



OUR WEBINAR WILL BEGIN SHORTLY

PLEASE MUTE YOUR LINE



WRITING COMPELLING NARRATIVES

A WEBINAR FROM HANOVER RESEARCH

PENN STATE COLLEGE OF ARTS & ARCHITECTURE

APRIL 18, 2022

PRESENTATION LENGTH ~ 90 min

Q&A and WRAP-UP We will save 10 min for questions at the end with a wrap-up discussion.

RECORDING & SLIDES All attendees will have access to the slides and corresponding recording.

YOUR PRESENTER



MICHELLE FRANK, PhD

GRANTS CONSULTANT

Ph.D., Physiology
University of Wisconsin-Madison



TOTAL WINS

\$9M+ to individual
investigators & small
businesses

- Joined Hanover in 2019
- >8 years of grants consulting experience
- Started writing grants as a graduate student

SPECIALIZES IN



On a personal note...



HIKING



COOKING AND FOOD BLOGGING



BREWING



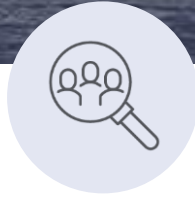
Quick Poll

1. *Have you written your own grant?
(Y/N)*
2. *If yes, have you been awarded
funding from your own grant
submission? (Y/N)*

OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S TOPICS



**PREPARING TO
WRITE YOUR
NARRATIVE**



**DESIGNING YOUR
NARRATIVE**



**WRITING YOUR
NARRATIVE**



**CREATING SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS**



**LEVERAGING YOUR
RESOURCES**

LET'S GET STARTED!



PREPARING TO WRITE YOUR NARRATIVE

BUT FIRST, SEMANTICS

Narrative often refers to the:

- Project Narrative → used by the USDA
- Research Plan
- Project Description → used by NSF
- Research Strategy → used by NIH
 - Please note: The *Project Narrative* is a separate component of any NIH application
 - 2-3 sentences in plain language for the lay public should the project be funded.
- Proposal
- The heart of your grant application



TAKE STOCK

To prepare for a competitive grant proposal:

- Make a checklist of all required application elements
- Note required timelines and deadlines
- Create a grant development plan, including a timeline
- Gather required information
- Draft proposal documents
- Solicit feedback on your proposal documents
- Refine as needed
- Submit your proposal well ahead of the application's deadline

If something is unclear, ask questions as soon as possible – ideally, by email so that you have a record of your correspondence.

PROPOSAL SUPPORT CHECKLIST

ALL DELIVERABLES	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation: Check and correct in comments, email, narrative, slides, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Time Stamps: Remove all personal information from the file upon saving to remove timestamps.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Templates: Confirm all memos, prospecting reports, and slides are on the most recent template.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Delivery Email: Draft for the CD (see delivery email guidelines for details on format / content).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hours: Report hours to the CD for all final deliveries (add time for debrief prep and call, if needed).

REVIEW	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Funder Compliance: In the second comment, 1) identify all areas where the proposal does not comply with funder requirements on formatting, length, headings, etc.; 2) link to or paste the relevant funder requirements (and highlight key points, if necessary); and 3) explicitly tell the PI how to comply. Reiterate this guidance at the points in the proposal where it is most relevant.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation: Do not correct these in the document. If the proposal includes many errors, note a few and recommend a thorough proofread prior to submission. If the proposal needs revision due to ESL or other reasons, recommend they seek that support (only offer Hanover as an option if the CD agrees). If you see a recurring problem the PI may miss in proofing, note it, and explain how/why to correct.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Number/Frequency of Comments: Best practice is an average of at least three substantive comments per page, whether praise or criticism.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Directiveness: Comments on compliance must be directive. Comments on obtaining feedback from a PI, peer, or grants office must be directive with supporting rationale. Comments on grantsmanship should be directive with supporting rationale. Comments on research or program design, supporting data or literature, or other elements should be consultative rather than directive.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strengths vs. Weaknesses: Occasionally identify strengths but focus most comments on weaknesses.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Subject Matter Expertise: If the proposal includes content you feel you cannot evaluate due to lack of subject matter expertise, use a comment to identify that content, state your limitation, and direct the PI to seek review from a peer with relevant expertise.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Omissions: Use a comment and the delivery email to identify sections not reviewed, and provide rationale.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Revisions: No direct edits in the document. Exceptions: Examples of how to address a formatting compliance issue or recommendation (e.g., moving a figure, changing spacing between paragraphs), addition of a recommended element (e.g., example Gantt-type timeline), or recommended example revision that is too long to include in a comment. If any revisions are included, they must be accompanied by a comment noting that this is outside the scope of a typical Hanover review.
<input type="checkbox"/>	File Name: When saving your completed file, follow this convention: CLIENT - PI Name - AGENCY Grant Type - Hanover Review - Day/Mon/Year.docx (Ex: UMBC - Coppinger - NIH R01 - Hanover Review - 13Jan2019.docx)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Delivery Email Repetition: Copy and paste delivery email as first comment.

SAMPLE TIMELINE WITH KEY MILESTONES

Milestone	Responsible Party	Date
Contact OSP to begin the proposal process		
Draft Project Description/Narrative		
Draft Budget (and corresponding Budget Justification)		
Draft Attachments (e.g., Facilities & Resources, Biosketch)		
Revise draft documents		
Solicit feedback of drafts from peers & external reviewers		
Review feedback		
Revise proposal documents		
<i>Complete routing form</i> (at least X weeks prior to the sponsor's deadline)		
Perform final review and revision		
Submit final document to OSP at least X days before the sponsor's deadline		
SPONSOR DEADLINE		

DESIGNING YOUR NARRATIVE



**START THE PROPOSAL
DEVELOPMENT PROCESS WITH A
CAREFUL REVIEW.**



WHAT YOUR REVIEW SHOULD INCLUDE

- The Program Solicitation, e.g., [AFRI-EWD-RFA-508](#) → Eligibility, deadlines, narrative formatting (e.g., font, spacing, margins, page limits), and the required narrative content including the preferred or required outline and key elements.
- Funded grants (if possible) → Structure, presentation, tone, vocabulary
- Review grantmaker guidance – e.g., [NIFA Grants.gov Application Guide](#) → Grantmaker policies and procedures; grantmaker language and tone; and grantmaker priorities

THEN REVIEW

Your project design



What are the funder's aims?

How does your project accomplish these aims?

Assess and adjust your goals, objectives, and conceptual structure, if necessary

Note key elements to emphasize, e.g., buzzwords

THEN REVIEW

Your project design



What are the final

s

Note

rationale
innovative
objectives
approach aims
hypothesis-driven
milestones **outcomes**
significance
goals

emphasize, e.g., buzzwords

IRON OUT THE DETAILS



- What will be done?



- Who will do the work?



- Where will they do the work?



- How will they do the work?



- What tools and resources will be used to do the work?



- How will you know if your project is successful?

ALSO CONSIDER...

- How does the proposed project relate to the sponsor's interests?
- What difference will the project make to your institution, your students, your discipline, the state, nation, and stakeholders?
- What has already been done, and how will your project advance that work?

Remember: Good proposals come from good concepts!



WRITING YOUR NARRATIVE

WRITE THE RESEARCH PLAN

Each solicitation will require information to be presented in specific ways. Read the details closely.

Strong narratives have similar core elements:

- Introduction
- Statement of the Problem
- Literature Review
- Conceptual Framework
- Hypotheses or Research Questions
- Methodology / Strategy
- Scope of Work
- Management Plan
- Staff and Institutional Qualifications
- Evaluation Plan

THE INTRODUCTION

Do:

- Spark the reader's interest.
- Orient the reader to your project and your narrative.
- Specify the project's overall goals.

Don't:

- Meander or digress.
- Include unnecessary background information.
- Make unsubstantiated claims about your project's impact.

Engage the reviewers!

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Do:

- Concisely describe the problem you will solve or the question you will answer.
- Show that the problem or question is important.
- Point out the potential impact of solving the problem.
- Use data where necessary.

Don't:

- Restate the information in the solicitation – they already know that!



Inspire the reviewers!

LITERATURE REVIEW

Do:

- Review what has been done to address the problem thus far.
- Clearly delineate what **gap** you will fill.
- Show that you understand your field.
- Cover your bases in terms of important citations.

Don't:

- Omit key citations.
- Fail to address conflicting work.

Demonstrate confidence that you know your field.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Do:

- Identify the theories or concepts that will guide your project.
- Describe how they will guide.
- Connect the theories or concepts to the work itself (e.g., via a logic model).

Don't:

- Be vague.
- Fail to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Convince the reviewers that you are taking the right approach to solving the problem.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Do:

- Clearly state hypotheses and questions.
- Explain how testing these hypotheses and/or answering these questions will solve the stated problem and fill the identified gaps in the literature.

Don't:

- Use vague or confusing wording.
- Include hypotheses that are not fully testable and falsifiable.

Ground and frame the work.

Do:

- Clearly describe your planned implementation methods.
- Include details for all procedures, work, and implementation protocols.
- Include enough detail so that the reviewer can judge feasibility and appropriateness.

Don't:

- Assume the reviewer knows what you're talking about.

Leave the reviewer confident with your design.

SCOPE OF WORK

Do:

- Describe exactly what will be done, including the sequence of the proposed activities and the anticipated outcomes and/or deliverables.
- Include all activities necessary for completing the project.
- Provide a viable schedule for carrying out the tasks (i.e., work plan)

Don't:

- Include insufficient detail.

Leave the reviewer confident that you have thought through your process and have a plan.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Do:

- Explain how you will manage the project.
- Indicate who will be responsible for each work component.
- Describe how each element of the project will be coordinated.
- Include a graphical organizational chart where appropriate.

Don't:

- Be vague about responsibilities and management structure.

Leave the reviewer confident that you can get the work done.

QUALIFICATIONS

Do:

- Include details of relevant qualifications (skills and experience) for all key personnel.
- Describe the institution's resources and qualifications as appropriate.
- Connect qualifications directly to the work to be done.

Don't:

- Trumpet irrelevant qualifications.

Leave the reviewer confident that you are the right people, in the right place, to do this work right now.

EVALUATION PLAN

Do:

- Follow the funder's guidance regarding evaluation approaches.
- Include formative and summative evaluation plans.
- Describe how you will use the evaluation to improve the project.
- Describe data collection and analysis instruments and procedures.
- Describe the evaluator's qualifications.

Don't:

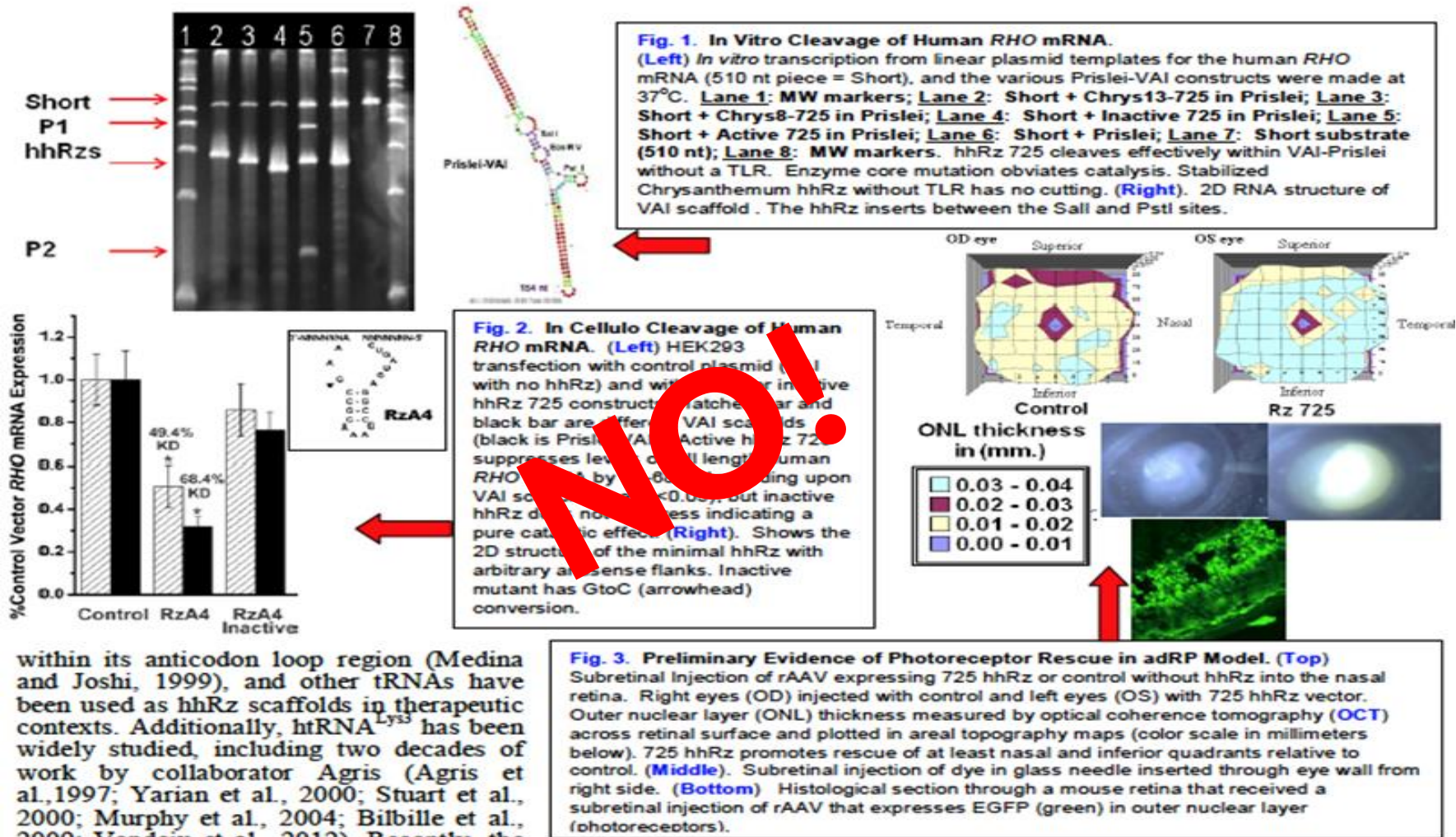
- Provide an evaluation that is out-of-scale with the funder or the proposed work.

Leave the reviewer confident that you have the necessary structures in place to evaluate the project.

**HOW WILL YOU PRESENT YOUR
MATERIAL SO THAT REVIEWERS ARE
INSPIRED TO FUND YOUR PROJECT?**



PROBABLY NOT LIKE THIS



within its anticodon loop region (Medina and Joshi, 1999), and other tRNAs have been used as hhRz scaffolds in therapeutic contexts. Additionally, htRNA^{Lys3} has been widely studied, including two decades of work by collaborator Agris (Agris et al., 1997; Yarian et al., 2000; Stuart et al., 2000; Murphy et al., 2004; Bilbille et al., 2009; Vendeix et al., 2012). Recently, the htRNA^{Lys3} scaffold was used to abundantly express various small and large RNA aptamers and hhRzs in bacteria for biophysical and structural analysis (Ponchon and Dardel, 2007, 2009). The scaffold maintains the tRNA intrinsic RNA polymerase III A and B box promoter elements to allow high-level expression in human cells. htRNA^{Lys3} is naturally expressed in human cells (unlike adenoviral VAI), decreasing toxicity potential in the context of a human gene therapy, and is post-transcriptionally modified in a natural manner. We plan to exploit the potential of the htRNA^{Lys3} scaffold

MAKING GREAT FIGURES

How do we get from BAD...

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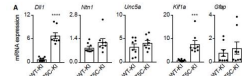


Figure 1: Non nisi est sit amet facilis magna. Faucibus nisl tincidunt eget nullam non id consectetur.

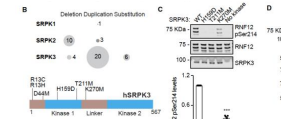


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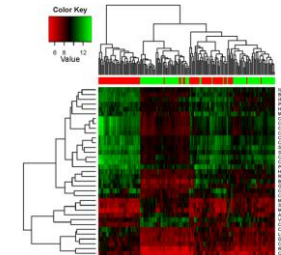


Figure 3: Non nisi est sit amet facilis magna. Faucibus nisl tincidunt eget nullam non. Vestibulum mattis ullamcorper velit sed. Cras sed felis eget velit aliquet sagittis

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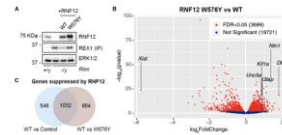


Figure 4: Non nisi est sit amet facilis magna. Faucibus nisl tincidunt eget nullam non. Vestibulum mattis ullamcorper velit sed. Cras sed felis eget velit aliquet sagittis



Figure 5: Non nisi est sit amet facilis magna. Faucibus nisl tincidunt eget nullam non. Vestibulum mattis ullamcorper velit sed. Cras sed felis eget velit aliquet sagittis



...to GREAT?

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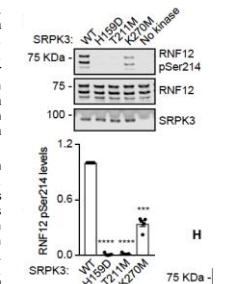


Figure 1: Non nisi est sit amet facilis magna. (Top) Faucibus nisl tincidunt eget nullam non. Vestibulum mattis ullamcorper sed. (Bottom) Cras sed felis eget velit aliquet sagittis id consectetur. *** P < 0.05, **** P < 0.001.

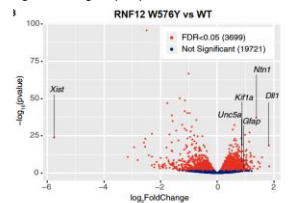


Figure 2: Non nisi est sit amet facilis magna. Faucibus nisl tincidunt eget nullam non. Vestibulum mattis ullamcorper velit sed. Cras sed felis eget velit aliquet sagittis id consectetur.

APPLYING THE META-NARRATIVE APPROACH

Use a “meta-narrative” technique that emphasizes sentences or phrases that you want the reviewers to see – especially for those who might be skimming the proposal

Ask yourself – What are the key points in each project section? What do I *absolutely* want the reviewers to know about my project? How can I convey the high points?

e.g., Bold formatting

Use of headers and sub-headers to guide reviewers

Give your reviewers the key takeaways at a quick glance.

USING MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA FOR CONSTRUCTING META NARRATIVES

Weave the merit review criteria into your proposal!

Where appropriate, help the reviewers easily find the information they need to evaluate.

- ALWAYS include any headings required in the RFP and instructions guides
- ALSO CONSIDER adding subheadings/in-text emphasis for merit review criteria (e.g., use them as a template)

Select NIH merit review criteria for required section, “Significance”:

- Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field?
- Is the prior research that serves as the key support for the proposed project rigorous?
- If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved?
- How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?

WRITING TO THE MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA

A. SIGNIFICANCE *Before: no meta narrative*

Really Bad Problem (RBP) affects 7.9 billion people each year, incurring enormous economic burden and other serious things. [MORE ABOUT THE PROBLEM GOES HERE] Although recent work demonstrated that RBP can be solved through a careful regimen of healthy foods and meditation (Name Drop et al., 2018), the results of this study were called into question because the subjects were eating cotton candy and playing video games during data collection. A subsequent study concluded that the experimental regimen had no effect at all (Nemesis, 2020). [MORE LITERATURE REVIEW GOES HERE] Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand the mechanism underlying RBP to enable identification of an appropriate therapeutic intervention. The proposed study will make use of a unique animal model, developed in the PI's lab, to identify the receptor responsible for RBP. Moreover, it will test a novel therapeutic, Really Good Solution (RGS), for treatment of RBP. [MORE ABOUT THE SOLUTION HERE] The results of the proposed work will lead to a paradigm shift in current clinical approaches to RBP, with the potential to improve the quality of life for nearly 8 billion people worldwide.

WRITING TO THE MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA

A. SIGNIFICANCE

After: with meta narrative

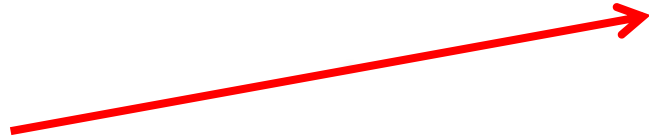
Importance of the problem. Really Bad Problem (RBP) affects 7.9 billion people each year, incurring enormous economic burden and other serious things. [MORE ABOUT THE PROBLEM GOES HERE]

Rigor of the prior research. Although recent work demonstrated that RBP can be solved through a careful regimen of healthy foods and meditation (Name Drop et al., 2018), the results of this study were called into question because the subjects were eating cotton candy and playing video games during data collection. A subsequent study concluded that the experimental regimen had no effect at all (Nemesis, 2020). [MORE LITERATURE REVIEW GOES HERE] Knowledge gap: there is an urgent need to understand the mechanism underlying RBP to enable identification of an appropriate therapeutic intervention.

Significance of the expected research contribution. The proposed study will make use of a unique animal model, developed in the PI's lab, to identify the receptor responsible for RBP. Moreover, it will test a novel therapeutic, Really Good Solution (RGS), for treatment of RBP. [MORE ABOUT THE SOLUTION HERE] The results of the proposed work will lead to a paradigm shift in current clinical approaches to RBP, with the potential to improve the quality of life for nearly 8 billion people worldwide.

NIH PROPOSAL OUTLINE BEFORE & AFTER ADDING REVIEW CRITERIA LANGUAGE

A. SIGNIFICANCE
B. INNOVATION
C. APPROACH



A. SIGNIFICANCE

- Importance of the problem
- Rigor of the Prior Research
- Significance of the expected research contribution

B. INNOVATION

- Novel methodology.
- Challenges to standard of care.

C. APPROACH

- Rationale.
- Methods.
- Data analysis
- Expected outcomes/benchmarks
- Potential problems & alternative strategies



CONCEPT PAPER/META NARRATIVE WORKSHOP

A stack of papers is shown, with the top sheet featuring a large, bold black question mark. A dark blue horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'THE SUPPORTING DOCS' in white, uppercase letters.

THE SUPPORTING DOCS

THE FULL PACKAGE



- Supporting documents are more than merely *Attachments* but rather, they are **essential** for a competitive grant.
- They should not be treated as an afterthought.
- They should be high-quality and could make/break your application.

WHAT MAKES A FULL PACKAGE

- Abstract / Project Summary
 - Budget and Budget Justification
 - Quotes or documentation for specific budget items
 - Timeline
 - Letters of support or letters of collaboration, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), contracts
 - Biosketches / CVs
 - Other sponsor-specific documentation:
 - Current and Pending Support
 - Facilities & Other Resources
 - Data Management Plan
 - Resource Sharing Plan
 - Post-Doctoral Mentoring Plan
- Use a checklist to see what you need to include and what you have completed
 - Keep track of all of your supporting documents
 - Manage version control
 - Ensure alignment between your supporting documents and any changes that occur during revision of the Project Narrative

A NOTE ON PERSUASIVE WRITING

Much of what goes into creating a competitive narrative includes crucial elements of **persuasive writing**.

- *Be strategic in your argument* to the funder that you are worth funding.
- Giving reviewers reasons *why* is critical.
 - As humans, we usually do not like to be told to accept something with no explanation:
 - *“People are more likely to agree with a request if you give them a reason why, even if it doesn’t make sense.”**

*Langer, E., Blank, A., & Chanowitz, B. (1978). The mindlessness of Ostensibly Thoughtful Action: The Role of “Placebic” Information in Interpersonal Interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36(6), 635-642.

PROPOSAL WRITING CHARACTERISTICS

Sponsor goals	Service attitude
Future-oriented	Work that <i>should</i> be done
Project-centered	Objectives and activities
Persuasive rhetoric	“Selling” the reader
Personal tone	Conveys excitement
Team-focused	Feedback needed
Strict length constraints	Brevity rewarded
Accessible language	Easily understood

[Why Academics Have a Hard Time Writing Good Grant Proposals](#) is an essential resource.

ACADEMIC WRITING IS NOT THE SAME.



IN CONTRAST, ACADEMIC WRITING IS...

Scholarly pursuit	Individual passion
Past-oriented	Work that has been done
Theme-centered	Theory and rhetoric
Expository rhetoric	Explaining to the reader
Impersonal tone	Objective, dispassionate
Individualistic	Primarily a solo activity
Few length constraints	Verbosity rewarded
Specialized terminology	“Insider” jargon



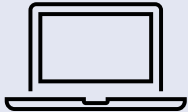
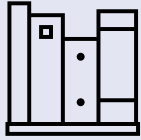
“...proposals must be written in a strong, persuasive style, and [those] accustomed to a different style [should seek] help to develop more effective [grant]writing habits.”

- Porter, R. (2007). Why Academics Have a Hard Time Writing Good Grant Proposals. *Journal of Research Administration*, 38(2):37. Retrieved from: <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/funding/documents/Whyacademicsprobsgrantwriting.pdf>

A dark, monochromatic photograph of a library aisle. The aisle is flanked by tall bookshelves filled with books, receding into the distance. At the end of the aisle, there is a bright, arched opening, possibly a window or a doorway, which creates a strong light source. The overall atmosphere is quiet and scholarly.

LEVERAGE YOUR RESOURCES

LEVERAGE YOUR RESOURCES

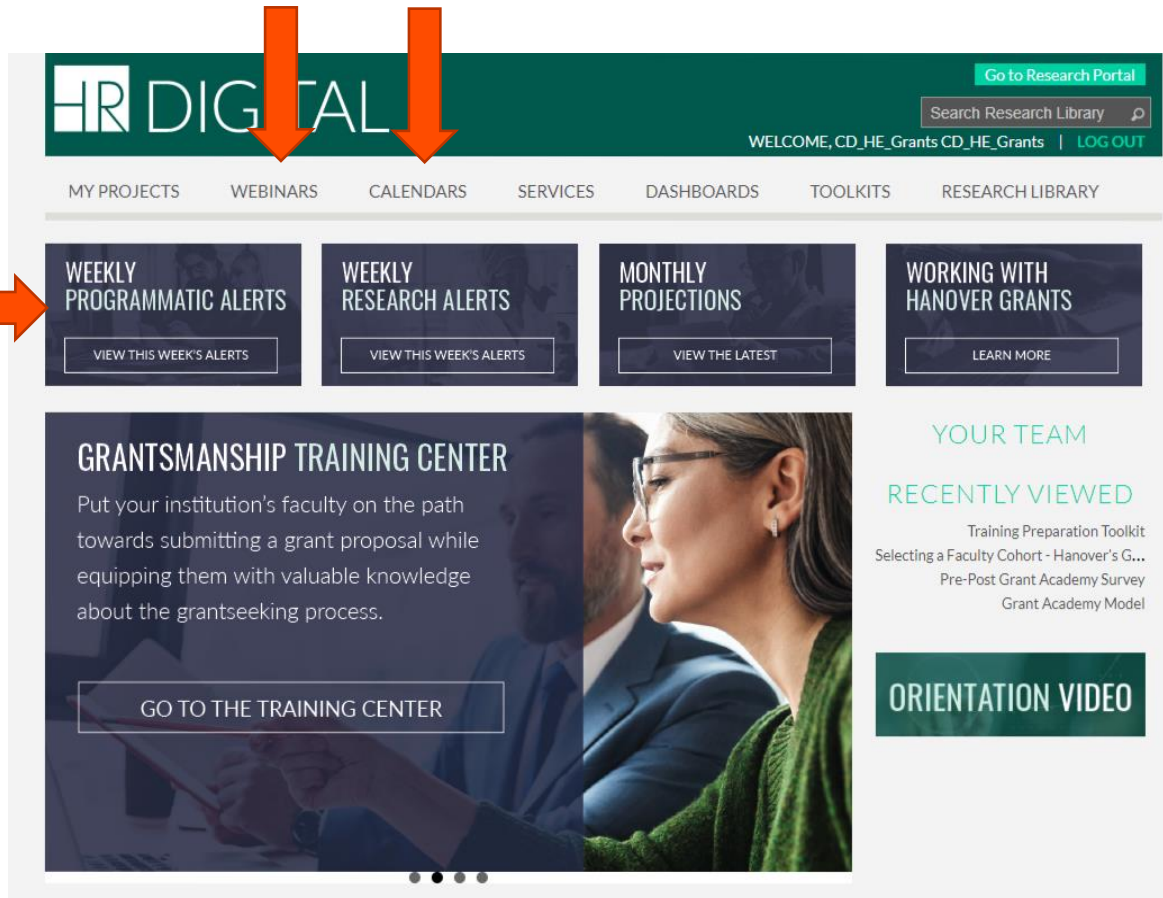


- Mentors, colleagues
- Funding announcements and opportunities
- Funder conferences
- Program Officers
- Peers who have been funded in your competition of interest
- Consultants
- Abstracts of recent awards (funder awards databases)
- Review funded proposals, if available

RESOURCES FOR GRANTWRITING

- The **National Organization for Research Development Professionals (NORDP)** maintains a [Writing a Grant 101](#) page, which includes links to many useful guides, as well as a more general [Resources](#) page.
- The [Anatomy of a Specific Aims Page](#) by Bioscience Writers (2015).
- The **Foundation Center** provides an [Introduction to Proposal Writing](#) course, focused more on private grants.
- The [Grant Application Writer's Workbook](#) offers comprehensive, step-by-step instruction for creating proposals for a variety of funding agencies.
- The **NIH Office of Extramural Research (OER)** offers guidance for [Writing the Application](#) and the **NIAID** offers excellent [application samples](#).
- Porter, R. (2007). Why Academics Have a Hard Time Writing Good Grant Proposals. *Journal of Research Administration*, 38(2):37. Retrieved from: <http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/funding/documents/Whyacademicsprobsgrantwriting.pdf>
- [10 Red Flags in Grantwriting](#). Inside Higher Education.

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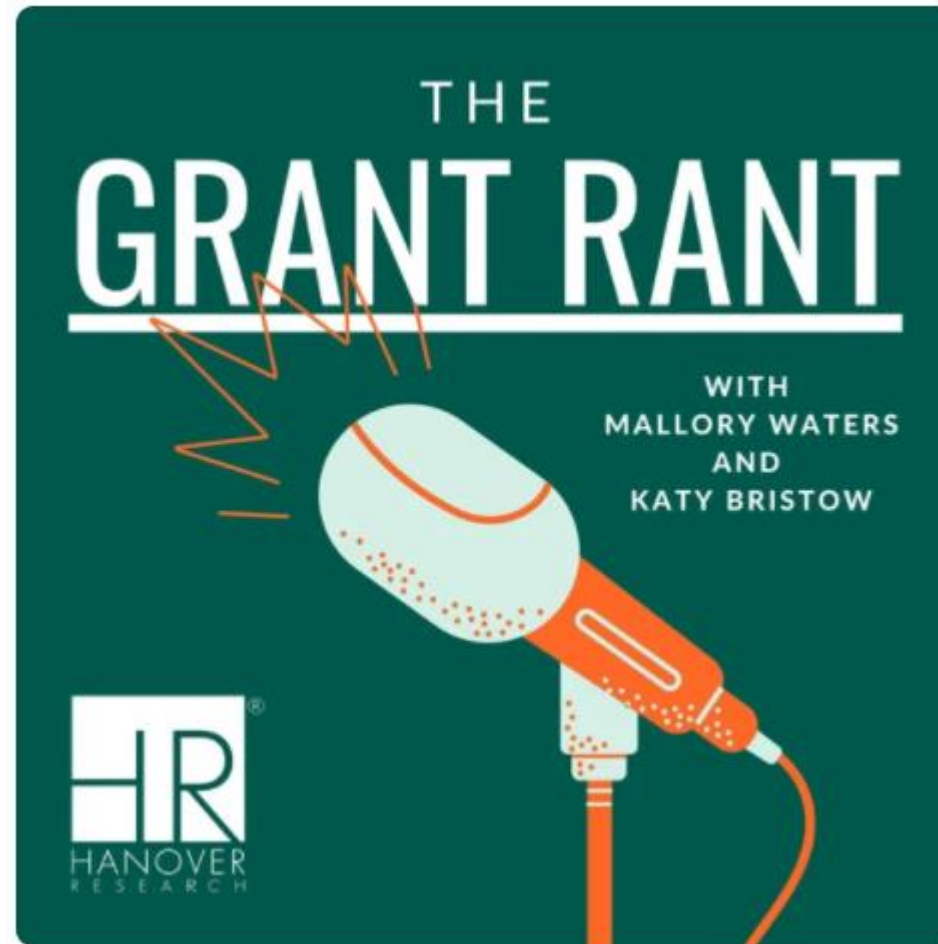
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Hanover debuted our first [Grantsmanship Training Center \(GTC\)](#) for NSF CAREER applicants last year – **CHECK IT OUT!**

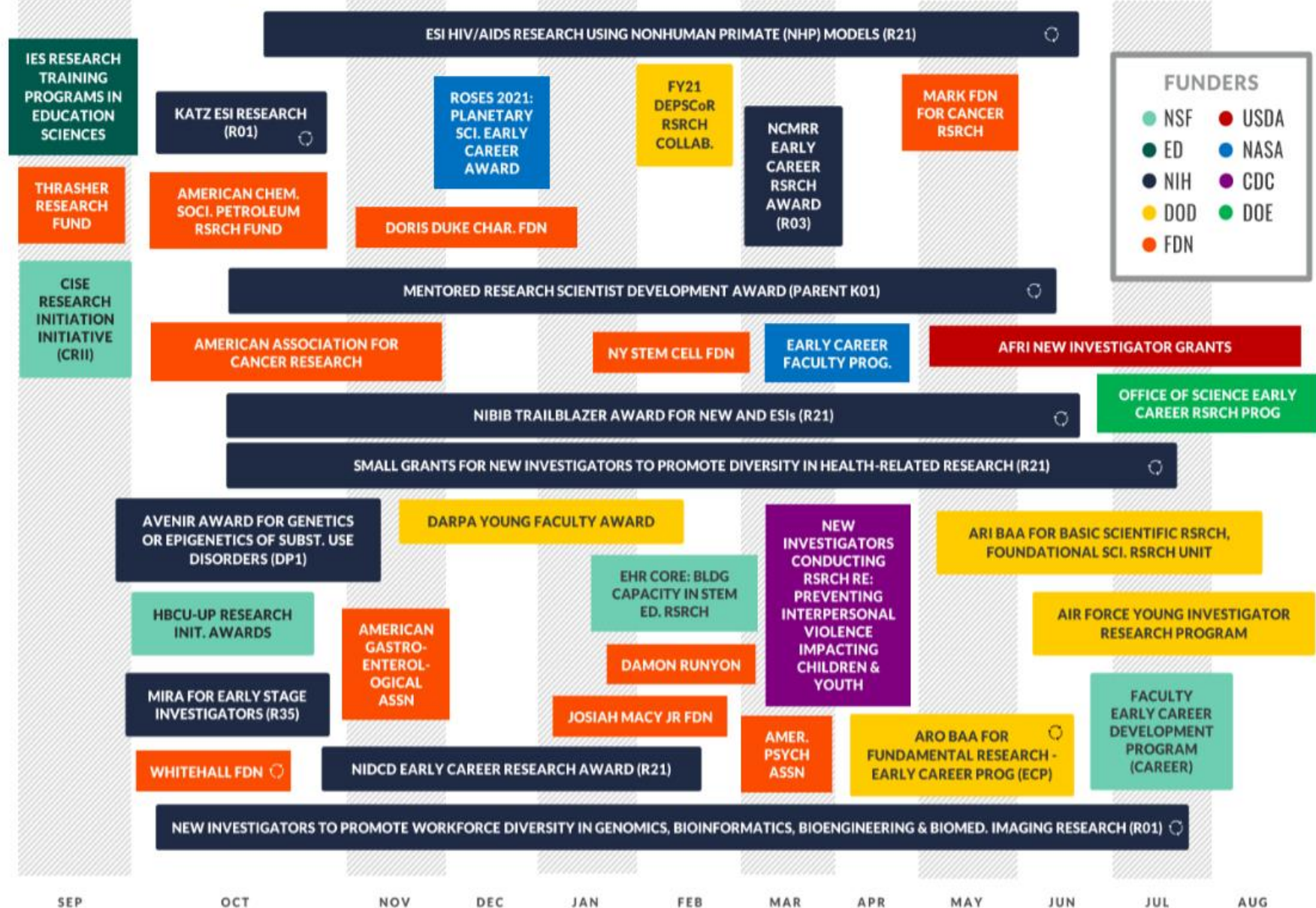
Stay tuned for additional modules coming soon, including an NIH-focused GTC.



[The Grant Rant on Apple Podcasts](#)



HANOVER GRANTS CALENDARS



QUESTIONS?



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