Grant Writing Tricks

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"Fully loaded" outline

• Your research career
• Types of funding
  • Pilot grants
  • F32s
  • K grants
  • R and U grants
• NIH fun facts (review process)
• Pet peeves and dos
Somebody called her a smarty pants and she thought, “why yes, yes I am. Thank you for noticing.”

Queenisms™
Your research career is judged on

Mentoring  Publications

Grant awards
Types of funding

- Pilot grants
  - UCSF RAP
  - Hellman awards
  - AIDS Research Institute (ARI) awards

- Foundation grants [https://pivot.cos.com/funding_main](https://pivot.cos.com/funding_main)
  - Look for career development grants – can be similar to Ks

- NIH grants
  - F32 grants – postdoc stipend and tuition
  - K awards – late postdoc / junior faculty
  - R-series – Independent researcher (i.e. faculty)
  - U-series – Like R grants but with collaboration from the NIH
  - Supplements to existing NIH grant awards – diversity or administrative

- Table of K01 and K23 salary and research support by institute
  - [https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/contacts/parent_K01.html](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/contacts/parent_K01.html)
Pilot grants

• UCSF RAP (includes CFAR Mentored Junior Scientist, CAPS Innovative Grant, others)
  • Here rap.ucsf.edu
  • Range from $25K - $50K
  • 1 year of funding
  • 43% success rate
  • Can be easier and faster than applying to the NIH

• Hellman foundation (junior faculty)
  • $25-$75K, less restrictive than NIH funds
Pilot grants

• Get experience writing grants
• Pilot data for K award proposal
• Establish feasibility within your area (recruitment, methods, etc.)
• Publications!
• Viewed favorably by reviewers of K-award proposals – success begets success
Pilot grant applications should include (even if not explicitly in the instructions):

• A vehicle to get your research career in motion
• How it fits into your research trajectory – explicitly state that this will lead to a K-proposal on xyz
• Mentoring/senior participation
F32s (a.k.a. NRSAs)

• Postdoctoral awards, up to 3 years of support
  • If you are on a T award you may not be eligible
• Provide stipends and tuition, very limited research $
• Include a research plan and a training section
• Very common in the basic sciences (PhDs), becoming more common for MDs
• 28% success rate in 2017 ([report.nih.gov/success_rates](http://report.nih.gov/success_rates))
• Establish a track record
K awards

• 3-5 year awards (duration varies by institute, can ask for more) for training and research towards independence as an investigator
• Support 75%-100% of your salary – protected time for research
• $25K-$50K for training and research / year
• 2017 Success rates: (report.nih.gov/success_rates)
  • K23: 34%  K01: 31%  K08: 43%  K99: 23%
• Catch 22: You must be faculty or have a letter that says you will be faculty, independent of the outcome of the proposal (except for the K99)
K Funding Mechanisms*

- Eligibility, $ awarded, flavor, and rules vary somewhat by NIH Institute
  - Find out which institute has the most relevant work and search “K award”

- **K01**: Mentored **Research Scientist** Development Award
  - Usually non-clinician PhDs

- **K08**: Mentored **Clinical Scientist** Development Award
  - Health professional doctoral degree not doing patient-oriented research (e.g. using established data, social attachment genes in prairie voles)

- **K23**: Mentored **Patient-Oriented Research** Career Development Award
  - Clinicians doing patient-oriented research (better salary coverage than K01)

- **K99/R00**: Pathway to Independence Award
  - 2 years in postdoc position conducting training activities
  - 2-3 years in faculty position conducted research (like a small R01)
  - Non-US residents may receive this one

NIAID [https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/career-development-awards#A2](https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/career-development-awards#A2)

K12 funding mechanisms

• NIH grant awarded to an institution

• There are several K12s at UCSF
  
  https://accelerate.ucsf.edu/funding/career-development-awards

  • BIRCWH – Women’s Health https://bircwh.ucsf.edu/
  
  • CTSI K Scholars https://accelerate.ucsf.edu/training/kl2
    
    • Can go on to receive a K01, K08, or K23
    
    • CTSI K Scholars also mentors scholars who have their own K
      
      https://accelerate.ucsf.edu/training/k-scholar-application
        
        • Hint: If you are writing a K application say you intend to apply for this

• Domestic research only
K award criteria

• All about you and your mentoring team
• Evidence of *recent* productivity
  • First-author publication of original research in a peer-reviewed journal.
• A track record of training and research consistent with the proposed research/training
• A career development plan and a research plan that will prepare you to compete successfully for an R01 grant.
• The proposal includes a 6-page career development training plan and a 6-page research plan, plus LOTs of letters
Career development training plans for a K award

• Develop a training plan that is *uniquely* suited to you.
  
  • Propose a mix of didactic training and “hands-on” research experience that make perfect sense for you (and only you), given your previous training and research experience and your short- and long-term career goals.
Training plans for K awards

• A training plan that emphasizes “hands-on” research experience is appropriate for candidates with substantial previous formal training in research.

• Reviewers expect you to fully exploit the training resources that are available to you at UCSF (i.e. CFAR, CTSI).

• You can propose to use training resources outside UCSF, but choose the best available.

• Your training plan should be as strong as your research plan.
Designing a research plan for a K award application

- The research plan is a *training vehicle*.
  - The research plan should provide an opportunity to acquire new skills and should be well integrated with your career development training plan.

- The research plan is a *means to achieve independence*.
  - The research plan should be viewed as a precursor for a subsequent R01 or R34 application.

- Mentored K awards provide *limited funding*.
  - The scope of the research plan needs to be appropriate and feasible, given the modest resources available in a mentored K award.
  - It is best to be adding on to an existing funded study.
Your team for a K award is key

• Choose a primary mentor who is a *senior* investigator with a track-record of NIH funding (i.e. Associate or Full Professor)
  • At UCSF, mentored others, preferably other K awardees
  • Should be able to mentor you in the content area *and* in career development
  • Include a co-mentor if needed to fill a gap
• Include consultants who will complement the primary mentor’s strengths.
• Every person included should have a unique role.
• Keep your mentoring team small (3-5 members).
K award study section review criteria

• Candidate
• Career Development Plan/Career Goals & Objectives
• Research Plan
• Mentor(s), Co-Mentor(s), Consultant(s), Collaborator(s)
• Environment and Institutional Commitment to the Candidate
Other NIH grant mechanisms
https://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/funding_program.htm

• Some grant mechanisms are offered by only some institutes
• Some grant mechanisms have different rules, varying by institute
• Not all funding announcements allow all grant mechanisms
NIH alphabet soup

• FOA: Funding opportunity announcement - generic term

• PA, PAS, PAR
  • Something the NIH (one or more of the institutes) wants to prioritize – no special funds attached. PAS or PAR might mean it will go to a special review panel, which may be an advantage.

• RFA, RFP
  • Something the NIH (one or more of the institutes) wants done, and has set aside $ for
  • Will have special review
  • Consider carefully. Note experts in the field will flock to these. If you are not established in the field think twice. Pay lines may not be any better than for other proposals.

• There are specific FOAs for Ks and F32s, etc. E.g. PA-18-369

• New rules! If you are giving an intervention to humans (meds, behavioral intervention, etc.) your study is considered a clinical trial and your FOA must note that clinical trials are allowed
Research (R) grants

• R03: Small Grant Program. Up to $100K over 2 years
• R21: Exploratory/Developmental Grant. Up to $275K total over 2 years.
  • Should address the feasibility of a *novel area of investigation* or a *new experimental system* that has the potential to enhance health-related research.
• R34: Clinical Trial Planning Grant. Up to $450K over 1-3 years
  • Clinical trial planning and/or feasibility/pilot studies (varies by institute)
• R01: Research Project Grant. Up to $500K/year, 3-5 years.
  • All institutes offer R01s.
  • Significant preliminary data and publications are required.
  • R01 or similar award is a sign of independence and needed for advancement to Associate Professor at UCSF.
Designing a research plan for an R01

1. Address a clearly defined research problem that is a high priority in your field. Public health significance.

2. Build on previous research (the data you collect in your K award?) and pose interesting, important, and testable hypotheses.

3. Propose a scope of work that is appropriate to the track record of the investigator(s).
Building your team for an R01 (and onward)

• Seek opportunities for collaboration.
• Identify co-investigators who fill gaps in your expertise, especially a collaborator who is well known.
• Consider multidisciplinary approaches.
• Recruit senior colleagues who can provide advice and periodic peer-review of your grant application (e.g., overall scope, specific aims, methods)
Think like a reviewer

- R grant review criteria
  - Investigators
  - Significance
  - Innovation
  - Approach
  - Environment

- For R grants, the investigators and environment can score perfect scores, but proposals are mostly sunk on significance or approach

- If re-submitting a proposal, carefully analyze the comments
  - If the only problems are with approach, it may be fixable
  - If the reviewers are having a hard time with significance, you might have more trouble on a resubmission

- Be a reviewer
  - Junior faculty can be RAP reviewers – contact Emy Volpe

- Your review hinges on communicating to the main reviewers
NIH review process

• 3-4 reviewers get your proposal several before section
• They are asked to write up reviews: summary, and strengths and weaknesses of each of these sections
• If preliminary scores from the reviewers make the cut (usually top 50-60%), your proposal will be discussed.
• The reviewers present your proposal, all members vote on the final score
• You will get the reviewers’ written comments, plus a one paragraph summary of the discussion (if discussed)
Grant writing resources

• Read others’ successful proposals, including their summary statements and revisions
  • CTSI K library accelerate.ucsf.edu/funding/k-library
  • Hahn K library or take my grant writing course (http://ticr.ucsf.edu/courses/schedule/grant_writing_workshop.html)
  • NIH reporter projectreporter.nih.gov

• CAPS peer reviews (contact Stuart Gaffney)
Pet peeves

- Using long words or phrases short ones would suffice. E.g. *utilize instead of use; with respect to instead of about.*
- Using a passive voice
- Feeding the reviewer adjectives without specifics
  - *This project will have a highly significant impact on the field.*
- Filling every millimeter of every page.
- Typos and inconsistencies (e.g. you changed your sample size one place, forgot to change it in another)
- Lacking excitement for what you are doing
- Writing the proposal* at the last minute
  - Reviewers can smell it, co-investigators don’t want to deal with it
DO!

• Read others’ successful grant proposals. If possible read their review sheets as well.

• Make your proposal easy to read. Clear short headings, judicious use of bolding or underlining (only a few per page).

• Get reviews of your concept early on and then get a peer review when it is mostly done.
In grant writing and in life,

• Choose your mentors and collaborators wisely
  • Make sure you have found the experts in your field
• Reach out to new and interesting people, even if they are very senior
• Be generous
• Find and follow your passions
• Have fun
Thank you!