

# QUICK GUIDE FOR GRANT APPLICATIONS

Revised September 2010 (adapted from <http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.pdf>)

## INTRODUCTION

The guide is organized according to the major sections of the SF 424 (or PHS398) Grant Application Instructions. Each section is described, and a checklist is provided detailing what that section should cover. In addition, suggestions are included to enhance an application's success. The checklists are not exhaustive, but rather are designed to jog the application writer's memory and ensure completeness. This document in no way obviates the need for an inexperienced applicant to seek further advice from experienced colleagues or from appropriate NCI program personnel.

**PLANNING YOUR APPLICATION** Several key issues should be considered before, during, and after your application is written.

1. Before you begin writing your grant application, familiarize yourself with the new [NIH SF 424 Application Guide](#) for electronic applications and all the requirements and certifications. See [NIH Forms and Applications](#) for other types of required forms and applications, including the PHS 398 application for multi-component applications.
2. The submission of electronic applications to NIH involves the interaction between two systems: Grants.gov (<http://grants.gov>) and the NIH eRA Commons (<https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons/>). Individual investigators do not need to register with the Grants.gov system; however, you must be a registered Commons user to submit an application or be included as a Senior/Key Person. For more information, see [Electronic Submission](#).
3. All applications must be submitted in response to a [Funding Opportunity Announcement](#) (FOA). The NIH has developed Parent FOAs ([http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/parent\\_announcements.htm#more](http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/parent_announcements.htm#more)) for use by applicants who wish to submit unsolicited investigator initiated R01 applications and other common grant mechanisms. In addition, NIH publishes FOAs for specific [Request for Applications](#) (RFA) and [Program Announcements](#) (PA) that identify special research opportunities. Responding to such an FOA ensures that the correct application package is used and enables NIH to receive the application from [Grants.gov](#). FOAs can be found at [Grants.gov/FIND](#) for all government agencies and in the [NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts](#). If you are submitting to a specific RFA or PA, read the announcement in detail to be sure your application will be responsive to the announcement.
4. The deadlines for NIH grant applications depend on the grant mechanism. See schedule of standard due dates on: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/submissionschedule.htm>. For new R01 applications, February 5, June 5, and October 5 are the due dates. March 5, July 5, and November 5 are the due dates for R01 renewals, resubmissions and revisions. **Please note:** The deadlines for investigator-initiated applications in response to specific FOAs, such as RFAs and Program Announcements with special receipt (PAR), may differ. Always check the FOA for the receipt date.
5. The review and selection process for applications takes 8 to 10 months. Submit your very best application because reviewers expect you to have taken the time needed to think it through before submitting. For new investigators, there is an opportunity for resubmission of your application in the next review round when there are only minor concerns.

6. If possible, find someone in your institution who can assist you in understanding and completing the application. Ask your colleagues for copies of successful NIH grant applications to get a more concrete idea of what each section should include. Incomplete applications are returned without review.
7. Establish deadlines for the preparation of the grant application, particularly when collaborating investigators are involved. Be aware of institutional deadlines that could delay your application. Allow time for equipment failures, personnel shortages, etc.
8. Publish the papers; you can only cite published or accepted-for-publication papers. With the new page limitations, preliminary data should be published.
9. Become familiar with the NIH peer review criteria; reviewers will use them to rate your application.
10. If several people have major contributions to the research project, consider the option for [multiple Principal Investigators](#) (PIs). A Leadership Plan is required and [New Investigator](#) policies do not apply unless all PIs are considered New Investigators.
11. If possible, have objective experts (e.g., successful grantees, an institutional panel) review your application. Friends or close associates are rarely as critical as the reviewers on an NIH study section.
12. Do not feel inhibited about requesting technical assistance from the funding agency or your institution. Talk to the program representative (<http://www.cancer.gov/researchandfunding/contacts>) who will manage the grant for advice on scientific and technical issues, grant mechanisms, and information on special initiatives. Your institutional grants office can also be of assistance. Talk to them and find out how they can help you.
13. Investigate any special research priorities of funding agencies. Search the [NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts](#) for current FOAs and ascertain from the program representative whether your project falls within the scope of an existing RFA or PA or an area of special emphasis.
14. When submitting a revised application (resubmission), answer all reviewer concerns mentioned in the earlier Summary Statement. Substantial scientific changes must be described in the Introduction and marked in the text by bracketing, indenting, or change of typography. Only one resubmission is allowed; so prepare carefully. Regardless of how you feel, don't insult the reviewers. If you differ in your opinion, try to courteously convince the reviewers of your point-of-views. In addition to responding to specific reviewer concerns, review all other aspects of the application to determine whether updating or improvement is called for or possible. Just because it was not criticized before is no guarantee that it will not be criticized in the review of the resubmission.
15. ***Before submitting, reread your application. Have someone else read it as well. And then proofread it again.***