NIH SPECIFIC AIMS POINTERS

The following are some suggestions to ensure that your Aims document includes all the traditional elements.

<u>Introductory Paragraph.</u> Your Introductory Paragraph should include: 1) an interest-grabbing and context-setting opening sentence; 2) a brief statement of what is known about the topic; 3) a brief statement of an existing gap in knowledge; and 4) a statement of a critical need associated with the topic and the gap in knowledge.

<u>Proposed Solution Paragraph</u>. In your second paragraph, you will want to introduce the solution that will fill the gap in knowledge, thereby addressing the critical need. This paragraph will take a variety of forms depending on the focus of the project, but should include a number of elements: 1) long-term goal of application or lab, 2) central hypothesis and project purpose, 3) rationale and 4) qualifications of PI or research team (including new data or advances to be utilized).

<u>Specific Aims</u>. Here you want to discuss the steps to meeting your objective (s) and, thereby, addressing critical need. A typical NIH R grant will have between 2 and 4 aims describing the experimental approach and how each step will help answer your larger hypothesis. Some tips for writing this section: 1) give your aim an active title that clearly states the intention in relationship to the hypothesis; 2) include a brief summary of the experimental approach and anticipated outcomes for each aim; 3) consider including a sub-hypothesis (the small portion of the overall hypothesis) and a small description of the impact of each aim (establishes each aim as valuable, testable, and independent of the others); 4) link aims to the critical need; and 5) have a logical flow from one aim to the next. Of special note: each aim can cover several related experimental questions.

<u>Significance:</u> Here you want to explains the overall significance of the project (ex. why it's an important project and how it will advance the state of the science, be of value to society, and aid the agency). One purpose of this section to develop advocates for your proposal among the majority of reviewers who will not, in all likelihood, have read the complete application. In this section, you will want to plainly state what is innovative about your project. What would completion of this proposal bring to the field that is not currently present?

*Formatting Suggestions: The most critical piece of the gap in knowledge or other Specific Aims content may be italicized. This technique can be useful to emphasize words or phrases but should you choose to use *italics* or <u>underline</u> to emphasize key points, remember to do so judiciously. Too much italicized text or underlining can be distracting. Also be sure to use bullet points to delineate your Specific Aims.