

Expectation, Tips, and Observations (1-16-17)

USDA-ARS, the external reviewers, and stakeholders expect coherent pre-plans with clear objectives, accomplishments, and all required components

- In a multiyear proposal, if you have a series of steps it would be helpful to state them as objectives (in all sections of the proposal) so that each year you could clearly state “Past Year Accomplishment” and “Duration of the Project Accomplishment”. Clear objective(s) and the timeline should fit “hand-in-glove”.
- If you do not meet your objective/milestones on one or more objectives, it is helpful to reviewers and stakeholders to state the reason. For example, recruiting graduate student, project personnel left for different position, failed field season due to hail, etc. The “Past Year Accomplishment” might be a good place to state why a planned objective was not accomplished.
- It seem incongruous that a 3 to 4 year project with numerous facets would have only one objective, which reads more like an intermediate goal rather than a specific objective. Saying you are going to study sclerotinia biology is not a specific objective. Having a multi-year NACA, that does not give one license to conduct an open ended (objectiveless/hypothesisless/questionless) project.

- External reviewers have access to past year pre-plans; steering committee members have good memories. If you have vague or no specific objectives and the proposal is essentially the same as what you submitted before (and was rejected), your funding prospects are diminished.
- When one of us looks back at last year's pre-plan and finds different objectives or one or more additional, new objectives, it suggests a lack of initial planning. If objectives change, it would be prudent to submit a new and separate pre-plan.
- If you have changes in key cooperators and/or co-PIs, this is important to discuss as this could affect project objectives and progress.
- If there are multiple PIs on a proposal, the proposed projects should flow well together. If not, separate pre-plans should be prepared by each PI.
- If there are multiple PIs on a proposal and the proposed projects flow well together, one PI should be responsible to ensure the pre-plan reads clearly and coherently.
- In the rationale and significance section, instead of focusing at length on the seriousness of sclerotinia diseases, focus on the rationale for the approach(s) you are taking.
- The last phase of research is publication. Publication is important for the viability of the National Sclerotinia Initiative. If a project has been funded at a moderate to substantial rate for a period of time, the C.V. should reflect published work from the project. Few, if any, recent publications on Sclerotinia in the C.V. suggest funds might not be well directed.

- Some pre-plans are excessively casual.
 - Lack of an applied or fundamental scientific basis
 - Lack of specific objectives
 - Putting some or all of the M&M in the Introduction rather than the M&M section

- There are certain obligations of PIs when they are awarded a NACA.
 - Manage NSI award fund is the PIs responsibility
 - Annual reports
 - Various other reports