

# Success Stories in NIH R-15 AREA Grant Writing

Top Tips from a Faculty Perspective

# Brian Downes, Associate Professor, Department of Biology, Saint Louis University

1. Start early
2. Set time aside to begin catching up on the field's literature while outlining and definitely before digging in and writing. Too demoralizing otherwise. May have to change plans too far in and miss deadline if reading while writing.
3. Set 2 month pre-deadline to get all the detail work done:
  - forms downloaded and filled in
  - mock budget with all but specifics
  - collect references in endnote
4. Outline, and compare to timeline.
5. Create timeline, and compare to outline
6. Run ideas past an experienced/successful grant writer at early stages
  - specific aims
  - outline
  - final best draft
7. Illustrate, 1 picture per page
8. Decrease density, increase white space
9. Remember how broad the eligibility is ... I use a weed, *Arabidopsis*
10. Novelty is at least as important as medical relevance

Faith Liebl, Assistant Professor,  
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1. Start early--start earlier than you think you need to so you have plenty of time to send the proposal to others to read.
2. Do some research on HOW to write grants. NIH has lots of articles on their website. You can also find articles in *Nature* on how to write grants.
3. For the R15, it's especially important to show that you can successfully mentor students.
4. Provide letters of support from your Dept. Chair and Dean.
5. Talk to people at scientific meetings about their experiences. They don't have to submit R15s. Writing an R01 is almost the same as writing an R15.
6. Be careful about what you propose. Reviewers will often comment that a project is "too ambitious." You should take what you think you can get done and put it in a timeline. Then add additional time to your timeline.
7. Ask other PIs to see their successful proposals. Examples are great resources for giving you good ideas.
8. Carefully format the proposal to make it easy for the reviewers to read.

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1. Start at the right place (and do it early!)– Begin the process by coming up with your best research idea or question.
2. Challenge ideas from the start - Ask colleagues to critically evaluate your ideas. Perform exhaustive search against literature.
3. Gather information - program announcements, guidelines and instructions, scoring criteria, success rates, NIH study sections, funded projects.
4. Talk to people – NIH program officers, awardees, colleagues in the field.
5. Don't force collaborations – The best collaborations come naturally resulting from research ideas or questions.
6. Put yourself in the reviewer's shoes – When questions or concerns arise related to the research proposal, try to think like a reviewer!
7. Leave time for polishing - Be neat and consistent in formatting and wording. Careless writing is a real turn-off for reviewers.
8. Take a break – After several days without writing or even thinking about the grant, you can return with a fresh perspective.