

CHAPTER 7

THE OVERVIEW/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this chapter we will begin a discussion of the Overview/Executive Summary of your grant application. At the very outset, we need to emphasize to you, the potential applicant, that the preparation of this section is the key to writing a truly first-class application. If this section is effectively developed, the rest of the application will fall naturally into place. You should therefore spend considerable time to get it exactly right. To help you understand how to write this section effectively, we will focus on development of the conceptual framework for an effective Overview/Executive Summary. In CHAPTER 8 we will actually take you step-by-step through the development of this section of your grant application. Remember that this may be the very first part of your proposal that reviewers will read as they begin reviewing and evaluating the relative merits of your ideas and their relevance to the mission of the funding agency. It must therefore very quickly engender enthusiasm and advocacy for your ideas.

Anyone who reads your proposal must be able to easily and quickly read and understand the Overview/Executive Summary section. The flow of logic must be unassailable and absolutely compelling. As we pointed out in CHAPTER 4, there is never an *a priori* guarantee that a reviewer will necessarily be knowledgeable in the area or field of your proposal, so it is essential that you write this document in such a way that any intelligent reader will understand it. The Overview/Executive Summary must bring the reviewers to a position of advocacy for your proposal without their knowing that they have been led. As such, this part of the grant application is probably the most difficult to write well.

This section of the application is likely to be called by different names, depending upon the specific funding agency to which you will be applying for grant support. Because most granting agencies have different formats for preparation of an application, it would be impossible to identify exactly what each funding agency would require. Nevertheless, many funding agencies specifically provide for the presentation of an Overview/Executive Summary. For example, in a proposal to the National Institutes of Health, this section would be called the Specific Aims page. If this were a proposal to the National Science Foundation, this section would be the first part of the Project Description. For U.S. Department of Agriculture grant proposals, this would be the first part of the Introduction of your application, plus a specific section on Rationale and Significance. For U.S. Department of Defense (DARPA) proposals, this section is actually termed the Executive Summary. For foundations, this will often be the pre-proposal that is submitted to explore the potential interest of a foundation and from which an invitation to submit a full proposal will be based. In the event that the proposal format of the funding agency from which you are seeking support does not specifically provide for an Overview/Executive Summary, use the opening section of the Projected Approach/ Plan of Work as a place to insert this section (unless there is a precise format for presentation of the information requested that does not allow for this degree of flexibility).

The Overview/Executive Summary is important because it will be the first part of your grant proposal that the reviewers will read. Individuals who study reading behavior often suggest