What do you do when asked to review a proposal?
Reviewing Proposals

- Philosophy
- Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core (College of Medicine)
- Grants and Research Services Center (College of Education)
- Grants Support Office (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences)
- Office for Nursing Research and Scholarship (College of Nursing)
Philosophy

Within time constraints and limits set by authors, do everything possible to ensure submitted documents meet expectations regarding intended:

- use  
- content  
- organization  
- design  
- style

Make it functional (for readers), as well as correct and consistent.
Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

Mission:
Help researchers succeed with funding efforts and scholarship by advising them on how to make their message clear, concise, and compelling

Focus:
- Specific Aims page
- Research Strategy
- Abstract
- Project Narrative
- Biosketches
- Budget Justification
- Other ancillary docs

Level(s) of editing desired
(check all that are appropriate, mechanics always considered)
- Mechanics (proofing for grammar, typography)
- Style & Clarity (suggestions toward improving)
- Presentation (suggestions toward highlighting)
- Analysis (pre-review from perspective of a non-expert)
Contributions that do not require field-specific knowledge

- Correct mechanical issues
  - Inconsistencies in labels and abbreviations
  - Incorrect formatting

- Identify ambiguous statements
  - Ideally, provide alternative wording
  - Explain problem (embedded comments)

- Rearrange sentences and paragraphs
  - Topic vs. stress position
  - Topic and summary sentences

- Increase emphasis on key points
  - Improve formatting
  - Suggest figures in key places

Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core

**RESEARCH STRATEGY**

- **Significance:**
- **Importance of the problem:** About one third of the US population suffers from connective tissue disease. The inadequate delivery of scientific information to patients and clinicians is a significant problem. This is particularly true in conditions associated with a poor quality of life, such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, and scleroderma. Despite significant advances in research, many patients do not have access to the latest treatments or information. This leads to a lack of informed decision-making and reduced quality of life. Furthermore, there is a need for more effective drug delivery systems to improve patient outcomes.

- **Scientific premise:** The focus is on providing high-quality scientific content that is easy to understand and engaging for patients and clinicians. This includes correcting mechanical issues, identifying ambiguous statements, and rearranging sentences to improve clarity and readability. The goal is to ensure that the information is presented in a way that is accessible and informative, thereby improving patient outcomes and quality of life.

- **Objectives:**
  - Correct mechanical issues: Inconsistencies in labels and abbreviations, incorrect formatting.
  - Identify ambiguous statements: Ideally, provide alternative wording, explain problem (embedded comments).
  - Rearrange sentences and paragraphs: Topic vs. stress position, topic and summary sentences.
  - Increase emphasis on key points: Improve formatting, suggest figures in key places.

**= key terms from funding announcement**
Strategies to promote timely submission:

- Encourage authors to make “appointments” well before agency deadline (e.g. via website)
- Give priority to authors who
  - make (and keep) appointments
  - submit Specific Aims page at least two months before deadline
  - submit revised Specific Aims page with rest
  - incorporate substantial amount of feedback
- Provide templates for Specific Aims page/Research Strategy
- Provide timetable highlighting deadlines

Adapted from timetable shared by Linda Hand
College of Nursing
Strategies to decide which services to offer individuals:

- Post service options on website/ask first-time users (most say “all”)
- Send survey after first use
- Keep track of what authors requested previously

Strategies to earn author trust:

- Build up to potential gradually
- Use embedded comments to explain reasoning/ask questions

Ultimately, what will help is when the authors...

- See how much better their grants sound (and look)
- Receive compliments on clarity from colleagues and reviewers
- Find themselves less stressed/more confident about grant submission

Level(s) of editing desired
(check all that are appropriate, mechanics always considered)

- Mechanics (proofing for grammar, typographical)
- Style & Clarity (suggestions toward improving text)
- Presentation (suggestions toward highlighting strategies)
- Analysis (pre-review from perspective of a non-expert)
Minimum Review

- Look for typos (and correct), spelling, grammar & punctuation issues
- Review formatting - margins, font, type size (do all comport with instructions)
- Tables - are tables allowed? Double vs single space? What’s allowed?
- Are personnel/key personnel identified? Do identified personnel have cvs/bios? Are bios formatted correctly? Comport with instructions
- Headers/Sections: Are they consistent with instructions?
Minimum Review

- Does abstract contain all the required components?
- Is abstract clear?
- If NSF proposal, does abstract begin with the sometimes required first sentence?
Medium Review

- Review for understandability - highlight unclear sections
- Read for style/clarity - offer editorial suggestions - strike extraneous words/phrases/sentences as appropriate
- Review tense - is proper tense employed?
- Review budget and ensure it comports with narrative
- Identify overuse of jargon (if that is the case)
Grants and Research Services Center
College of Education

Full Review

- Deeper editorial review/mark up (only with PI permission) - make recommendations for improved writing
- Identify areas of weakness (if exist - some proposals are fantastic)
- Review grant scoring criteria and ensure that PI meets requirements
- Prepare per PI instructions all or any ancillary materials for the proposal
Grant Support Office
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Relationship with Principal Investigator
  - Discuss expectations - timelines, responsibilities, checklists, etc.
  - Communication styles
  - What feels like help?
  - Establish trust - know the boundaries
  - Relationship-building
Grant Support Office
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Reviewing Proposals:
  - Compliance - font size, margins, biosketches, etc.
  - Appearance - white space, headers, tables/graphs, etc.
  - Review Criteria
  - Logic - e.g. do the budget and narrative line up?
  - Proofing - typos, formatting, grammar
  - Editing - strengthen language, shorten if space constraints
  - Writing - drafts of boilerplate language, letters of support, etc.
  - Connect with reviewers if time allows
Office for Nursing Research and Scholarship
College of Nursing

What to DO:

► Clarify the level of review desired: Deep-dive vs. copy-editing
► **READ THE FOA**
► Determine where your edits can add value: Budget Justification? Biosketches? Facilities? IRB?
► Be gentle, esp. if you don’t know the PI well. It takes time to establish trust and credibility: “I think reviewers might be confused by this...”

DON’T:

► Wordsmith it to death
► Suggest changes that can’t be implemented in the time and budget given
► Assume you have nothing to offer as a nonscientist reviewer. You do!
Contact Information

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