

CIRA-YIGH Early-Career Scientists Panel: "Crafting the NIH Specific Aims Page"

Panel Summary – September 11, 2025

The Specific Aims page is arguably the most vital component in an NIH grant proposal. The aims page describes the scope of a problem and/or knowledge gap, a proposed innovative solution, and expected outcomes and impact. It serves as a standalone page from which a reviewer can gain a reasonable understanding of the research hypothesis and objective without reading other parts of the application. This virtual panel provided an opportunity for early-career scientists to learn from established investigators about approaches to developing, crafting, and writing an NIH specific aims page.



Amy Justice
Yale School of Medicine
Panelist



Nicola Hawley
Yale School of Public Health
Panelist



Jeffrey Wickersham
Yale School of Medicine
Moderator

Key Takeaways

- **Know your audience:** Tailor the aims page to the grant mechanism; the mission, cultures, and priorities of the NIH institute or center; and potential reviewers assigned to review the application.
- **Your aims page must answer 3 questions:**
 1. What is the problem or knowledge gap?
 2. What will you do?
 3. Why you/why now?
- **Structure matters:** Aims should be standalone; interrelated but not interdependent. Each aim maps to the central hypothesis or question, all data collection contributes to an aim, analyses match the stated aims.
- **Craft your aims:** Use concise language, perfect grammar and spelling, strong action verbs, bolding, white space for readability, 2-3 short paragraphs, numbered aims.
- **Common pitfalls to avoid:** Aim dependency, too many aims, vague endpoints, overuse of jargon and acronyms, inflated innovation claims.
- **Find a balance:** For career development awards (e.g., K01), aims should both achieve scientific goals and enhance your education and training on relevant skills and competencies.
- **Get to know the NIH review process and criteria:** Talk to scientific review officers; read the peer review guidance and framework; consider serving in a study section; meet with colleagues and mentors who have successfully received awards and served on study sections.



cira

Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS
at Yale University

Yale Institute for Global Health

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Resources

Specific Aims Page Checklist

- Does the first paragraph make a non-expert care?
- Is the knowledge gap explicit?
- Can a reviewer describe the hypothesis or research objective in one sentence?
- Do the aims use strong action verbs and name endpoints?
- Are the aims non-dependent?
- Is the impact claim concrete and credible?
- Are there cues for rigor, reproducibility, and feasibility?
- Would a policymaker or a clinician understand the benefit?

Presentation Slides and Recording

- [Dr. Amy Justice's slides](#)
- [Dr. Nicola Hawley's slides](#)
- [Recording \(YouTube\)](#)

Yale University (*available to Yale community only)

- Yale School of Medicine: [Grant Library](#)*
- CIRA Early-Career Scientists Panel Summary: ["NIH K01 Awards" \(October 18, 2023\)](#)

Public

- BioScience Writers: [The Anatomy of a Specific Aims Page](#)
- UAB CFAR: [Specific Aims Workshop Slides \(May 10, 2024\)](#)
- Monte AA, Libby AM. [Introduction to the specific aims page of a grant proposal](#). *Acad Emerg Med*. 2018;25(9):1042-1047. doi:10.1111/acem.13419
- Inouye SK, Fiellin DA. [An evidence-based guide to writing grant proposals for clinical research](#). *Ann Intern Med*. 2005;142(4):274-282. doi:10.7326/0003-4819-142-4-200502150-00009

National Institutes of Health

- [Planning and Writing](#)
- [Sample Applications and Documents](#)
- [Early Career Reviewer \(ECR\) Program](#)
- [NIH Grants Process: A Brief Walk-Through for Beginners Video and Slides \(May 15, 2024\)](#)
- [Find Funded Projects and More Using NIH Databases](#)
- [Office of AIDS Research: Early Career Investigator Resources](#)
- [Simplified Peer Review Framework \(for due dates on/after Jan 25, 2025\)](#)