Sharpening Your Focus:
Tips on Grant Proposal Preparation

Specific Aims
Tailored to Your Specifications

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File under:
- Specific Aims
- Writing
- NIH

Start with four main components in a NIH Specific Aims page and tailor as you see fit:

**Paragraph 1: Introduction (the critical gap)**

The main purpose of this paragraph is to convince the reviewers of the importance, need and relevance of your ideas. Start by stating the significant problem/need you are addressing within your research niche.

Explain the (a) status quo in the field, (b) the gap that you will investigate, and (c) the critical need to fill the gap (i.e., so what?). "Management of XXX disease depends largely on chemotherapy, but the drug treatment has multiple negative consequences." This is a good place to introduce your innovative concepts or approach.
Paragraph 2: What, Why, How, Whom
(where this is going? Why is this such a hot idea?)

What are your long-range goals, i.e., how will this study impact human health?
"The long term goal is to develop a safely administered therapeutic..." Your two to four aims will be driven by a clear, central hypothesis, or perhaps more than one (i.e., one aim per hypothesis - some investigators imbed "working" hypotheses).

Note: Some projects do not need a hypothesis (e.g., develop a model or device, retrieve or storing large data); some projects are not ready for a hypothesis (i.e., no extensive previous work).

Briefly, what is your rationale for this hypothesis and what interpreted, preliminary findings has your investigative team discovered to support feasibility?
"Our published data on work with X support..."

Paragraph 3: Two to four objectives you will accomplish during the funded period (master plan)

These are outcome oriented and directly focused on your hypothesis and on the critical gap from Paragraph 1. Have endpoints, e.g., not "to study," but "to develop" or "to identify."

Do not to make Aims interdependent (e.g., Aim 1 depends on outcomes of Aim 2) in case results do not support the next Aim. Alternative hypotheses may be appropriate.

Leave more imaginative/exploratory aims to end.

Avoid jargon - not all the reviewers in the Study Section will understand your specialty.

You can briefly describe related methodology for each Aim; mixed methods are fine, e.g., clinical and entomological studies.

Paragraph 4: Payoff
(when accomplished, knowledge from these Aims will move the field forward!)

Concentrate on expected outcomes, translation and impact.

Tie your study's potential positive impact to health (or the primary mission of your funding agency). "Understanding the pathogenesis of this disease will have a positive impact on the development new therapeutic approaches."

This entire page has been a logical progression of ideas and evidence, so this conclusion is inescapable.

Next step:

GET THIS PAGE INTERNALLY REVIEWED BEFORE YOU MOVE ON!!