

# ***CHAPTER 2***

---

## ***HOW TO DEVELOP AN IRRESISTIBLE IDEA FOR YOUR GRANT APPLICATION***

---

The application you write can only be as good as the idea with which you start: If you don't have a compelling, novel idea that will drive your field vertically, you're unlikely to be funded. It's that simple! No amount of 'window dressing' — grantsmanship — can overcome a bad idea. Therefore, you (and we) must do everything possible to ensure that your starting point — your idea — is nothing short of outstanding.

The best preliminary idea of which you are capable is usually the product of a step-by-step developmental process, i.e., it will rarely occur as a spontaneous event. We recommend that you take six steps in the developmental process: 1) define the problem that you want to address; 2) collect and critically analyze background information that pertains to the proposed area of investigation; 3) generate a preliminary idea that is pertinent to the problem you have chosen; 4) assess your preliminary idea's potential for success and modify it, if necessary; 5) seek constructive criticism from knowledgeable colleagues; and 6) refine the idea to maximize its potential for impact on your field.

**1. Define The Problem That You Want To Address.** Very few reviewers will be interested in funding your application if what is proposed only confirms or marginally extends the work of others. Therefore, you must identify an area of research in which you can make contributions that will drive your field vertically. Therefore, within the scope of your overall research interest, you need to identify a niche area that is not overworked, i.e., a subdivision of your broader interest that can be systematically developed by you.

Once you have done so, identify the long-term goal you have within that niche area. It should be more than what could be accomplished under the auspices of a single grant, but not so ambitious that it would be seen as unrealistic within the context of your career. Next, conceptualize the continuum of research that would be required to attain the long-term goal you have identified.

Finally, identify the first logical step that must be taken along the continuum of research that you have conceived. In contrast to the long-term goal, the problem you select here should be one that can be resolved under the auspices of a single grant. It will become the subject of your proposal.

**2. Collect and Critically Analyze Background Information That Pertains To The Proposed Area Of Investigation.** A comprehensive review of the literature is the next step in generating a fundable idea. This is necessary for at least three reasons. First, you need to determine what is already known. Second, the extent to which that body of knowledge is reliable needs to be