

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, unfortunately, a relatively commonly misunderstood component of most requests for funding, because many writers of grant applications think that they should provide reviewers with a *comprehensive* review of all the literature that might possibly be relevant (even tangentially) to the proposed set of activities. Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, how could you, or any applicant for that matter, possibly write a *comprehensive* review of your field in the relatively few pages that are generally allotted in grant application formats for the development of this section? It seems reasonably apparent to us that it would not be neither physically nor intellectually possible. Thus, this important means of justifying what you have proposed in your application must be viewed in a different light. Its true purpose, in this respect, is to provide a highly *selective review* of what has been done in the past that would *support* and *justify* the *need* to do the proposed studies, as well as providing a justification for the strategy that will have just been proposed in the Projected Approach/Work Plan (discussed in Chapter 8 and 9)

It is primarily for that reason, therefore, that we have recommended that you not undertake the writing of this subsection of your application until *after* you have written the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section, even though (for most grant proposals) this section should logically be presented before the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section. Why would we make such a recommendation? We suggest that you think of the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section as the strategy by which the activities that you will use during the proposed tenure of the project to guide the creation of the new knowledge or accomplishment. Moreover, this new knowledge or accomplishments must be formulated in such a way that they serve as the “plug” to fill the gap in the knowledge base or address is the key issue or need. Therefore, you should be optimally prepared at this point to custom design the “hole” into which the “plug” will exactly fit.

Specifically with respect to this issue, Background/Needs Assessment subsections that are written before the Projected Approach/Plan of Work section has been started may well contain a great deal of extraneous information that would most likely not be necessary to justify the specific set of activities that has been proposed. That problem can, to a large extent, be 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 allows you to anticipate and, therefore, to deflect any criticism by an inexperienced reviewer that your Background/Needs Assessment subsection is not going to be a comprehensive review of the field.