

## How To Write A Grant

Faculty Presenter

**Keith Flaherty, MD**, Director of Termeer Center for Targeted Therapy & Director of Clinical Research, Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA, USA

### Scholars' Summaries

*Authored by **Juan Pablo Alderuccio, MD**, Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, FL, USA*

Dr. Keith Flaherty gave us an exceptional talk about grant writing skills. In two slides, he was able to summarize most important parts of grant writing and provide his view as a grant reviewer for foundations and the NIH. He addressed the way in which junior faculty should approach their first submissions. He emphasized the relevance of the first page as a key element to gain a reviewer's attention and interest. This page includes the abstract and objectives. Regardless of founding agency, the first page represents the first impression reviewers will obtain from a proposal and provides a foundation for the entire project. He also remarked upon the importance of showing this page to different faculty members at your own institution, especially those not directly involved in one's own research field.

Dr. Flaherty stressed writing and returning multiple times to the first page and providing sufficient time for mentors and reviewers in order to obtain a critical and constructive feedback for our grant. He also explained how the scoring system works.

Finally, he provided precious examples of previously funded proposals.

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*Authored by **Chirayu G. Patel, MD, MPH**, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN, USA*

In this session, Dr. Keith Flaherty provided the most salient tips for grant writing. Rather than making it seem like an arduous process with low success rates, he framed grant writing as a way to protect your own time for your creative research endeavors, because no one else is going to do it for you. In this regard, it seems that grant writing is the key for controlling your own destiny in terms of research as a primary career objective.

He emphasized the time commitment and flexibility involved becoming a research leader in one's field. Engaging scientific collaborators, through virtual and in-person meetings, cannot be done if one has only several hours available per week for research. Time is needed for reading, writing, and strategic planning. I appreciated that Dr. Flaherty acknowledged that this 'time to think' is valuable to one's research success, and it is in your best interest to protect this time yourself by obtaining grants to cover your salary.

From a numbers perspective, Dr. Flaherty explained the concept of the NIH salary cap as it pertains to grants. For example, if an NIH grant budget includes 20% PI effort, then this amount cannot be greater than 20% of the NIH salary cap =  $183,000 * 0.20 = \$36,600$ . Obtaining your first grant can be a daunting process, but it is important to realize that once you have been awarded one, this grant will greatly bolster your application for future grants.

In terms of concrete tips with regard to grant writing, Dr. Flaherty stressed the importance of the "Aims page" in terms of the real-world grant review process – it must be a page (no more than one page!) in which every word counts. He revealed insights into the 2- to 3-month process prior to grant submission: reviewing 20-40x prior to submission on a 30" monitor,

gradually perfecting the Aims page. Also crucially important is a well-reasoned section on “pitfalls and alternatives.” Finally, always directly address reviewed comments in a grant resubmission. Indeed, the audience appreciated Dr. Flaherty’s practical grant-writing tips delivered in a memorable manner.