

“Approach” Section of NIH Grants

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Outline

- Why is “Approach” important?
- Key components
- Tables and Figures
- Videos
- Sex as a biological variable

Question

What are the most important things to include in the “Approach” section of an NIH grant?

Write your answer in the chat or Q&A box.

Imagine your reviewer is a on crowded airplane



“Approach” Section

- This is where you describe in detail what you are proposing – including the preliminary data, the rationale, the analysis, and the sample size calculation
- Similar to a methods section of a research paper in terms of providing enough detail that you can actually do the work (and be useful after your grant is funded!)
- Three ways to organize: a sequential approach if each aim has different study populations or data; an integrated approach if there is substantial overlap; a hybrid that combines both types

Avoid Annoying Reviewers

- Don't annoy your reviewers: acronyms, repetition
- I repeat the specific aims before the approach associated with each aim (some folks don't do it this way)
- DO NOT repeat items in the approach as a rule of them (better to cross reference other parts of the grant)

Key components of Approach

- Theory or conceptual approach
- Study team
- Aims: introduction, justification & feasibility, preliminary data, study design (study sites, key steps, sample size/power, measures, data analysis, expected outcomes, potential problems and alternatives, summary)
- Need to include sex as a biological variable

Key components: Theory

- Reviewers like to see a conceptual framework, theory, or approach that can weave different elements together
- More than one framework is fine, but need to think about how they inter-relate and also will be used in your study
- Expect this to be more carefully examined in qualitative studies and mixed methods research
- UW has a helpful website on picking a Theory/Model/Framework:
<https://impsciuw.org/implementation-science/research/frameworks/>

Tables

- Tables help to break up the text and make things easier to emphasize
- Include a table title above the table and make sure that it can be interpreted on its own (footnotes underneath the table are good)
- Use consistent fonts/sizes as the rest of the grant application (Arial 11 generally good)
- My general take on shading and colors is to be simple. If you want to use colors, don't draw attention to them. Make the science on the page the super exciting part!

Figures

- Explaining new concepts in a figure can be helpful to get your point across; need to be intelligible without text
- A flow chart in clinical trial grants can be useful to map out the territory (similar to a CONSORT diagram in a trial paper)
- May consider small photographs of the study team members (can be especially useful if their identity is relevant to the grant application)
- Figures that don't add value should be deleted

Videos

- A video can provide valuable information not in the grant itself
- Need to write in your cover letter that you are submitting a video
- Must include an image/still of the video in the research strategy (cannot assume all the reviewers will access the video)
- Closed-captioning is best to increase understanding
- After the review group is listed, you contact the scientific review officer (SRO)
- No hyperlinks to videos

Sex as Biological Variable

- Sex is a biological classification encoded in DNA; gender is social constructed roles, behaviors, expressions of men, women, and gender diverse people
- Brief video: <https://orwh.od.nih.gov/sex-gender/nih-policy-sex-biological-variable>

True or False

Cost is a valid reason for excluding females from inclusion in the study.

Write your answer in the chat or Q&A box.

True or False

Cost is a valid reason for excluding females from inclusion in the study.

Cost is not an acceptable reason to exclude females from a study. There are scientifically justifiable reasons to exclude women. For example, a grant focused on preventing HIV among men who have sex with men.

Thank you



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Thank you



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