



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