

Tips and Tricks for Preparing K Awards

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Start Earlier Than You Think

- **Well before the writing begins (1-3 years)**
 - Develop a network of mentors
 - Publications, preferably with mentors
 - Small grant programs
 - Establish independent line of research with preliminary data/working model
- **When the writing begins (6-8 months)**
 - Acquire examples of successful K's for a template
 - Time for strategic planning on both research and training plans
 - Time for input from mentors and advisors
 - Time to gather all the parts and pieces
- **The final refinement (1-2 months)**
 - Independent assessments and editing (mock reviewers, mock study sections)
 - Editors for typos and clarity

The Candidate

- **Go into “I love myself” mode to put your best foot forward**
 - **Enthusiastic, confident, unapologetic**
 - **Describe a strategic, rather than a serendipitous, training path, which will lay the foundation for this training experience**
- **Provide reasonable explanations for gaps in training or productivity**
- **Provide summary metrics of productivity for reviewers**
 - **# publications, # first author, # abstracts, # small grants**
- **Clearly identify strengths, gaps in knowledge/skills**

Goals and Training Plan

- **Provide clear long-term (career) and short-term (K) goals**
 - **Be specific!** What kind of institution do you want to be at; how will this K/CDP help you get there?
- **Strategic plan specific to YOU**
 - **Fill specific gaps in knowledge/skills**
- **Plan should balance didactic, hands-on, and enrichment activities**
 - **Address both research and professional development**
 - **Detailed RCR, hitting all relevant points**
- **Integrate training plan with research objectives**
 - **Provide a clear path to independence**
- **Ambitious, but feasible**
 - **Research training should advance your skillset and be leading you to independence**

Importance of the aims page

- 1st thing to write
- It is the first impression of the research project
 - 3 reviewers will read the whole grant; but most of the review panel will at least skim your aims page
- Use it to recruit advisory/mentoring committee members
- Keep message simple
 - Use a schematic
- Format:
 - Rationale-addresses an important problem; will fill a knowledge gap;
 - Hypotheses!
 - Associated training
 - Impact of the work
- Number of aims should be feasible for budget and timeline

Research Plan

- **Working model, addressing a significant problem**
- **Independent aims, testing the working model**
 - Well presented preliminary data that supports the premise
 - Research objectives that are well-integrated with the training plan
 - Ambitious, but feasible; this includes budget considerations
 - The subsequent R01 should be easily envisioned
- **Address important components**
 - Rigor and reproducibility
 - Sex as a biological variable
 - Well aligned human subjects, vertebrate animals, etc

Mentors and Mentoring Plan

- **Strategically designed mentoring team**
 - Well defined roles, relevant to the training plan
 - Not too many, not too few; well justified
- **Awesome mentors**
 - Funding profile, mentoring experience
 - Enthusiastic supportive statements, dedicated to your success
 - Statements consistent with the training plan
- **Clearly support pathway to independence**
 - Non-competing line of research
 - Tools and data are yours to take with you
- **Mentoring vs. advisory committee:**
 - Doesn't matter what you call it but it must be clearly defined
- **Co-mentor: more common now**
 - Definitely include if you are staying with your postdoctoral advisor and/or institution

Environment

- **Enthusiastic support for your potential and success**
 - Evidence of pre-existing support
 - Reasonable path to tenure-track faculty position in time for R01
 - Plans for promotion, NOT contingent upon the award
- **Be creative in selling institutional support**
 - Centers of excellence, research cores, pilot programs, research base, enrichment programs, training programs
- **Strong, tailored facilities/equipment section**

Important Considerations

- **Institutional support letter**
- **Approach to addressing sex as a biological variable**
- **Integrated timeline for research and training**
- **Use figures, tables, diagrams**
- **Know your agency!**