

# CHAPTER 12

---

## ***THE BACKGROUND/NEEDS ASSESSMENT SECTION OF YOUR APPLICATION***

---

Once you have completed the preparation of the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section of your application, you now should be ready to begin writing the background component of your Background/Needs Assessment section. This is one of the main ways, together with the Significance paragraph, that you will be able to fully *justify* the critical need for the proposed studies. This is a commonly misunderstood component of most proposals, because many writers of grant applications think that it should be a comprehensive review of all the literature that might possibly be relevant (even tangentially) to the proposed activities. Nothing could be further from the truth. How could you or any applicant possibly write a comprehensive review of your field in the few pages that are generally allotted to the development of this section? It seems reasonably apparent to us that it would not be either physically or intellectually possible. Thus, this important means of justifying what you have proposed in your application must be viewed in a different light. Its real purpose is to provide a highly *selective* review that supports the *need* to do the proposed studies.

We therefore recommend that you not write this subsection until after you have written the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section, even though for most grant proposals this section should be presented before the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section. Why? If you think of the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section as the “plug” that will fill the gap in the knowledge base or address is the key issue or need, you can now custom design the “hole” into which the plug will exactly fit. Background/Needs Assessment subsections that are presented before the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section often contain a great deal of extraneous information that is not necessary to justify the specific set of activities that has been proposed. That problem is avoided by writing the Background/Needs Assessment component *after* the plan of work has been formulated and proposed. We recommend that you title this section ***Review of Literature That Is Relevant to This Project*** or ***Review of Literature That Is Relevant to the Needs Assessment***. Put this title in boldface, italic letters and then continue to write on the same line with text that is not highlighted. The phrasing of the title anticipates and is designed to deflect any criticism by an inexperienced reviewer that your Background/Needs Assessment subsection is not a comprehensive review of the field.

Because the Background/Needs Assessment subsection will vary greatly from application to application, our recommendations here will be general suggestions as to how you should approach the writing of this subsection. This section should fully educate reviewers by expanding upon the essential information that you provided in the first paragraph of your Overview/Executive Summary section. As you develop this section, it should become increasingly apparent that there really is a true critical need for the work or activities that will be described in the application. Therefore, always keep in mind as you prepare this section that the purpose of the Background/Needs Assessment subsection is to justify why the work proposed in your grant application is necessary. It must substantiate all the unsubstantiated assertions that you made in the first, introductory paragraph of the Overview/Executive Summary section. It should detail, and