

Chalk Talks

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Chalk Talk is to obtain critical feedback from experienced researchers and subject matter experts to help shape the aims of your grant proposal. Before you submit a grant, it is helpful to get critiques from your colleagues, since often they may pose questions that a reviewer might ask. It's also a great opportunity to discuss your work with other researchers in your department.

In some cases, grant writers may have different objectives; please modify the suggestions below to accommodate your needs. For example, if you want attendees of your Chalk Talk to review your plans to resubmit a grant application, send the reviewer comments and summary sheet to the attendees in advance of the meeting.

SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK

Schedule 1-1.5 hours for your Chalk Talk; no PPT slides; have a whiteboard available to write out your aims and revise on the board as suggestions are made. Be sure to invite someone (e.g., a collaborator or co-investigator on your proposal) to your Chalk Talk who is willing to capture the feedback from the group discussion.

Before the Chalk Talk:

- Send a copy of your Specific Aims and hypotheses to attendees.
- Inform attendees of logistics (e.g., *virtual vs. in-person, location, time, plan to serve food, etc.)
- Arrive early to the event and write your aims on the whiteboard. If you have associated hypotheses, list them also. A simple model to describe your aims may be helpful.
- If applicable, invite a statistician or other co-investigators on your proposal.

During the Chalk Talk:

- Introduction: Express gratitude for the attendees' interest and feedback. Ask that when the discussion begins, only one person speaks at a time so that you can benefit from all input.
- Present (verbally describe): the bigger picture –
 - significance and rationale of your planned research
 - if you feel it is necessary, distribute a sheet with simple graphs to explain your preliminary data; otherwise refer to data in general, e.g., "...this is supported by data from our pilot tests."
 - a sentence that states your project's long-term goals
 - what institute you will apply to and what study section will review your proposal
- Present: the aims/central hypothesis that are written on the whiteboard
- Present: the planned techniques and approaches you will use to achieve aims
- Present: current and/or planned access to collaborators and necessary resources
- Revise on board as needed

Discussion Points:

Ask your attendees for their feedback on the following aspects:

- Important problem? Significant field? Potential impact? (i.e., so what?)
- Do the aims adequately test your hypothesis/hypotheses?
- Do the aims seem feasible?
- Are the aims focused?
- Are the endpoints clearly defined?
- Is there some degree of uniqueness/innovation?
- Can the aims be accomplished with the proposed resources and time allotted?

Tips:

- Practice your Chalk Talk and come prepared.
- Expect to be interrupted and to explain – questions are good!
- Don't get defensive, try to get the most expertise out of every attendee
- It's okay to think for a few moments before answering a question
- Keep the discussion focused on your needs
- If a particular aim/approach is noted as problematic by one person, encourage others also to address the same issue from their perspective. There may be differences of opinion and diversity of thought that will be helpful to hear about.

***VIRTUAL CHALK TALK SUGGESTIONS**

Chalk Talks can be conducted successfully on a virtual platform as well. Building on the information above, adapt the framework as appropriate for hosting a Chalk Talk on Zoom. Below are a few options for adapting your Chalk Talk for a virtual presentation:

1. One option is to utilize the [Zoom Whiteboard feature](#). Write your Specific Aims on the whiteboard and share it with participants. You and other participants (if enabled) can [annotate](#) on the whiteboard to brainstorm and collaborate.
2. Another option is to record the Zoom session and spend the first several minutes of the Chalk Talk having participants read over your Specific Aims document. After giving attendees a little time to read and reflect, go through each Aim individually to solicit feedback and encourage discussion amongst the group.

If you host your Chalk Talk virtually, be sure to invite someone (e.g., a collaborator or co-investigator on your proposal) who is willing to capture feedback from the discussion so that your focus can remain on answering questions from the group.