Successful grant writing

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I. Read instructions and follow the rules perfectly!

- Page limits, Fonts
- Limitations on appendices, etc...
- Due dates
- Initial contacts if allowed/recommended with program officers
- Responsive to all elements of the call
2. Remember, reviewer is in a bad mood.

- Large pile of grants to review
- Typically, not enough time
- Bad proposals put them in a bad temper
- Your job is to brighten their day
3. Use white space, bulleted lists, images = make it beautiful

• Do NOT fill every page with a block of text
• Make it visually appealing and attractive
• Make the structure totally transparent
4. Exciting ideas often result from combination of threads

- Good ideas are the hardest thing about a new grant
- Very often, the best ideas come from combining two approaches or technologies in order to create a synthesis of approaches (e.g. systems biology + genomics OR next gen sequencing + expression analysis)
5. Abstract structure is critical

- Overall “big” challenge you are contributing to, why important
- Specific “smaller” challenge you will solve, why critical
- Why is there a special opportunity?
- What is your particular advantage?
- What are specific aims
- How will you evaluate success?
- How will field be left in better position
6. Specific aims

- Aims = “what” is to be achieved, not “how” (so methods may change after award, but aim change much more rare)

- “Specific” = clearly possible to judge if the aim has been achieved
7. Background/Literature review

- (Especially new investigators) Show that you have a scholarly understanding of the key contributions before this work.
- Anticipate who might review the grant and refer to their work!
- Make it short, pertinent and tutorial (but not condensending--respectful and high quality)
8. Prior results

- (Especially new investigators) Show that you have done good & relevant previous work, establish your technical virtuosity

- Sometime prior results better in the methods section so you don’t make it appear that the proposed work is already completed, label it as “preliminary.”

- Keep prior results relevant, but allow a stretch to show previous successes
9. Methods section

• Organize methods by specific aim
• This is the “how” and is your best estimate of how to proceed at the time of submission
• Include “failure mode” analysis to show you have anticipated problems
• Include timeline to show how the work will proceed in sequence or parallel
• Include as much detail as possible => convince the reviewer that on Day 1 you have a full agenda of things to do that will be productive.
10. Other elements

- Budget should be realistic but make sure enough to get work done even with cuts
- Don’t be insensitive to data sharing, human subjects, animal subjects, privacy, security
- Key letters of support to show environment of support (especially young investigators)
- Name specific individuals >> “To be announced” (even if they change later)
- Be prepared to cut aims if budget reduced