TIP SHEET FOR MENTOR'S STATEMENT FOR NIH K APPLICATION

DO's and DON'Ts:



Convey confidence and commitment to the candidate from the mentor and institution



Emphasize accomplishments and research productivity over the efforts of the applicant



Include strong, positive, enthusiastic language



Avoid doubt raiser statements including negative language, faint praise, hesitancy, irrelevancy, hedging, etc.

TIPS FOR WRITING A STRONG LETTER

- **Grasp the funding opportunity's goals and address the review criteria.**
  Take the time to craft and tailor the letter for the award.
- **Use titles and surnames consistently for the applicant in the letter.**
  Keep it professional.
- **Be mindful of your word choices**

1) Women and minorities are more frequently described by more communal traits (eg: compassionate, caring, honest, helpful, etc.) than agentic traits (eg: independent, assertive, competent, confident, etc.) which are generally used for men. Be cognitive of this to avoid unconscious bias in your letter.

Adjectives to include	Adjectives to avoid
Excellent, Trailblazer, Independent, Self-driven, Accomplished, Skilled, Resourceful, Outstanding, Spearheaded, Insightful, Successful, Confident, Ambitious, Proactive, Logical, Pioneered, Inventive, Robust	Caring, Compassionate, Hard-working, Conscientious, Dependable, Diligent, Tactful, Interpersonal, Warm, Helpful, Honest, Tireless, Stable, Nice, Easy to get along

Adapted this table from: 1) and 2)

2) Use standout adjectives like outstanding, exceptional, etc. rather than grindstone adjectives like tireless, hardworking, etc. to emphasize achievements.
3) Letters written for men candidates are often longer and thus perceived as more enthusiastic. So, maintain a level of high enthusiasm to fill the allowable 6 pages for all candidates.
4) Use the gender bias calculator to evaluate your word choices.
5) Other useful resources: Racial Bias Gender bias

FORMATTING TIPS:



- Should include letter head, contact information/position, and signature/date.
- Use at least 0.5 margins, 1.0 line spacing, and 11-point font with an approved font type: Arial (preferred font), Georgia, Helvetica, Palatino Linotype.
- All letters from the primary mentor & co-mentor(s) are up to 6 pages in length.

If a co-mentor is proposed in addition to a primary mentor,



- Explicitly describe the primary mentor's and co-mentors' respective areas of expertise, the responsibility of each, and the nature of the involvement with the candidate.
- Describe clearly how co-mentor(s) will coordinate with the primary mentor and the candidate to provide an integrated mentoring effort.
- Letters can be co-signed with the primary mentor or submitted as a separate letter.

OUTLINE FOR MENTOR'S STATEMENT FOR NIH K APPLICATION

START WITH GIVING YOUR STRONGEST POSSIBLE SUPPORT

- Start with strong language: "It is my pleasure to write the strongest possible letter in support of Dr. XXX's NIH XX application."
- Summarize the applicant's exceptional prior research and training experiences, including publications, awards, grants, exciting preliminary data, etc.
- State that the applicant will be a productive, independent research investigator.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF AS THE LEADER OF THE MENTORING TEAM

- Describe mentor's adequacy of scientific background and research productivity
- Document a successful track record of fostering the development of independent investigators
- Highlight how the applicant's proposed research project is sufficiently distinct from mentor's ongoing research
- Document the availability of sufficient research support

ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING REVIEW CRITERIA

- Is there appropriate expertise, experience, and ability on the part of the mentor(s) to guide the applicant onto an independent research career?
- Is there adequate description of the quality and extent of the mentor's proposed role in providing guidance and advice to the candidate?

PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF CANDIDATE'S POTENTIAL AS AN INDEPENDENT AND PRODUCTIVE RESEARCHER

- Describe candidate's prior training and scientific background
- Evidence of originality
- Quality of research endeavors or publications
- Commitment to health-oriented research

ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING REVIEW CRITERIA

- Does the candidate have the potential to develop as a productive and independent researcher?
- Is the candidate's prior training and research experience appropriate?
- Is the candidate's academic, clinical (if relevant), and research record of high quality?
- Is there evidence of the candidate's commitment to becoming an independent investigator in research?

DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH PLAN AS ENABLING FUTURE INDEPENDENCE

- Summarize the prior research that serves as the key support for the proposed project
- Summarize how the proposed strategies will ensure a robust and unbiased approach
- Describe how the candidate will gain independence from his/her mentor(s) and separate his/her scientific research program from that of the mentor(s).
- Affirm any resources and reagents that can be taken by the applicant to the independent phase of the award
- Document the availability of facilities for high-quality research

ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING REVIEW CRITERIA

- Is the research plan appropriate to the candidate's stage of research development and as a vehicle for developing the research skills described in the career development plan?
- To what extent is the proposed research likely to foster the career of the candidate as a successful, independent investigator in biomedical, behavioral, or clinical research?
- Are the research facilities, resources and training opportunities, including faculty capable of productive collaboration with the candidate adequate and appropriate?

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING PLAN

- Summarize the career development activities that support their transition to an independent investigator, e.g. weekly meetings with mentor and annual advisory committee meeting
- Highlight career development plan was created by the candidate with input from the advisory committee
- Describe the nature of the monitoring and evaluation, including mentor writing an annual evaluation within the progress report, that will occur during the proposed K award and promote the candidate's scientific and professional independence
- Agree to assist the candidate in transitioning to an independent research position by guiding the candidate during the job search and negotiation process (important for K99/R00)

ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING REVIEW CRITERIA

- What is the likelihood that the plan will contribute substantially to the scientific development of the candidate and lead to scientific independence?
- Are there adequate plans for monitoring and evaluating the candidate's career development and research progress toward independence?
- Is the environment for scientific and professional development of the candidate of high quality?

CONCLUDE WITH YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE CANDIDATE

- Reiterate applicant is an ideal fit for the NIH XX Award : "The applicant has demonstrated excellent productivity during his/her/their post-doctoral work; this proposal provides a strong foundation for transitioning as an independent investigator."
- Rank applicant in the top A% of trainees that you have mentored.
- Emphasize you as a mentor are committed to his/her/their independent research career.

End with "Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions. Thank you in advance for giving Dr. XXX your strongest consideration".