

based materials or social media. Integration with existing electronic extension resources, and not ‘reinventing the wheel’, is an important consideration for National Program Leaders when they evaluate a proposed electronic extension programs.

TIP: During the course of your literature review, create a list of key words that describe the field, as well as the names of investigators who have been active in the area during the last ten years.

3. *How To Generate A Preliminary Idea That Is Pertinent To The Problem You Have Chosen.* As you work your way through the literature, invariably, ideas will begin to occur to you. Retain such ideas, but continue to conduct your review until it has been completed. Why? Because many of your early ideas will probably prove to be simplistic as you become more critically conversant with the literature. Also, major shifts in your insight will almost certainly occur as you view your ideas, not individually, but in the context of how they relate to each other. Finally, some of your early ideas may be ones that other investigators have had before you and have used in their own grant proposals. As you will soon see, there is nothing more ‘lethal’ in this business than writing a grant application that has already been written.

Once you have completed your review, go back to the notes and ideas that you have written down. As you consider them, inspiration may strike. But, if it doesn’t, don’t be alarmed. Don’t become anxious or think that you are somehow deficient. In fact, it is unusual for your best idea to immediately occur to you. Should that be the case, simply put your notes away for a few days and then take another look at them. Remember that solitude, a rare commodity busy for academicians, is generally regarded as necessary for creativity. Next time you look at your notes, use a different approach – e.g., try outlining, diagramming, or even creating a formal concept map to better establish how the ideas and concepts relate to one another. The proverbial light bulb will eventually come on. When it does, you will know it, because you will be genuinely excited by the prospects that become apparent to you. At that point, you need to ask yourself one last, two-part question: ‘*Will this idea impact significantly on my field and, if so, can I convince others of that fact?*’ If your answer to both parts is affirmative, you’ve crossed the Rubicon and you’re on your way. On the other hand, if you find that you can’t say with conviction that the idea has the potential to advance your field substantively, you have to accept that you are not yet ready to write a competitive, i.e., successful, grant application. You either need to keep trying to evolve a more novel, important idea in the same area, or shift to a new problem that has the potential to pass this ‘impact’ test.

4. *How To Assess Your Idea’s Potential For Success And Modify It, If Necessary.* Once you have generated your preliminary idea, as the next step you need to assess its potential for success before you ever put pen to paper. There are three criteria that must be considered:

Your own ability to pursue the idea. Regardless of how good your idea is conceptually, it has to be one that is within your capabilities to pursue, practically speaking. For example, do you and your colleagues have the expertise necessary to accomplish the work? If not, can you mobilize the missing expertise by recruiting either co-investigators, collaborators or consultants? Is this an