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THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

Writing an Introduction for an NIH Resubmission Application

NIH gives applicants who are resubmitting an NIH proposal just a single page (the Introduction) to respond to reviewer feedback on the original proposal, even though the specific critiques can number over 30[1]. Often this means that there isn't enough space to cover each concern that was raised. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on those that are most important and carefully weigh the benefits of highlighting positive feedback against the drawbacks of not responding to all key criticisms. In this newsletter issue, we provide examples of Introductions[2] as well as strategies to help make them focused and balanced.

From NIH Tips for a Strong Resubmission Application[3]:

- *If possible within your Introduction's one-page limit, address comments point by point.*
- *Be sure your Introduction at least does the following:*
  - *Summarizes the issues and criticisms, responding in as much detail as possible.*
  - *Summarizes the substantial additions, deletions, and changes to the application.*

Content to include:

- A statement or short paragraph thanking the reviewers for their insightful comments.
  - When space allows, authors sometimes include a brief summary of the things the reviewers liked best about the original proposal.
  - This paragraph should be no more than four lines long and should not refer to previous praise if this comes at the expense of adequately responding to a criticism.
- A section addressing key issues point by point, preferably in bullet format.
  - This typically takes up most of the space.
  - If new preliminary data are available, these can be referred to in support of the resubmitted proposal.
- If space allows, a short section addressing minor issues point by point, preferably in bullet format.

Strategies for organizing responses:

- If the original application was discussed, prioritize criticisms that are mentioned explicitly in the "Resume and Summary of Discussion" paragraph (on page 2 of the NIH Summary Statement for the original submission). These are the issues on which most of the discussion was focused.
- Rank the concerns according to their scientific importance.
- Rank the concerns according to the number of reviewers who brought them up.
- Consider average values for scored criteria; generate a table summarizing each reviewer's score for each criterion.
  - Do any criteria stand out as requiring the most attention?
  - If there is space in the Introduction, the summary table can be inserted as text box in the upper right-hand corner to justify how the reviewer concerns were prioritized[1].
  - Typically, score-driving concerns for research (R) grants relate to Approach and Significance; they can also relate to Innovation, Investigator, and/or Environment.
  - For Career (K) and Fellowship (F) grants, score-driving concerns beyond the research plan can relate to the career development/training plan and mentoring team/sponsor(s).
- When writing your responses, start with those criticisms that were score driving and then move on to those that were raised by the most reviewers. As depicted in the examples of Introductions[2], consider organizing the responses by:
  - Topic (Example Introduction 1)
  - Scored review criteria (Example Introduction 2)

Strategies for keeping the response to one page:

- Paraphrase reviewer concerns as topics rather than quoting each reviewer; if organizing by topic, use the paraphrased text as a heading (Example Introduction 1).
  - Follow each heading with a brief description of how you have addressed the point.
  - Address each point as concisely as possible but in enough detail to satisfy the reviewer.
- Refer to the reviewers as R1, R2, R3 after defining this abbreviation the first time you use it; to save space, consider formatting these as superscripts and bolding them.
- Use lean language but provide context; explain not just what was changed but why[4].
- Avoid long apologies, though if there was a mistake in the first submission, acknowledge it.

Other considerations:

Upcoming Opportunities

Have a question about writing grants or research articles? Contact us and we will attempt to answer it in a future newsletter.

Demystifying the NIH Diversity Supplement Application and Review Process
October 30 | 3:30–4:30 pm | Zoom
NIH Diversity Supplements (PA-21-071) support research experiences for individuals from diverse backgrounds, including individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. All UI faculty, postdocs, graduate students, and undergraduates are invited to attend this informative panel discussion, hosted by the Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core (SERCC).
More Information
Join Zoom Meeting

Hybrid Proposers' Days for new ARPA-H Programs to Improve Our Ability to Fight Viruses and Treat Disease
November 16 | 8:30 am–5:30 pm MST | virtual
November 17 | 8:30 am–5:00 pm MST | virtual
On September 29th, the The Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-A) launched the Resilient Extended Automatic Cell Therapies (REACT) program and the Antigens Predicted for Broad Viral Efficacy through Computational Experimentation (APECx) program. The REACT program aims to overcome the problems surrounding medication non-adherence by creating two different, but related, bioelectronic devices capable of treating chronic conditions remotely. These devices will be implanted in patients during minor outpatient surgery and will interface with a simple software platform or app that allows users to track their condition directly. The APECx program is focused on three areas: high-throughput biochemical analysis and protein engineering, protein modeling toolkit development for antigen design, and translational candidate development and clinical evaluation.
Details about the REACT program, including registration for Hybrid Poposer's Day November 16
Details about the APECx program, including registration for Hybrid Poposer's Day November 17

Limited Submission: Mallinckrodt Foundation Scholars Program 2024
December 11 (Internal Submission Deadline)
January 15 (Sponsor Deadline)
The mission of the Mallinckrodt Foundation is to support early-stage investigators engaged in basic biomedical research that has the potential to significantly advance the understanding, diagnosis or treatment of disease. Eligibility: Faculty members who hold MD and/or PhD degrees, and are in their fifth to eighth year of a tenure-track position, with support to move the project forward to the point where other independent funding can be obtained, are eligible to apply. Limitation: two applications per institution
Submit internal application

- As with any rebuttal letter, avoid a defensive or confrontational tone; this will likely not be appreciated by either the new reviewers or NIH staff.
- Be sure that all concerns addressed in the Introduction are also addressed in the body of the grant.
    - E.g., it is not sufficient to explain in the Introduction why a particular approach was taken.
    - The point must also be clarified in the proposal.
- Whereas many factors contribute to how your revised proposal fares under review, putting your best effort into writing a clear, concise, and thoughtful Introduction will set a good tone and is well worth the effort. Be sure not to leave this until the last minute.

Good luck with your next resubmission of an NIH grant!
Chris Blaumueller and the SERCC Team

Summary of Resources:

1. Robertson J, Russell S, Morrison D. *The Grant Application Writers' Workbook, NIH version*, 2021.
2. Supplementary file of example NIH Introductions.
3. NIH Tips for a Strong Resubmission Application
4. AtKisson MS. *Handbook for Planning and Writing Successful Grant Proposals: Approach/Research Plan*. 2021.

Limited Submission: NIH: Collaborative Program Grant for Multidisciplinary Teams (RM1 - Clinical Trial Optional)
December 21 (Internal Submission Deadline)
January 26 (Sponsor Deadline)
This FOA is designed to support highly integrated research teams of three to six PDs/PIs to address ambitious and challenging research questions that are within the mission of NIGMS. Project goals should not be achievable with a collection of individual efforts or projects. Collaborative program teams are expected to accomplish goals that require considerable synergy and managed team interactions. Teams are encouraged to consider far-reaching objectives that will produce major advances in their fields. Limitation: two applications per institution
Submit internal application