

NIAID Funding News December 23, 2009

Writing That Shorter Research Plan

If you read our previous article, The Art of Application, you saw our advice about choosing a high-impact problem for your application.

Now we can help you with that critical next step: writing your Research Plan. We've updated our Part 5. Research Plan of the NIH Grant Cycle: Application to Renewal with a new strategy to help you make your application appeal to its audience, your peer reviewers.

Get the Chemistry Going

Is getting the chemistry right important? You bet - your application's appeal is probably its most important determinant of success. While marketing a product is an imperfect analogy, it's the best one we can think of for illustrating the importance of creating a document that will spark enthusiasm in your reviewers.

What makes an application alluring is no secret: it's in an area reviewers feel is important, is written so they can easily grasp its concepts, and has coherence -- for example, beginning investigators should propose a modest budget and a limited amount of work that is well within their expertise.

While none of that is new, shorter applications are. No one knows for sure what reviewers will look for, but we believe that thinking and presenting your thoughts strategically can give you a clear advantage. Part 5. Research Plan covers these and related topics:

- * Why it's critical to understand your audience - your reviewers.
- * How your level of expertise affects how innovative you should be.

- * How to present your application strategically, with branching of different lines of research depending on results from the first experiments.
- * Why it is more important than ever to get feedback before you send the application in.

Here's a sample of what you'll find.

Significance -- Know How Much to Highlight

Know how much information to include on significance -- the importance of the problem to the field. While your reviewers must see your research as significant, the amount you will write depends on your reviewers' expertise.

The farther reviewers are removed from your topic area, the harder you'll have to work to convince them of its significance.

- * Include more or less detail depending on the expertise of your audience.
- * The farther reviewers are removed from your topic area, the harder you'll have to work to convince them of its significance.
 - o Scenario one -- study section is narrowly focused in your area, write less on significance.
 - o Scenario two -- study section is more diverse, include more significance information.
- * Explain the importance of the problem or critical barrier to progress in the field that the project addresses. Show how it will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability.
- * Show how the work is new and unique. Describe how the field will be changed if your aims are achieved.

Knowing reviewers' perspective is more important than ever before -- including their views of your project and bigger questions in the field.

Figure out how to convince them that your project is high significance and you are the person to do the work. You'll do that by giving them the information they need based on their perspective.