Sharpening Your Focus:
Tips on Grant Proposal Preparation

Find Your Research Niche

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Your research niche is a specialized corner of your scientific field where you have potential to conduct research and create important, new knowledge for a significant period of time, e.g., a decade.

You want to carve out a space where a few grants will be impactful and lead you toward your longer-range goal. While you will want to stay away from crowded, overly competitive areas, keep in mind, some niches are untouched because they are inconsequential.

While identifying a niche is imperative for new investigators, it also is a sage strategy for experienced researchers who are changing/readjusting course.
Finding your own niche takes you on a quest:

- Locate the most promising research needs and opportunities in your field.
- Assess whether you have the skills to make an impact.
- Look at the other players and judge whether you can compete.

In the **Mentored Research Academy: R01 Boot Camp**, we use the Research Roadmap, e.g., a series of questions to assess the Principal Investigator’s readiness to embark in a scientific direction.

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) suggests networking early (e.g., conferences) to not only listen to the buzz and to brainstorm, but to get feedback on the strengths and skills necessary to compete.

(Remember, this is a team effort - supplement your expertise with that of your collaborators.)

Get opinions from people you respect (e.g., colleagues, mentors, NIH program officer) about research niches and opportunities.

This advice is adapted from the useful NIAID article, "**Ten Steps to a Winning R01 Application**."