

Critical Steps to **Completing**, **Submitting**, and **Receiving Funding** for Your Proposal

Peter Rosenbaum, MD
Canada Research Chair in
Childhood Disability
McMaster University



Starting with **Completing** the Proposal...

- The following slides present some of this reviewer's pet peeves – things that are likely to rankle a busy and perhaps unforgiving reviewer...
- ...and all of which I believe are avoidable with appropriate time and attention to detail.



Critical Steps to **Completing** (PR's list of things that drive a reviewer crazy!) - 1

- **Rx #1: READ** the agency's specifications – font type and size, margins, page numbers...
- **Rx #2: FOLLOW** the agency's specifications – font type and size, margins, page numbers!
- **Rx #3:** When in doubt, **contact the agency** (as you will no doubt have heard several times by now!)



Critical Steps to **Completing** (PR's list of things that drive a reviewer crazy!) – 2a

- **Rx #4:** Think about the 'look' of the proposal – is it densely packed with script? Remember - **First impressions are huge!**
 - ⇒ Can you make it look 'airy' – even if that means sacrificing words for white space?
 - ⇒ Have you left adequate margins – that's where reviewers write notes!



Critical Steps to **Completing** (PR's list of things that drive a reviewer crazy!) – 2b

- ⇒ A 'dense' proposal may elicit an angry response – it looks like harder work for the reviewer to slog through!
- **Making the reviewer angry is not good!**



Critical Steps to **Completing** (PR's list of things that drive a reviewer crazy!) - 3

- **Rx #5:** Make sure that the basic proposal stands on its own – without the need for appendices and other additions!
 - ⇒ You have 15-25 pages to tell your story!
 - ⇒ There is NO obligation for a reviewer to search for material – on principle this reviewer does NOT read appendices!
- **Succinct is beautiful!**



Critical Steps to **Completing** (PR's list of things that drive a reviewer crazy!) - 4

- **Q:** My proposal is too long – where can I cut?
- **A:** Often the **lit review** can be **summarized** – no need to show everyone how smart you are by giving all the details of the many papers you read for this proposal
- The **METHODS** section is where proposals live or die – so put your efforts there, and build the rest around it.



Critical Steps to **Completing** (PR's list of things that drive a reviewer crazy!) - 5

- Have you told your story with passion?
- Have you told your story clearly (remember Denzel Washington in Philadelphia!)
- Are there typos/poor grammar/subject-object disconnects/XS jargon/other mishandling of the English language?
- **Some of us still care! If you can't write well can you think clearly?**



Okay – So You Are Nearly Ready to *Submit* Your Magnum Opus...

- Here are a few things to consider as the time nears...
- Again – all these ideas are obvious, and all are based on considerable experience of things that we have done wrong, as well as a few successful steps.



Critical Steps Prior to *Submitting* – Possible Strategies – 1

- **Rx #6: START EARLY & LEAVE ENOUGH TIME!!!**
(Most of us never do...)



Critical Steps Prior to *Submitting* – Possible Strategies – 2

- We usually produce multiple drafts of a proposal – which can cause confusion.
- **Rx #7:** Number and date each version
- Be careful when different folks write different sections of a proposal – we need to reconcile content and style.
- **Rx #8:** One person (usually the PI) has to have the final say, and all the feedback should go to them.



Critical Steps Prior to *Submitting* – Possible Strategies – 3

- **Rx #9:** Ask people you trust to read the proposal in draft form, and offer feedback!
- Remember – when they scribble on the proposal – they are your friends! Pay attention to what they say – if it ain't clear to them it won't be to a reviewer (who isn't your friend!)



Critical Steps Prior to *Submitting* – Possible Strategies – 4

- By the end – we are fed up with the thing and usually cannot see woods for trees any more!
- Also – with multiple drafts we can get things mixed up and muddled.
- **Rx #10:** Ask a sharp-eyed colleague (maybe your secretary!) to read the FINAL version, looking for typos, formatting issues, language, inconsistencies, etc.



Critical Steps Prior to *Submitting* – Possible Strategies – 5

- Check in regularly with your agency's research office. Remember that being friendly and polite can really help when things get tight!
- **Aim** to submit the grant at least one week early – the cushion helps when things go wrong (Murphy!).
- Assign someone specifically to the task of getting signatures – a boring but essential role.



Critical Steps Prior to *Submitting* – Possible Remedies – 6

- Be sure you know where to send the grant – names, addresses, 'attention XX", etc.
- A cover letter is a good idea – targeting the study section if possible, maybe suggesting reviewers (avoiding conflicts of interest, of course!)
- Track receipt of the proposal – just in case (Murphy again!)



Critical Steps after *Receiving Funding*

- Be sure to notify – and thank – all the people who helped make the proposal a successful experience.
- **CELEBRATE!**
- If you have a party to recognize your success, be sure to invite the people who had a hand in that success.

