

CHAPTER 19

HOW TO CREATE A COMPELLING, INFORMATIVE TITLE FOR YOUR PROPOSAL

PHS SF424 (R&R) Application Guide Instructions: “NIH and other PHS agencies limit title character length to 81 characters, including the spaces between words and punctuation. Titles in excess of 81 characters will be truncated. A “new” application must have a different title from any other PHS project with the same program director / principal investigator. A “resubmission” or “renewal” application must normally have the same title as the previous grant or application. If the specific aims of the project have significantly changed, choose a new title. A “revision” application must have the same title as the currently funded grant.”

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The title is critically important, because it will likely be the first thing related to the content of your proposal that a reviewer will see. It, therefore, gives the first impression that s/he will have of your application — and we all know that you get only one chance to make a good first impression. The title is also important, because it will be one of the things that will be used by staff at the Center for Scientific Review to assign your application to a Scientific Review Group. Thus, it behooves you to make your title as interesting and informative as you can.

TIP: Your title should emphasize the payoff – the product of the research.

An especially important point is to emphasize with your title what the research will produce, not the process that will yield that product. You should never offer a generic, process-oriented title like, ‘Investigations of *Bacillus megaterium*.’ Rather, your title should immediately convey to the agency and its reviewers what the mission-relevant payoff from the research will be. Thus, the objective of your application and the description of your expected contribution from the significance subsection of *Background and Significance* will be particularly useful in the development of your title.

TIPS ON CREATING YOUR TITLE

If you are going to capture the attention of your reviewers, the title must be maximally informative and should convey as much about the novelty of your idea as is possible. Titles with this kind of impact aren’t often created with the small amount of time and thought that are usually invested.