

Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

Writing the Innovation Section of an NIH Proposal



Why is it important to write the Innovation section well?

For most NIH funding mechanisms the Innovation section does not drive the overall impact score, yet a poor score can nudge the latter below the funding line. In contrast, a well written Innovation section, i.e., one that convinces reviewers that the novel aspects of the study will make it possible to decisively answer a key question, can create enough enthusiasm to overcome a lower score on the Significance section.

Suggested formatting:

- Include either one very important aspect of innovation or up to three smaller innovations (bulleted) that collectively promise to overcome limitations of earlier studies.
- Do not include so many innovations that this will sound like "stuffing".
- If you include more than one innovation, put them in order of importance (most important first).
- Use short, bold headings followed by a brief paragraph.

Effectively making your case:

Innovation can be either technical or conceptual. Highlight the type of innovation you are proposing by using a heading that conveys what is new (e.g., novel hypothesis, new animal model, new use of an old resource or tool). Follow this with a short paragraph covering the these points:

1. Strategies currently used, or current concepts, and their limitations (i.e., why they are unsatisfactory)
2. New approaches to be applied and/or new concepts to be tested (i.e., how these differ from the status quo and open new horizons)
3. How the new approaches/concepts overcome previous barriers (i.e., the impact of specifically the innovation)

This order of presentation is important – the context provided in the first step is necessary to appreciate the value of the innovation.

Other considerations:

- Keep this section concise and make the key points easy for the reader to find.
- A common pitfall is that this section ends up making a case for significance – keep the focus on what is possible because of the innovation (not the importance of the problem that will be solved).

Resources:

- "[Innovation section of NIH grants](#)" handout from a Scientific Editors Network (ScENe) Conference Call
- [The Grant Application Writers' Workbook, NIH version](#), Grant Writers' Seminars and Workshops group
- [Handbook for Planning and Writing Successful Grant Proposals: Introduction](#), workbook and video clip, AtKisson Training Group (ATG)

Upcoming Opportunities:

Have a question? [Submit](#) what's on your mind and we will answer it in a future newsletter.

Research Communications Master Class

(hosted by the OVPR)

Virtual workshops presented by Melissa Marshall. Participants are not required to attend all sessions.

- **March 29 | 5:00–6:30pm**
Tell a Clear Technical Story
- **April 5 | 6:00–7:30pm**
Transforming Slide Design
- **April 12 | 5:00–6:30pm**
Short Storytelling: Elevator Pitch

[Register](#)

NSF CAREER Awardee Panel Discussion

(sponsored by the OVPR)

This event will provide an opportunity to hear from 3 accomplished NSF CAREER award recipients regarding their experience with the application process, plus additional information and a Q&A session.

- **April 15 | 10:00–11:00 am**

[For more information and to register](#)

Maximizing Pivot to Find Funding and Collaborators

(hosted by the OVPR)

Join this one hour Zoom session to learn how Pivot can save you time and effort in identifying the right funding opportunities for your research, as well as finding potential collaborators with the relevant expertise.

- **April 19 | 2:00–3:00 pm**

[Register here](#)

NIH Administrative Supplements to Support Diversity Mentorship

Qualified investigators can submit proposals for a new NIH administrative supplement to extend their existing awards. Applicants should have demonstrated a commitment to exceptional training and mentorship, and especially individuals from groups identified as underrepresented in the biomedical sciences will be considered.

[More information](#)

Resource Library: Learn from Successful Examples

Are you curious about how to structure your proposal to a certain funding agency? Check out the Resource Library to see examples of successful proposals to various funding agencies.

[View the Resource Library](#) (Note: HawkID authentication required)

