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# Tips for New NIH Grant Applicants

*These tips were gathered by NIGMS staff members. Suggestions for additions to the list are welcome, and should be sent to [hagana@nigms.nih.gov](mailto:hagana@nigms.nih.gov).*

## First Steps

1. Find out about the institutional support that is available to you (such as a startup package).
2. Broaden your vision beyond that which you had as a student.
3. Seek mentoring.
4. Instead of feedback, try "feed forward." (This approach, put forth by Dr. Keith Yamamoto of the University of California, San Francisco, involves asking three senior colleagues to act as your "grant committee" and discussing your ideas for the application with them before starting the writing process. Next, write one page of three to five specific aims and discuss these with the committee before beginning to write the body of the application. Thus, by the time you tackle the bulk of the writing, the organization and content of your proposal have received fairly detailed scrutiny and critical consideration.)

## Start Work

5. Have a good idea!
6. Establish your independence as an investigator.
7. Generate preliminary data.
8. Enlist collaborators and include letters that clearly spell out the collaborations in your proposal.
9. Look at successful proposals of colleagues in your field.
10. Contact NIH by Web and by phone to reach people who want to help you:

- NIH--<http://www.nih.gov>
- Center for Scientific Review--<http://www.csr.nih.gov>
- National Institute of General Medical Sciences--<http://www.nigms.nih.gov>
- Reserch Portfolio Online Reporting Tool (RePORT, a searchable database of federally funded biomedical research projects)--  
<http://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm>

## Start Writing

11. Prepare your proposal **early**--well before the deadline. **Do not rush!**
12. Make your first proposal your best proposal. Convey your confidence and enthusiasm for the project.
13. Do your homework and know the literature and issues, questions and controversies in your area.
14. Place your work in perspective. Cite others. If there are two camps, make sure you cite both sides.
15. Make your priorities clear. Provide a timeline.
16. Be focused.
17. Discuss potential problems and pitfalls. Describe alternate strategies.
18. Carefully consider your funding needs. Start with personnel--you will need to explain fully the role of each person on the grant. Review the NIH modular grant rules, which specify that you must request funds in \$25,000 modules and which do not permit increments for inflation in the "out-years." In order to arrive at an appropriate bottom-line figure, you will have to treat the budget as a 4- or 5-year budget; you should get expert assistance in this preparation. Although you will not have to detail budgetary needs, keep in mind that the reviewers will judge your competence, in part, by how well your funding request matches the scope of the project.
19. Use a clear and concise writing style.
20. Proofread! Have zero tolerance for typographical errors, misspellings or sloppy formatting.

21. Critique your own proposal.
22. Have others read your final draft, as well.

### **After Review**

23. Remember that reviewers and the NIH program directors who influence funding decisions usually try to give new investigators a break.
24. If you are not funded the first time around, revise your application carefully. Consult your program director for advice.
25. If you are funded, be sure to talk with your program director at least once a year to discuss your progress.

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