Sharpening Your Focus:
*Tips on Grant Proposal Preparation*

**Know Your Audience!**

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The main audience for a grant proposal is the reviewers. In some cases, you will have a good idea of the identities of the reviewers (e.g., NIH Study Section members; small foundation board of directors).

In some instances the reviewers are a combination of internal and external reviewers. In other cases the reviewers are all internal (e.g., National Science Foundation (NSF) EAGER grants, NIH Early Independence Award).

If you can identify the reviewers ahead of time, think strategically about how that may be useful to tailor the application. For example, can you cite a relevant publication of the reviewer? Do you know by their publications or reputation if they are scientific risk takers or conservatives?
Have you made a personal contact with the reviewing program officer to ask how you may strengthen the relevancy of your study?

In many cases, the reviewers will remain anonymous to the grant applicant. Learn what you can about the scientific backgrounds of your reviewers.

Then, here are some important considerations from any reviewers’ perspectives:

• They may not be familiar with your area – don’t make assumptions especially regarding significance – spell it out.

• They may not be familiar with your methodologies (e.g., behavioral vs. basic science; unusual data analysis; new technologies); be sure to give enough detail to help them visualize the procedures.

• They probably do not have a lot of time to read your application –

  • write like a “scientist” with focused aims/hypotheses
  • use lots of headings and subheadings and short paragraphs
  • use white space when possible, and do not justify the right hand margins, to make the page easier to visually navigate

• If the reviewer likes your proposal, he or she will have to be your advocate to their peer review group; so give the reviewer the data, arguments, justifications, and fervor they need to make a good case that your proposal should be funded.

Analyzing the audience is one of the first steps in persuasive writing. Remember…

“Put the argument into a concrete shape, into an image, some hard phrase, round and solid as a ball, which they can see and handle and carry home with them, and the cause is half won.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson