

# **The NIDCR Grant Process: This is How to Prepare for it**

**Amid I. Ismail  
Dental Public Health  
School of Public Health  
University of Michigan**

# Lessons Learned from Failures and Some Successes

# General Rules for Grant Preparation

- General guides
  - It is a chess game; but with unknown reviewers
  - “Reviewers are always right”; even if they are wrong
    - Reviewers are right most of the time
  - Unfortunately, they may not say it to you
  - Not all projects deserve to be rejected and some of the funded projects should not have been funded
  - Reviewers are from the “show me” camp; they are cautious
  - Work for success but be ready for rejection

# General Rules for Grant Preparation

- Development and writing
  - Start to prepare very early and BUILD TEAMS
  - Mr. or Ms. 10%
  - It is all about the idea; keep it simple
  - The budget, budget, budget first
  - Coordinate the team
  - The first 2-3 pages can make or kill your proposal
  - Prepare for the busy reviewer
  - Convince them that you know
  - Methods, methods, methods

# General Rules for Grant Preparation

- After the submission
  - The review process is independent and “objective”
  - Research administrators have unique roles
  - Hope that the Study Section is appropriate; or attempt to make it happen

It is a chess game; but with unknown reviewers

It is better to have enough ideas and for some of them to be wrong, than to be always right by having no ideas at all.

Edward de Bono

Reviewers are always right; even if they  
are wrong

Reviewers are right most of the time

Reviewers are from the “show  
me” camp; they are cautious

Unfortunately, they may not say it

I cannot give you the formula for success,  
but I can give you the formula for failure:  
which is: try to please everybody.

Herbert B. Swope



Not all projects deserve to be rejected and some of the funded projects should not have been funded

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent in doing nothing.

John Bernard Shaw

Reviewers are from the “show me”  
camp; they are cautious

The policy of being too cautious is the  
greatest risk of all.

Jawaharlal Nehru

Work for success but be ready  
for rejection

I think all great innovations are built on  
rejections.

Louis Ferdinand Celine

Start to prepare very early and  
**BUILD TEAMS and  
SOCIAL/COMMUNITY  
NETWORKS**

**Mr. or Ms. 10%**

It is the lone worker who makes the first advance in a subject; the details may be worked out by a team, but the prime idea is due to the enterprise, thought, and perception of an individual.

Alexander Fleming

Focused and simple; too much information, like water, may kill you.

It is all about the idea; keep it simple

Everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler.

Albert Einstein

# Budget first

The art of developing and managing research  
budgets

**Be ETHICAL AND FOLLOW ALL THE  
REGULATIONS**

Coordinate the sections written by  
different team members

Failure is instructive. The person who  
really thinks learns quite as much from his  
failures as from his successes.

John Dewey

**Prepare for the busy reviewer!**

**Do not leave gaps in the methods;  
reviewers will always assume that  
you do not know**

**The first 2-3 pages (abstract,  
specific aims) are key**



Convince them that you know

Methods, methods, methods

Design

Outcomes

Validity and reliability

Statistical analysis

The review process is  
independent and “objective”!!

I have not failed. I've just found  
10,000 ways that won't work.

Thomas Edison

Research administrators  
usually do not comment on the  
reviewers' comments during  
the review session

I wash my hand of those who imagine chattering to be knowledge;  
silence to be ignorance...


Kahlil Gibran

Hope that the Study Section is appropriate; you may ask for assignment to a specific review section

However, what the investigators completely overlook, ..., is that the high rate of caries in this population is almost certainly due to lack to access to dental health care.

NIH Review, 2006

# Challenges are Opportunities



Nothing will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must first be overcome.

Samuel Johnson



Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly.

Robert F. Kennedy

