**NIH K Grant**

**SPECIFIC AIMS PAGE RUBRIC**

### Instructions

This rubric provides recommendations for a Specific Aims page of a NIH K grant application. In addition to overall considerations, the rubric is broken up into four parts that correspond to the four sections of a Specific Aims page: the **introduction** paragraph, the **body** paragraph(s), the **specific aims** themselves, and the closing, or **impact** paragraph. We Recommend that you use this rubric after you’ve completed a Specific Aims Page draft to ensure that you have included all the necessary components.

Additional Specific Aims page recommendations can be found on the [Grant Writing Tips](#) resource on the Harvard Catalyst Writing and Communication Center website. In particular, the Specific Aims page should follow the guidance on the following pages: [Write Your Specific Aims Page](#), [Use Style Tips](#), and [Common Grant Writing Mistakes](#).

**Please Note:** Review the completed rubric and carefully note any unchecked boxes. Review the resources linked throughout this document and use them to improve your Specific Aims page.

### Introduction

In this section:

- The first sentence clearly defines the problem that the proposal addresses.
- The paragraph describes why the proposal is important.
- The paragraph includes facts about what is known about the area of research.
- The paragraph explains the current gaps in knowledge and what still needs to be learned.
- The closing sentence of the paragraph states the critical, unmet need.
- The paragraph uses a funnel shape conceptually.

### Body

This section:

- Describes what the applicant is proposing to do (i.e. the solution to the unmet need).
- Describes why the applicant is the most qualified to do this work.
- States the applicant’s long-term goal, or the effect that this work will have on their field of research. The long term goal should show the intention to be an independent investigator in this field.
- References any preliminary data that the applicant will build upon. This preliminary data backs up the hypothesis.
- States the central hypothesis. The central hypothesis should be one clear, overarching idea, testable by the aims. It should be explicitly written out (e.g. “Our central hypothesis is…”).
- Explains why the applicant is doing this work and what the result/payoff will be. It should reference long-term career development goals.

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Content adapted from: BioScience Writers and lectures by Karen Costenbader, MD, MPH and Peg AtKisson, PhD
This section:

- Contains 2-3 specific aims.
- Does not include sub-aims.

Each specific aim:

- Is 1-3 sentences long.
- Starts with a clear title.
- Describes the approach (often called the “rationale” or “working hypothesis”).
- Shows which part of the central hypothesis will be tested through the aim.
- Typically does not have an individual hypothesis.
- Does not rely on the success of previous aims.
- Uses decisive language.

This section:

- States how the applicant’s research will advance the field.
- Explains the impact of the work on the NIH institution to which the applicant is applying.
- Is written as though success is inevitable.
- States how this grant will prepare the applicant for an R01.

Overall the Specific Aims Page should:

- Be only one page.
- Use concise, plain language that a non-expert can understand.
- Follow a logical flow of information.
- Spell out acronyms the first time that they are used.
- Not include citations (the document should stand alone).
- Use effective formatting (e.g. headings, appropriate use of bolding/italicizing).

Notes: