## Common mistakes in NSF proposal preparation

| Section | Fatal (return without review) | Weaknesses |
|---|---|---|
| General | • Failure to meet font and margin requirements<br>• Failure to meet eligibility requirements | |
| Project Summary | • No section marked "Intellectual Merit"<br>• No section marked "Broader Impact"<br>• More than one page<br>• Not written in third person | • Too technical<br>• Intellectual merit section fails to justify that the project will produce *new* knowledge<br>• Broader Impact section is one sentence |
| Project Description | • Exceeds page limits<br>• Does not include results from Prior NSF Support for PI and all Co-PIs. | • Too many words<br>• Undefined acronyms<br>• No charts, graphs, or tables<br>• Embedded URLs<br>• Unsubstantiated claims<br>• No clearly stated goals<br>• No means of evaluating whether goals are achieved<br>• No discussion why it is important to achieve goals<br>• Less than a page on broader impact |
| References Cited | • Journal title missing<br>• Incomplete list of all authors<br>• Use of *et. al.*<br>• Authors not in same order as on publication<br>• Use website addresses rather than journal citation | • Web references rather than archival journals and published proceedings |
| Biographical Sketches | • Missing PI, co-PI, or senior personnel<br>• More than 2 pages<br>• More than 5 closely related publications<br>• More than 10 total publications<br>• More than 5 synergistic activities<br>• Publications not listed in correct form (see References)<br>• Collaborators not alphabetized | • Includes personal information (*e.g.* birth date, marital status, personal address, cell phone number) |
| Budget | • Includes voluntary committed cost-share<br>• Includes general purpose office supplies, books and/or computers | • More than two months/yr of faculty salary support without justification |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Budget Justification | • Exceeds 3 pages<br>• Contains voluntary cost share | • Contains additional information that should be in the narrative<br>• Not organized by budget item |
| Letters of commitment | • Must be allowed by solicitation | • Express general support, but commit no specific resources<br>• Missing when a resource or collaboration is claimed in the narrative<br>• Not signed on letterhead<br>• All say the same thing |
| Current and Pending Support | • Missing PI, co-PIs, senior personnel<br>• Missing required information<br>• Failure to include current proposal as pending | • Not in standard form<br>• Overcommitting summer months |
| Data Management Plan | • Missing<br>• Collaborative lead submits Data Management Plan for all parties | • Just statement that no plan is needed (without a clear justification)<br>• No provision for retaining data at least three years after project end date |
| Postdoc Mentoring Plan | • Missing if a postdoc is supported in the budget | • Vague<br>• No benchmarks or goals |
| Facilities, Equipment, and Other Resources | • Missing<br>• Includes quantified cost share | • Contains project information which should only be in the narrative<br>• Fails to include non-quantified resources mentioned in narrative |
| Supplementary Documents | • Included when not specifically allowed by solicitation<br>• Used to circumvent narrative page limit | |
| Additional Single Copy Documents | • Included when not specifically allowed by solicitation<br>• Used to circumvent narrative page limit | |