

CHAPTER 7

BACKGROUND/NEEDS ASSESSMENT, LITERATURE CITED, PRELIMINARY STUDIES SECTIONS (Weeks 5-6)

WEEK 5: Background/Needs Assessment Subsection

Developing the Background/Needs Assessment Subsection. You are now 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 justify the need for the proposed studies. It is a commonly misunderstood component, because most writers of grant applications think that it should be a comprehensive review of the literature. Nothing could be further from the truth. How could you 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 could not. Thus, this important means of justifying what you propose 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 recommend that you not write this subsection until *after* you have written the Projected Approach and Methods section even though it should be presented in the final grant application before the *Projected Approach and Methods* section. Why? Because, if you think of the *Projected Approach and Methods* section as the ‘plug’ that will fill the gap in the knowledge base or address is the key issue (need), you can now custom design the ‘hole’ into which the plug will exactly fit. Background/Needs Assessment subsections that are written before the *Projected Approach and Methods* section usually contain a great deal of extraneous information that is not necessary to justify the specific research that is proposed. That problem is avoided by writing the background (needs assessment) component *after* the research plan has been formulated and proposed. We recommend that you title this section, ***Review of Literature that is Relevant to the Needs Assessment***. Put this title in bolded, italicized 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 application-to-application, our recommendations here will be general suggestions as to how you should write this subsection. For example, this should be a critical analysis of what has been published, not a passive one (i.e., ‘Smith did this, Jones did that’). Without being overly critical of other workers, if there are relevant gaps in what has previously been published, those gaps need to be identified (by you as the applicant). You should not rely only (or even primarily) on review articles and books when you write this subsection. Reviewers will expect to be able to discern how complete your command is of the primary literature of your field. Your treatment of the relevant literature needs to be fully up to date. We recommend, therefore, that you update this subsection just before the application is submitted, (i.e., during weeks 13 and 14 when your final draft is being reviewed by the members of the pre-submission review committee that you have identified to provide you with a critical review of your completed grant application). During that time you should