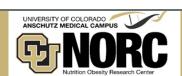
Tips and Tricks for Preparing K Awards

Paul MacLean and Darleen Sandoval



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



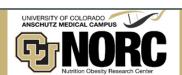
The Candidate

- 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



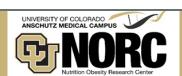
Importance of the aims page

- 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



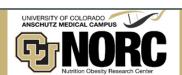
Research Plan

- 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



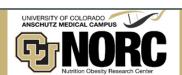
Mentors and Mentoring Plan

- 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!

