



Ron Payne Photography

Writing Effective Project Summaries for Grant Proposals

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First, let's define our terms—
a project summary is
a stand-alone document
in a formal multi-part proposal
that explains the goals, methods,
and expected outcomes of the project

A project summary is *NOT* a scientific article—

The Positive Electron

C. D. ANASTAS, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California
(Received February 26, 1933)

Out of a great number of similar tracks
in a vertical Wilson chamber, the
particles which are as great as that of
the proton. From the range and
ionization produced it is concluded
that this track, and in fact the
proton. If these particles are

On August 2, 1932, a photograph of
photographing cosmic-ray tracks
in a vertical Wilson chamber
by Professor R. A. Millikan and the
tracks shown in Fig. 1 were obtained
seemed to be interpretable only on the
the existence in this case of a particle carrying
positive charge but having a mass of the
order of magnitude as that normally possessed
by a free negative electron. Later study
photograph by a whole group of men
Norman Bridge Laboratory only
strengthen this view. The reason
interpretation seemed so inevitable
track appearing on the upper part of
cannot possibly have a mass as small
proton for as soon as the mass of
is at once faced by the curve of
a proton of this curvature is
well established and the
terminations) has a range of
while that of a proton is
visible in this photograph
5 cm without a
noticeable curvature. The only way
from this photograph could be to assume that at
the track is a proton and the sharpness of
the track is due to a that instant is within
about 10⁻¹⁰ second; two independent
measurements of the range of the
track and the sharpness of the
terminations are in agreement.
It is possible with the present experimental
data only to assign rather wide limits to
the mass of the particle.

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**A project summary is *NOT* a scientific article—
think of it as a *prospectus****

**why the funding agency should invest in your research*

**Different agencies call this document different
names (abstract, executive summary), and**

➔ they all have their own rules

The project summary does for the full proposal what a picture postcard in the museum gift shop does for a famous painting



P. Gauguin, *The Swineherd*



Project Summary



Project Description

It's a miniature version of the full proposal

The project summary will probably be the first thing most reviewers read...



and it may be the *only* thing that some reviewers read!

First step—follow the directions!

Print out a copy of the directions and read them with a **highlighter** in your hand

Make a checklist and adhere to it **witlessly**

Pay special attention to **margins, fonts, and length limits**



b. Project Summary

Each proposal must contain a summary of the proposed project **not more than one page in length**. The Project Summary consists of an **overview**, a statement on the **intellectual merit** of the proposed activity, and a statement on the **broader impacts** of the proposed activity.

The overview includes a description of the activity that would result if the proposal were funded and a **statement of objectives and methods to be employed**. The statement on intellectual merit should describe the potential of the proposed activity to **advance knowledge**. The statement on broader impacts should describe the potential of the proposed activity **to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes**.

The Project Summary should be written in the **third person**, informative to other persons working in the same or related fields, and, insofar as possible, **understandable to a scientifically or technically literate lay reader**. It should **not be an abstract** of the proposal.

The project summary must “stand alone”

No figures

No tables

No references



No complex equations

No unfamiliar acronyms

No jargon

Quiz Question #1

How important is the project summary to the success of your proposal?

- a) Not as important as the technical description**
- b) Not as important as the overall budget**
- c) Not as important as having a novel method**
- d) Not as important as having a well-qualified team**

Answer: None of the above

An effective project summary is *critical*

**You may be able to recover
from a poorly conceived,
badly written summary,
but you'll have a big hole
to climb out of**

**If your summary is not
compliant with agency rules,
your proposal may not get reviewed at all**



To whip up a perfect project summary...

*Celia's Project
Summaries*

...follow the recipe!

Celia's Foolproof Project Summary

Ingredients:

What problem will you study and why is it important?

What methods will you use and why did you choose them?

What results do you expect and how will you analyze them?

How will funding your project benefit the agency?

Assemble ingredients in this order. Don't add ingredients or omit any. Measure carefully.

Taste frequently and adjust seasonings.

Allow to rest before serving.

Don't write a partial summary



Describe the *entire* project:

goals and objectives

methods, data analysis, metrics

qualifications of the team

unique resources

benefit to the funder

significance to science and society

Omissions and ambiguities in the project summary

raise immediate questions in reviewers' minds

about the whole project

Don't assume all reviewers will be an expert in your narrow field— some will, but some won't, and they may all have equal votes



Advice from NIH:

“This section should be informative to other persons working in the same or related fields and insofar as possible understandable to a scientifically or technically literate reader.”

**Get rid of irrelevancies;
eliminate introductory fluff***



**Project summaries are always constrained by
word or page limits; make every word *count***

**Don't waste precious space on any idea that is
not directly relevant to your project, no
matter how "interesting" it might be**

Delete, rephrase, clarify, quantify

****In fact, eliminate all fluff;
reviewers appreciate conciseness***

If your project is funded, the summary may be made public



Do not include any confidential or proprietary information

Don't put anything in the project summary that you wouldn't want the whole world to see on the agency's website

The summary should represent your best, clearest, most thoughtful, most persuasive writing

To recap...

Follow the rules—witlesly

Use the four-ingredient recipe

Aim for the three C's: *clear, concise, compelling*

Write for a generalist—emphasize *meaning*

Leave out proprietary information

**Plan for time to revise and polish—your
summary must be *perfect!***

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