

TOP 10 FEDERAL PROPOSAL WRITING TIPS

- 1.** Have a novel idea that:
 - Addresses an important problem (who cares?)
 - Advances scientific knowledge (why?)
 - Builds on or expands the knowledge base (why?)
 - Is capable of making a difference (what are you going to do about it?)
 - Is understandable to others
- 2.** Collect and critically analyze background information related to the proposed area of investigation/comprehensively review the literature.
- 3.** Read the application instructions carefully. (And re-read them.)
- 4.** Read and understand the agency mission. Make sure you understand the agency review process. (Study the website.)
- 5.** Contact the program manager before writing. Clarify information from the RFP and website. Also ask questions like, "What are two reasons why PI's haven't been funded?" "Where are the holes in the program?" "Will you review a draft proposal?" "Can I get a list of the reviewers?"
- 6.** If the program manager will review your draft or specific aims, plan ahead so this can be sent several weeks prior to the submission date.
- 7.** Ask colleagues to review your initial idea and later, your proposal, before it is sent to the agency. Ask them to be brutally honest in their review.
- 8.** Organize the application in a logical manner making it easy for the reviewers to read. Use major and minor section headings and a detailed table of contents. Follow guidelines on font size, margins, number of pages, etc. Clearly address review criteria in your application. For NSF, address broader impacts and intellectual merit.
- 9.** Write clearly and without jargon, using technical language only as needed. Some experts say to write like a USA Today newspaper article, written so anyone can understand.
- 10.** If your proposal is not funded, contact the program manager to gain their input, make the suggested changes and resubmit.