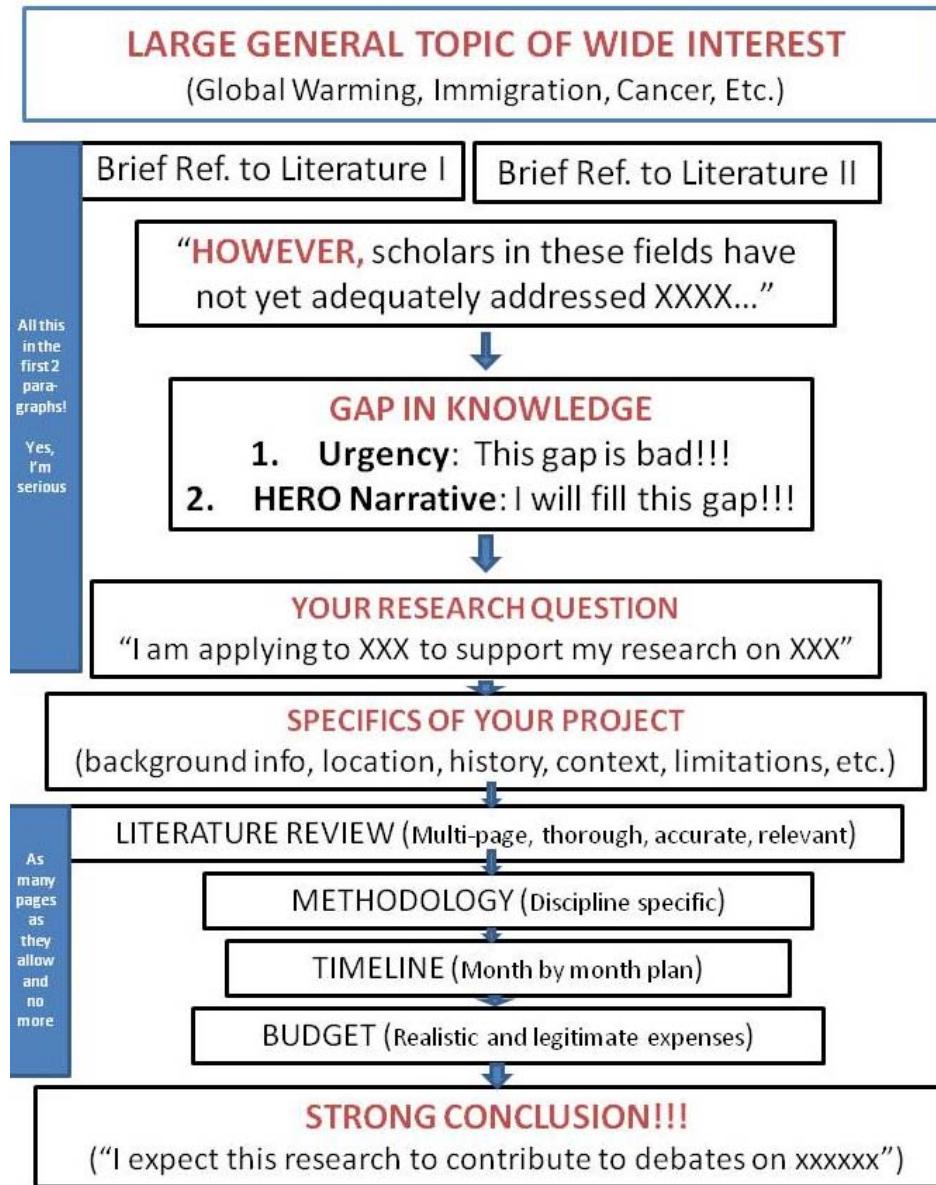


## The Foolproof Research Proposal Template



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”;	INSTEAD: “ <b>will</b> ”
▪ NOT: “will allow”;	INSTEAD: “ <b>enable</b> ”
▪ NOT: “the question of whether or not”;	INSTEAD: “ <b>whether</b> ”
▪ NOT: “It is our expectation that”;	INSTEAD: “ <b>We expect</b> ”
▪ NOT: “are dependent upon”;	INSTEAD: “ <b>depend on</b> ”
▪ NOT: “all of the members of the Center”;	INSTEAD: “ <b>all Center members</b> ”
▪ NOT: “It has been shown that”;	INSTEAD: “ <b>Jones (2019) found X and Y</b> ”
  - 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