The importance of supplemental data for your NIH application – Congratulations!

You've just sent off your NIH grant, thus ending months of data gathering and weeks of writing. Now all you have to do for the average 3½ months until your study section meets is cross your fingers, make a novena, or perform whatever other arcane rituals you hope may bring you good luck (and funding), while shifting your scientific attention and efforts to other projects – right? Wrong! You have two to at most three months in which to obtain additional preliminary data to support your application and help convince the study section that you and your project are worth funding.

So what should you do in this period? While writing your application, you probably noted a few additional experiments that you wished you'd had time to complete, because the data would demonstrate the feasibility of an approach in your hands, further support your hypothesis, or just impress the heck out of a scientist who saw the results. So finish those experiments, already! If you can't finish all of them (especially without the grant funding in hand – the classical Catch-22), then you have to prioritize. As you might suspect, the three criteria mentioned above are in the proper order of precedence – feasibility über alles!

However, I should not give the impression that you can automatically send in supplementary material. You may do so only with the permission of the Scientific Review Officer in charge of your study section – but most are willing to accept and distribute supplemental data, even though doing so makes more work for them. Shortly after study section assignment shows up in your Commons account, (it's in the notice of receipt of your proposal, along with the program and Institute/Center that will consider your application for funding), you should e-mail the SRO and politely ask permission to send supplemental information for consideration by the panel along with your original submission, and the latest date by which (s)he must receive the pdf file for forwarding to the assigned reviewers along with their review assignments. Ordinarily, (s)he will readily agree (one common exception is if your submission was in response to a Request for Application – in most cases supplemental data are not permitted for them). The deadline is typically 4-5 weeks before the study section meets (The schedule of study section meetings can be found at [http://www.csr.nih.gov/Committees/meetings/ssmeet1.asp](http://www.csr.nih.gov/Committees/meetings/ssmeet1.asp)). While you can sometimes send information later and have it considered at the meeting itself, that means that the data are not available to the reviewers when making the vital triage/full review decision, and when they are writing their reviews. Truth be told, material presented only at the study section rarely has a major impact, unless the SRA reads it and specifically calls it to the panel's attention during the meeting, and that's very uncommon.

Ok, so your SRA has given his/her permission, and you have 2-3 days before you have to send in the material. You should try to send as much as possible, right? Wrong again – excluding preprints of any manuscripts accepted after your initial deadline (these should be enumerated and briefly described at the beginning of the supplement itself), you should provide no more than two pages (including text, figures/tables, and legends) presented in the standard NIH format and fonts. You're asking the reviewers to do you the favor of considering this additional material, and you don't want to annoy them with too much! You say you've already e-mailed your supplementary data? Now you can go rub the lab talisman for luck and shift your focus to more productive pursuits.

That's it for this month – Happy Spring!

-- Dave Konkel x24074; E-mail: dkonkel@utmb.edu (copyright 2005).