

Peer review should not be such a dominant process in determining research funding allocation, RAND argues

by Blog Admin

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Peer review is not always the best methodology for research funding processes, and diverse strategies should be used, according to [a report](#) by policy research organisation RAND Europe.

'Alternatives to Peer Review in Research Project Funding' evaluates nine alternative systems that are used worldwide and concludes that a number of established approaches address the shortcomings of the peer review process – effectiveness and efficiency.

Methods such as 'sandpits', where funders commit to investing in ideas that arise from a single event have a place in research funding exercises, the report found. Putting decision making in the hands of individuals instead of panels can also play a role.

The report acknowledges that peer review is considered the "gold standard for reviewing research proposals" and it is this process that currently decides the allocation of more than 95 per cent of the world's research funding. Yet, the report describes "clear potential problems", such as a bias towards already successful researchers and neglecting high-risk research, said Steven Wooding, who led the project.

The appropriateness of different approaches to funding research will depend on the funder's organisational structure and mission, as well as short and longer-term financial abilities.

Wooding said that the group, "wanted to promote the idea that should be experimenting a little bit" with research funding processes, adding that the method used should depend on the outcomes desired as each method boasts different pros and cons.

The dominance of peer review will be hard to break and Wooding acknowledged that the report's conclusions will split opinion. "Some people will think it's a great idea and some people will be appalled... successful researchers have clearly grown up in a system that uses peer reviews, so there's a lot of inertia."

This story originally appeared in [Research Fortnight issue 372](#) on 13 July.

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