NIH Study Section
“What Really Happens”

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“There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.”

Colin Powell
“If plan A doesn’t work, there are 25 more letters in the alphabet.”

quote stolen from a book I read-
Chris Reilly
Some of my more memorable recent comments

• “The PI’s post-training publications are in the mid to low impact journals.”
• “Although novel hypotheses are advanced there is a lack of strong support for several of them.”
• “There is literature on the topic of HDAC inhibition and B cells not cited in this application.”
• “Although the applicant has some post-doctoral research training in immunology it would appear to be somewhat limited. He has no background in B cell biology.”
• “Hopefully by using the term “utilize” the applicant means “train” these students.”
Study Section Members

• Some 4 year appointments
• Some ad hoc reviewers
• R15 “special emphasis panels”
If possible get to know your study section members
Go to meetings-schmooze

• Ask people about their research
• Bring people over to your poster, tell them about your research
• Find Program Officials at conferences
• Play the game
What’s most important (5 things)

1. Approach
2. Approach
3. Approach
4. Approach
5. Approach
Specific Aims Page

• This should be 50% of your time in writing a grant.
• If this isn’t perfect, nothing else matters.
• Have people look at it. Have people be harsh with it.
• Keep revising it as you write proposal.
A couple pearls that I have heard from others

- Each page needs a figure
- Left hand justified
- Each task needs to show you have expertise or someone in group does
- References (cite people on your study section if possible)
- Don’t get bogged down in the vendor you get antibody from (too descriptive)
- Alternate approaches and interpretation of data is essential
- Don’t be too ambitions
- Gene array needs a focus (fishing expedition)
- Don’t make figure/font too small
Investigator

• If you are not strong with publications, ask someone who is to be part of their project.
• Get your name on papers- Journal impact factor counts!!!!!
• If you are lacking expertise in area, get a co-investigator on project who has it.
• Publish with co-investigators (otherwise it’s just lip service) the relationship is questioned.
Significance

• Explain how many people your research may help
• Cost in dollars, patient hospital visits etc.
• Don’t say you will ‘cure cancer,’ but how your project will contribute to health or scientific ‘new’ knowledge
• Future implications
Innovation

• For R15 not as important
• Can be idea
• Can be method
• I put down three things (each with subheading):
  – Conceptual
  – Technical
  – Translational
Environment

• Generally not ever really discussed much
• Most every proposal it’s considered window dressing for the investigator (especially if they have a tract record or are known)
• More reflective of investigator
• For R15 need to stress this
  – Where you get students
  – Their role on the project
  – Tract record with students
  – Where research will be conducted
  – Bolded publication with them
Other stuff

- Statistics
- Animals
- Human subjects
- Data availability
- Reproducibility
- Preliminary data—need it. Make it large enough to see.
- Make it relevant to proposal (especially if you haven’t published in a technique)
- Spell check (typos are killers) Correct verb tense.
Discussed vs non-Discussed

• First goal-get it discussed…. top 50%
• If not discussed, look at comments from reviewers, call Program Official
• If discussed, read the Resume and Summary of Discussion- This is most important!!!!!!
Resume and Summary of Discussion

• Largely already written by chairman before meeting (your score is largely already decided).

• The comments need to be addressed in revision (each comment)
Finally, don’t give up, don’t ever give up

This snake captured a lizard and began to eat it alive. As the lizard lost the use of its arms and legs by being swallowed, the lizard bit down on the snake and prevented it from being eaten. Life or death fight and it’s all depended on how long this %&&*@#$ can bite down for. Eventually, the snake regurgitated the lizard and both left alive. You have no other choice but to prevail. The only easy day was yesterday. You can adapt, and made %&#@ happen.

#staythecourse