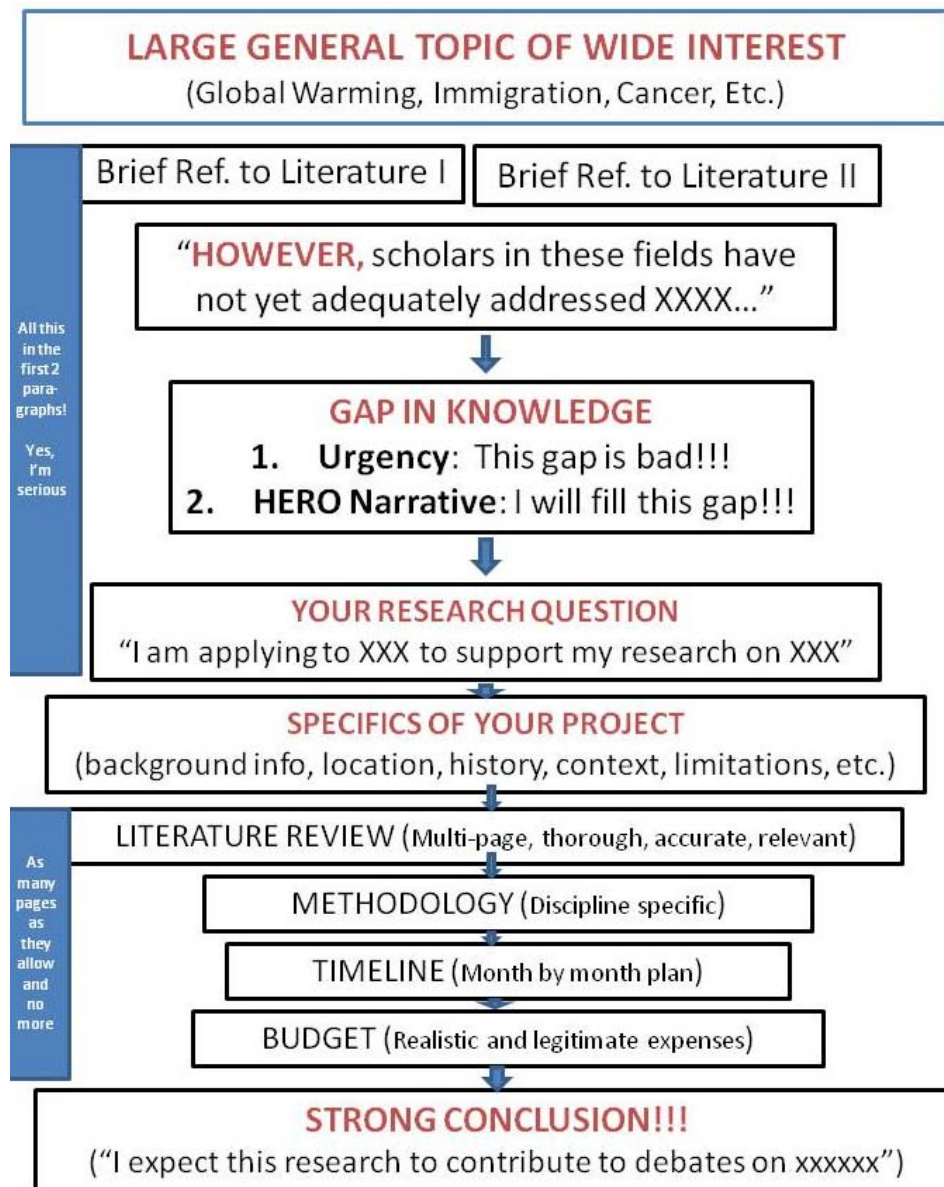


## The Foolproof Research Proposal Template



Source: Karen Kelsky, Ph.D., McNair Scholars Program, University of Oregon  
<https://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/05/dr-karens-foolproof-grant-template/>

## Proposals that Stand Above the Rest...

- ...Clearly connect the proposed project aims to sponsor objectives
- ...Are structured repetitively around a thread that loops throughout
- ...Are consistent - All components contribute to a coherent story
- ...Are focused & feasible - Not a 'fishing expedition' or mystery novel
- ...Own their value - Confidently assert the importance of the anticipated contributions **without overselling**
- ...Present possible pitfalls and alternative solutions to build trust
  
- ...Have a(n):
  - Introduction** that creates empathy, urgency for solving a clear problem
  - Literature Review** that establishes a clear gap that is important to fill
  - Research Questions / Hypotheses** that clearly address the established gap and explains how proposed work will extend preliminary work
  - Objectives** that are **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reasonable, & Time-bound**
  - Procedures / Methods** that leave no pragmatic question unaddressed and present a solid plan that demonstrates competency and credibility
  - Conclusions** that demonstrate how anticipated contributions will address the urgent problem and advance sponsor objectives
  
- ...Makes it easy for the reviewer to become your champion:
  - Tells reviewers where to look for answers** through headings and highlighted text that mirror review criteria
  - Assumes reviewers are too tired for complex language and jargon**
  - Follows the '20-minute Rule'** - Hooks the reviewer within 1-page
  - Does not let poor formatting, errors distract** from good arguments
  - Has a strong concluding paragraph** - Tells the reviewer what to write in their review

# Tips for Using Language Strategically

- **Mirror the language used in the RFP and review criteria** – For example...
  - “The **SIGNIFICANCE** of our results lies in...”
  - “This approach is **FEASIBLE** because...”
  - “The **OUTCOME** of this project will be...”
  - “This project is **INNOVATIVE** because...”
  - “The **TEAM** is **WELL-QUALIFIED** to undertake this project because...”
  - “This project will **ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE** by...”
  - “The **BROADER IMPACTS** of this work are...”
- **Project Confidence with an Active and Affirmative Voice**
  - **Who will be doing this impressive work? You!**
    - NOT: “Spatial analysis will be conducted...”;
    - **INSTEAD: “The PIs will conduct spatial analysis...”**
  - **Use an active, dynamic voice to engage the reader more effectively**
    - NOT: “Research has been cited to demonstrate that an estimated...”;
    - **INSTEAD: “Researchers estimate that...”**
  - **Use affirmative language** (“will,” not “try”)
    - NOT: “The proposed work will try to understand the complex relationships between...”;
    - **INSTEAD: “The proposed work will disentangle the complex relationships between...”**
    - NOT: “We hope our findings will shed light on...”;
    - **INSTEAD: “Our findings will shed light on...”**
  - **Use positive language, even when framing challenges of your position and/or institution**
    - NOT: “I carry a heavy teaching load that leaves little time for research...”;
    - **INSTEAD: “The proposed budget will enable me to devote time during the academic year to advance this important work”**
  - **Build on – don’t tear down – the existing literature**
    - NOT: “X field has largely ignored Y variable”;
    - **INSTEAD: “We will extend field X by examining the contributions of Y variable”**
- **Every word serves a purpose**
  - **Eliminate “Fluff”** – for example:
    - NOT: “are planned to”;
    - NOT: “will allow”;
    - NOT: “the question of whether or not”;
    - NOT: “It is our expectation that”;
    - NOT: “are dependent upon”;
    - NOT: “all of the members of the Center”;
    - NOT: “It has been shown that”;
    - **INSTEAD: “will”**
    - **INSTEAD: “enable”**
    - **INSTEAD: “whether”**
    - **INSTEAD: “We expect”**
    - **INSTEAD: “depend on”**
    - **INSTEAD: “all Center members”**
    - **INSTEAD: “Jones (2019) found X and Y”**
  - **Avoid verbs that don’t add meaning**
    - e.g. “accomplished,” “conducted,” “facilitated,” “implemented”
  - **Avoid lengthy introductions that only serve to take up space**
    - e.g. “Indeed, it can be argued that...,” “It is certainly worth noting, on the other hand, that...”
  - **Every adjective contributes – Avoid meaningless descriptors and unfettered enthusiasm**
    - e.g. “exciting,” “a lot,” “really,” “very”
- **Avoid ‘feel good’ platitudes**
  - **Don’t assume reviewers share your values**
    - NOT: “We must save key species from extinction”;
    - **INSTEAD: “X species plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of Y ecosystem”**
  - **Don’t waste space using statements with which most are likely to agree**
- **Use precise language**
  - **Explain the “how”** – NOT: “I will measure outcomes.”; **INSTEAD: “I will measure X by Y metrics”**
  - **Report comparisons** (e.g. “more than,” “better than,” “improved”) **alongside their reference**
  - **Use concrete verbs** (e.g. “decrease,” “increase”) **not fuzzy verbs** (e.g. “change,” “occur”)
- **Avoid Jargon** – Would you use it in conversation? If not, don’t use it; **Define technical terms**
- **Minimize Acronyms** – Aim for 3-4 acronyms; They can be difficult to follow even if they’re commonly used