Crafting The Specific Aims Page: Engaging the Reviewer

Children’s Foundation Research Institute
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
• You must be proposing innovative impactful work that your field cares about
Specific Aims Page Components

• Opening sentence
  – Should get the reader’s attention
  – Significance of the problem

• Current knowledge
  – Briefly summarize what is currently known about the topic

• Gap
  – What is the unmet need?

• Current barrier(s) to progress in the field
Specific Aims Page Components

• Long-term goal
  – Overall objective
  – Central hypothesis

• Rationale that underlies the proposed research

• What makes you (and your team) and your approach uniquely suited to tackling the problem?
Specific Aims Page Components

• 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
  – May cite one or more previous publications on the subject, or mention preliminary data
  – 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
  – Expected outcomes of the research
  – How clearing this hurdle or closing this gap fits into the big picture of improving health or curing disease
  – What is the potential IMPACT on the field, as the grant receives an overall impact score that is the main driver of funding recommendations
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