

TIPS FOR WRITING A STRONG GRANT PROPOSAL

The main purpose of your application is to convince the evaluating committee that supporting your proposal would be a good use of the funds. You have to take into account the fact that your proposal will be read by committee members who are experienced professional biologists, but who are not necessarily experts in your particular field. Because they are evaluating proposals competing for limited funds, they must be critical and skeptical; only the best proposals will be funded.

Your number one job is to capture their interest. If you describe an important problem and then explain how you intend to solve it, you convert the reviewer from a skeptic to an advocate for funding your work. If, after reading your proposal, a panelist still says "So what? Why is this important?", or "What's the problem being addressed?", or "Can these objectives be achieved using these techniques?", then you have not been successful. One good way to pre-judge how well you have gotten your points across is to re-read your application (before submitting it), putting yourself in the position of a reviewer. Or, better yet, ask another student or one of your instructors to read it from that perspective.

When you look at your proposal from the point of view of the reader, you will see why it is so important to describe the problem you are addressing or the hypothesis you plan to test. Without this firmly established, it is pointless to tell the panel all the things you will do in the field or lab. Don't stop there, however!

The logical next question is "Is that problem or hypothesis significant enough to be worth working on?" One way to assess this is to ask yourself, "Assuming I am successful in doing everything I say I will, how many biologists would want to hear the results?" If you conclude "not many" then you need to rethink why you chose the project and explain its importance more convincingly. Don't feel that you, single handedly, need to solve the most pressing problem in biology – the scope of any project must be limited to what can be realistically accomplished – but do worry about how your results will contribute to the solution of a fundamental problem in your field, or why your field area is ideal for addressing a significant regional or topical problem. If your project is part of a large project, make sure your part is clearly defined.

Once you have established the significance of your project, **outline what you will actually do** – i.e., your research strategy. Make sure that you explain to the reviewer how these steps will lead you to answer the questions you have set out to solve. This is the time to be specific: don't leave it to the panel to decide whether your research plan will answer the questions, tell them *how* it will! As for the budget, you should show the committee that you have carefully investigated possible expenses and have planned a realistic budget.

It is very important to **stick with the guidelines provided by the granting agency/body.** Many agencies simply disregard proposals that do not follow exactly all of their formatting guidelines; those proposals are weeded out from the very beginning so they never even get to be read. You don't want yours to be among them.

(Also, show good professional literacy: the correct form is **Curriculum Vitae**, and not Curriculum Vita.)