



A Teaching Affiliate
of Harvard Medical School

Grant-writing workshop

Introduction to the revised application, Significance, Innovation, Approach

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MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

CANCER CENTER

Introduction to the revised application

What the reviewers are looking for

- How you have IMPROVED the application
 - Give a clear and concise summary of the major changes.
- How the major weaknesses were corrected
 - Such as: improvements in the experimental plan (can be additions or deletions), better focus, better discussion of alternative approaches, more justification
- Where to find the key sections
- Evidence of progress
 - New data, publications

Introduction to the revised application - Tips

- Don't leave this section to the last minute
 - The intro sets the tone - get it right.
- Don't be combative, defensive, or argumentative.
 - Be diplomatic. Reviewers rarely admit to making mistakes and assume that the previous critique was both accurate and fair. Avoid sarcasm. "Clarify" points and apologize for sections that the reviewer misunderstood.
- Focus on key points and not on small details
 - restating the critique wastes space. Think about all 3 critiques.
- Don't put negative thoughts into the reviewers head
 - Accentuate the positive, minimize the negative

Significance

What the reviewers are looking for

- Overall importance of the topic
- Will the proposed work will make a significant advance? (ie. the importance of the project)

The text must demonstrate scholarship

- Detailed understanding of the research area.
- Ideas must be easily accessible
 - use informative headings, include figures, highlight key points, summarize the main message.

Significance

Potential pitfalls

- Long and boring (don't recycle a review)
- Difficult to read (too much jargon, complex sentences)
- Lack of focus (keep the info relevant)
- Missing the latest references
- Stresses significance of topic, but not the proposal
- Missing the big picture

What the reviewers are looking for

- Technical Innovation
 - Development of new tools or approaches.
 - Use of the latest techniques.

- Conceptual Innovation
 - Is this work an important step forward for this field of research?
 - Is the work unique?

Potential pitfalls

- Experimental plan appears to be “generic”.
 - If using standard approaches put the emphasis on the innovative nature of the question.
- Failure to use the latest technology
 - Don't choose sub-optimal approaches because they are cheaper.
- Is it too innovative to work?
 - Make sure that you have both proof of feasibility and a back-up approach.

Approach

Good features

- 3 complementary but not interdependent Aims
- Preliminary data showing feasibility of each of the main experimental strategies.
- Clear Structure.
 - Rationale, approach, expected outcomes, potential pitfalls, alternative (complementary) approaches
- Enough experimental detail to show that you can do the work, have all the appropriate samples, reagents, controls, and understand the strengths and limits of the data.
- (successful) collaborators

Approach

Flaws

- Interdependent aims
- Experiments that don't answer the question
- Unconvincing preliminary data.
- Overambitious, lack of focus, no strategy to prioritize data.
- Too little/too much experimental detail.
- Insufficient expertise (cite your papers, add collaborators)

General thoughts

For an application to be successful the reviewer has to sell the proposal to the rest of the study section

- Keep the logic simple and straightforward
- Give the reviewers good reasons to get excited about the proposal
- Feed the statements that you want to see in the critique to the reviewer.
- Never assume that the reviewer will “get it”. Make sure that somewhere in the proposal you have explicitly stated everything that you want the reviewer to know/think.