



The University of Utah Health Sciences Center

December 11, 2012

Colleagues,

As all of you know, this is an especially difficult time to obtain extramural grant funding. The success of the CVRTI funding relies almost entirely on our ability to obtain grants. I welcome your thoughts on what we can do to improve our ability to submit grants that become funded.

Here are a few suggestions.

- 1.** Start early in preparing the proposal. This is especially true for new investigators. All of my successful grants took months to prepare. A hastily prepared application is usually doomed to failure and may waste a chance to submit a revision
- 2.** First and foremost the proposal must be excellent science. It is very important to clearly identify: " what gaps in knowledge does my proposal fill". This requires a solid familiarity with the relevant literature and techniques.
- 3.** Write as clearly and persuasively as possible so the reviewers of diverse background conclude: We really need to know this and here is why. Whenever possible, emphasize the proposal's relevance to human disease When you have space, a simple explanatory figure up front can be very helpful for the reviewer.
- 4.** Be sure to include a brief summary of expected results for each aim and make sure you identify potential problems and how you will solve them. You can't assume everything you propose will work; often it doesn't. This will also help a favorable reviewer defend your proposal against other reviewer's criticisms.
- 5.** The project should not be overly ambitious: it needs to be a realistic amount of work for the requested time.
- 6.** The aims should flow in a logical sequence but be careful about proposing an aim that critically depends on the previous aim working as you expect.
- 7.** At a bare minimum the proposal should look great. Presentation is important. The figures included should be of high relevance, high quality and have clear legends or descriptions in the text. Make every effort to avoid poor grammar, spelling mistakes, missing sentences, mislabeled figures, and incomplete sentences. These types of errors drive reviewers crazy and conveys the message that you don't care so why should they. The worst thing about these types of errors is that they can significantly diminish the impact of the science. You may have great ideas but if poorly packaged they will probably not be funded. Reviewers may also think that if you cannot solve these problems, how will you solve the scientific problems in the proposal.

8. The bottom line is you cannot do too much proof reading. If you are going to take the time and effort to write a grant why not make it as perfect as it can be. Because there are so many ways a grant can be scored low, eliminate those under your control such as grammar, typos and sloppy presentation.

9. For those of you whom English is not your first language, grammar can understandably be a challenge. I strongly encourage you to have your grant reviewed for its presentation and content by colleagues at CVRTI or other institutions. But do this weeks in advance of submission in order to gain full benefit of the feedback. It is nearly impossible to provide a useful critique when one receives a proposal a few days before the submission date.

10. Take advantage of the grant writing experience of others. Whether you are an experienced grant writer or a beginner it never hurts to have someone else look over you proposal. If you are a trainee it's a good idea to have a faculty member, in addition to your mentor, look at it. But again make sure the person gets it well in advance of submission. It takes time to provide an effective pre-critique and getting it at the last minute is not helpful.

I welcome any additional suggestions regarding how we can improve our success in getting grants approved.

Sincerely,
Ken

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