



# The Specific Aims Page: Engaging the Reviewer



Children's Foundation  
Research Institute

**Le Bonheur**  
Methodist Healthcare  
Family Children's Hospital

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE   
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER



# Specific Aims Page

- One page
- Should immediately engage the reader
- Aim toward readers of varying expertise in your area
- Clear, accurate overview of the proposal
- Some reviewers claim to be able to immediately spot a competitive application from the SA page



# Specific Aims Page

- Opening sentence
  - Should get the reader's attention
- Current knowledge
- Gap
  - What is the unmet need?
- Current barrier to progress in the field



# Specific Aims Page

- Long-term goal
  - Overall objective
  - Central hypothesis
- Rationale that underlies the proposed research
- What makes you and your approach uniquely suited to tackling the problem?



# Specific Aims Page

- Specific aims that link back to the central hypothesis
  - Specific Aim 1: *To determine...*
    - *Our working hypothesis is...*
    - *To test this hypothesis, we will...*
- Payoff
  - These aims will yield the following expected outcomes...
- Impact
  - These outcomes are expected to have a major impact because...



# Why, Who, What, How

- 1-2 sentences
  - Set the “big picture”, the central challenge of your proposal
  - Backdrop for the “Why”
- 2-3 sentences
  - Elaborate on the problem
  - What is being done in the field to solve it
  - Introduction to the “What”



# Why, Who, What, How

- 1-2 sentences
  - What is the barrier or “bottleneck” that is impeding progress in this area?
  - Need clear-cut, defined “Gap” that you will close
  - Framing the “Why”
- 1-3 sentences
  - Elaborate on the “Gap” to make it specific and focused



# Why, Who, What, How

- 1-2 sentences
  - Propose a solution for solving the problem or closing the gap
  - State a general hypothesis
  - This is the “What”
- 1-2 sentences
  - Explain why you and your team are the right people to implement this solution/approach
  - This is the “Who”





# Why, Who, What, How

- 1 sentence
  - “We are proposing to test this hypothesis with the following Specific Aims:”
- The Specific Aims are the “How”
  - Need to be feasible and realistic
  - Each aim needs a “Why” or rationale for its existence
  - What is the expected outcome of each aim?
  - May have hypothesis for each aim
  - May use subaims judiciously



# Why, Who, What, How

- 1-4 sentences
  - How clearing this hurdle or closing this gap fits into the big picture of improving health or curing disease
  - What is the potential IMPACT as the grant receives an overall impact score



# Specific Aims Page

- Avoid
  - Too much jargon
  - Passive voice
    - Yes: We will test XXX...
    - No: XXX will be tested...
  - We will characterize...
- Do use
  - Approaches that are hypothesis-driven
  - Thoughtful and judicious use of a cartoon summarizing the proposed work