous peer review.
  - Proposers have sufficient information and guidance to adequately anonymize their proposals.
  - Review panels are sufficiently briefed about dual-anonymous peer review.
  - The duration of each panel is not significantly increased.
  - Conflicts of interest are identified ahead of time and not during the review.
  - High-risk/high-impact proposals are not disproportionately affected (new SMD blue-ribbon panel).



**Plan adequately, and please feel free to contact me:**

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