

The Anatomy of a Successful NRSA Specific Aims Page

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Why Should They Fund My Application?

First, a short story

What criteria would **you** use to decide which applications to fund?

How Do Reviewers Score an NRSA Proposal?

Scoring Criteria:

Significance

Approach

Investigator (you) & Environment

Overall Impact

(of you and your application on the field)

Writing a Strong Fellowship Application is all about. . .

Having a **good idea** = one that is high priority for the agency's **mission** and is **scientifically exciting** and **tractable** through the proposed experiments

Being at the **right place** at the **right time** for your individual journey as a scientist (= for being **trained** and for accomplishing **significant research**)

Grantsmanship = **Good Salesmanship**

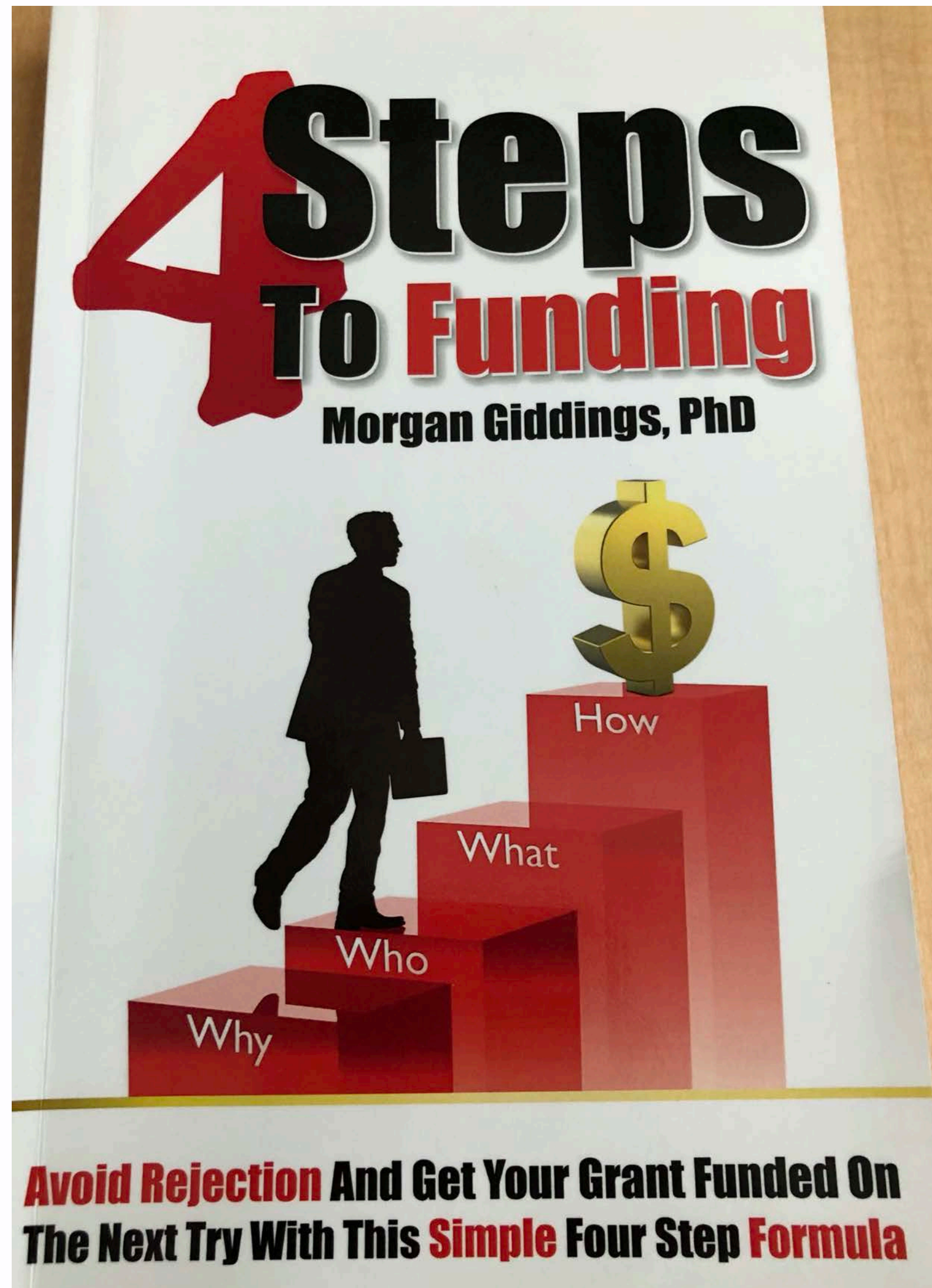
Selling Your Project & Yourself



Book Back-Cover Blurb

- Introduce the problem
- Outline how you will solve it
- Tell the reader how their lives will be better after reading the book

Selling Books



What goes on inside your grant reviewer's head?
Understanding this is the key to avoiding rejection and getting your next grant funded.

You may wonder:

- » What is my reviewer really looking for?
- » Did they actually read my grant?
- » Did they reject my grant just because of politics?
- » Why did one reviewer love my grant and another one hate it?
- » How can I revise my grant to make it fundable?

The answers lie within a four step process reviewers go through when they read your grant proposal - a process most reviewers aren't even aware they're doing. If you mess up one of the steps - or worse, leave it out altogether - your grant will be rejected, and you may get cryptic reviews back that don't explain why it was rejected or help you avoid rejection next time.

Specific Aims

Like an elevator pitch



What are you doing? and Why should I care?

An NIH NRSA Application (Predoc or Postdoc). . .

Research Training Plan:

1 page: **Specific Aims**

6 pages: Research Strategy

Successful Applicants Sell Their Proposals by Emphasizing the Reviewers' Scoring Criteria, Beginning in the **Specific Aims**



Approach & Significance

What are you doing? & Why should I care?

But Also. . .



Investigator & Environment

Who is doing the work, and are we confident that they will be successful?

And Selling the Application's **Overall Impact**



Significance, Investigator, Environment, Approach

Why, Who, What, and How

High or Low Impact: Will the field be substantially advanced?

How Do You Craft Your **NRSA Specific Aims Page** to Sell Your Application?

Use a “Specific Aims Sandwich” & Include All the Desired Ingredients



Specific Aims Sandwich

Top Slice:

A. Why it is important to do what I propose (**Significance = WHY**).

B. Project overview and focus:

- The state of our understanding of the field = Brief and focused background.
- The gap in our understanding that is holding the field back = critical need for the proposed study.
- How I propose to close the gap?
 - My hypothesis and my rationale for it.
 - How will I test my hypothesis, focused on strategy not details of methodology (**Approach = WHAT and HOW**).

C. Why I am an outstanding candidate to pursue the proposed project taking advantage of my **Environment** (mentor/mentoring team) = **WHO**.

Preliminary data is “money in the bank!”

Specific Aims Sandwich

Filler:

- A. List of my aims (2-3 for an NRSA—less is more!): *What am I going to do?*
- B. With focus on the *outcome* (what will be achieved or learned) rather than on what will be done. State the expected outcome of each aim in 1 sentence. Use up to 1-3 more sentences per aim to define the purpose of the aim or its work scope.
- C. The list summarizes your **Approach = WHAT** and **HOW** but also should reflect the **WHY** and **WHO** of your project.

Specific Aims Sandwich

Bottom Slice: “Payoff Paragraph”

- A. State what I expect will be the **impact** of my proposed work on the field.
- B. State what I expect will be the **impact** on me of my proposed training and its benefit to my field.

Good Science is Essential, But Impressions Rule When Competition is Steep!

You must sell them!



We Hope the Reviewers Will Enjoy The
Sandwich Your Serve Them!

