

A red-handled roller is shown in the process of painting a black road on a green field. The roller is positioned in the center of the frame, with its handle extending upwards. The road is painted with a dashed white line down the center and solid white lines on the sides. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

# Writing for Success: Developing a Strong Fellowship Proposal

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# Agenda

## ▶ Questions:

- ▶ Have you submitted an application yet?
- ▶ If not, what seems the most daunting?
- ▶ If so, what feedback have you received?

## ▶ What we will discuss:

- ▶ Elements of Success
- ▶ Strategy for Approaching the Application
- ▶ Key Sections

# Introductions

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*I'm here to share my 10 years of experience working in the Feinberg School of Medicine working with clinical research fellows and post-docs in developing fundable research proposals.*

# What is Fellowship Funding?

Very broad swath of funding opportunities open to trainees with similar proposal components:

1. Research project
2. Career development plan and mentoring
3. Reference Letters
4. Supplemental Material

Differences by funding agency, type of award (clinical/translational/basic), size of funder, award amount

Have you worked on these types of applications?



# Strategy

- ▶ Prioritize sections - begin with the most important and work to the least important
- ▶ Reviewers - Who are they? Do they know your recommenders? Do they know your science?
- ▶ Excellent science is important - just as important as matching the priorities of the funder

# Research Project

*A structured project that advances your research career and meets the priorities of the funder.*

1. Lean toward an idea where you have a stronger track record, unless funder does not require it.
2. Look at what the funder previously awarded to determine their current interests and ensure your idea is a good fit.
3. Understanding your audience will help you structure your proposal - are you writing to experts or generalists in your field?



# Specific Aims

*A one page summary of the hypothesis your research project will answer and the steps you will take to answer it.*

1. Most important section of your application - this is a road map for busy reviewers.
2. This area of your proposal will likely be read first. It should be clear and compelling to keep your reviewer interested.
3. Keep specific aims to one page.



# Career Development

*Explicitly or implicitly, fellowship funding is about your career development. This requires a roadmap for your career and understanding what skills and abilities you need to be successful for a given project.*

1. Not all proposals have a specific career development plan, but most have an expectation for the applicant to understand their *strengths and weaknesses* and how they will address them.
2. Include Northwestern research resources to bolster success (cores, centers)
3. Your mentor/collaborator selections can also bolster this section.
4. Coursework, training in a lab - pulling from a “master plan” every time you write a grant can help you fund your career development

# The Mentor Letter / Letters of Support

*Every proposal has them; most are drafted by the applicant.*

MENTOR LETTER: 2 pages

*Purpose: To establish your talents, skills and readiness for the proposed work and commit time to your career success and project. To describe your mentor's experience in working with you and your potential for success.*

## COLLABORATOR/SUPPORT LETTER

*Purpose: To describe past and current collaborations and commit to the proposed work through the life of the project.*

1. Include relevant information to the proposal.
2. Stack letters in order of relationship to funder or reviewers. (Not all of them will be read.)
3. Be enthusiastic, do not be modest - be factual.

# Suggested Mentor Letter Format

1. Involvement/Work with applicant-mentee
2. Summary of Applicant background
3. Assessment of proposal/career development plan as related to candidate's readiness for the project
4. Endorsement of collaborators
5. Description and commitment of mentor's resources and overall support for candidate and project

This letter format can be modified to meet specific requirements.

# Elements of Success

- ▶ Best match between your work and funding opportunity
- ▶ Get the science right - especially your specific aims
- ▶ Tell a clear, coherent, consistent story
- ▶ It's not necessary to use a lot of fancy words or jargon
  - ▶ Match your terminology to the funder and reviewers
- ▶ Each funding mechanism should have a tailored proposal
- ▶ Follow the guidelines
- ▶ Ensure that your science and budget are appropriate and realistic for the time period.

Most of all.....

Make your reviewer's job  
very, very easy!

# Questions



# Resources

Bourne P, Chalupa, L. *Ten Simple Rules for Getting Grants*. PLoS Comput Bio 2(2):e12

Dant, C (2010) *Your Thoughts Are Like A String of Pearls*. Science Writing: Dartmouth Undergraduate Jrl of Science. Vol3 (9-12).

Goodson, Patricia. *Becoming an Academic Writer, 50 Exercises for Paced, Productive, and Powerful Writing*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Sage Publishing 2017

Siegle G, Johnson S, Everhart E, Newton T. *Tips on Writing NRSA Proposals*. Supported NIMH(K02MH082998). 2006

Yuan K, Cai L, Ngok SP, Ma L, Botham CM, (2016) *Ten Simple Rules for Writing a Post-Doctoral Fellowship*. PLoS Comput Biol 12 (7): e1004934. doi: 10.1371/journal.pcbi.1004934