



United States Department of Agriculture



Cooperative State, Research, Education  
and Extension Service

## Tips for Successful Proposals

**Michael P. O'Neill**

*CSL Co-Chair; and National Program Leader  
Natural Resources and Environment Unit*

# Addressing CSREES WQ “Themes”

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- Eight Themes Identified for Research, Education, and Extension Programs
  - Animal Waste Management
  - Drinking Water/Human Health
  - Environmental Restoration
  - Nutrient and Pesticide Management
  - Pollution Assessment and Protection
  - Watershed Management
  - Water Conservation & Management
  - Water Policy & Economics



# Reviewers Generally Look For

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- **Merit**
  - The manor in which critical questions are addressed.
  - Originality of the work, or building on existing science.
- **Relevance to Water Quality**
  - Does it fit the spirit of a category?
  - Does it address a theme?
- **Investigator & Institutional Capacity**
  - Credentials of the personnel.
  - Prior work and contributions.



# The Basics

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- Follow directions.
- Well written proposals get funded.
- If it says “integrated” it means integrated.
- The panel has a strong orientation toward the physical sciences, but not exclusively. Therefore, the reviewers often give close attention to research methods and tangible program expectations (outcomes).
- Vitas matter.
- How are stakeholders involved in the project, and do the letters of support “demonstrate” real support.
- Make sure your partners are truly on board.
- Proposals are read with a conservative “eye” and between the lines is “out-of-bounds!”



# The Basics

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- How does this project defines its success:
  - ✓ Is It relevant?
  - ✓ Is it realistic?
  - ✓ Is it connected to the proposal's objectives?
  - ✓ Is it measurable?
- Multiple project objectives are usually required – and each should be clearly stated with its own evaluation (where appropriate).
- Always best to build on previous work and show how your proposal is based on prior studies, projects, theory and/or publication base.
- If your project is about modeling, better explain the model's utility, extrapolation required, etc.
- If your budget looks like a FAT duck, squawks like one, the reviewers will fry it for lunch!



# The Basics

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- Panels strive for consistency, and your proposal needs to be clear, well written, and follow the RFA's outline.
- Letters of support are read.
- Each proposal is read by at least three reviewers, but discussed by the entire panel.
- The project summary is very important. (Write it first and re-write it last, and check it twice.)



# Fatal Flaws

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- MUST address water quality issues in agricultural and rural watersheds or similarly relevant spatial scales.
- No Extension Programming.
- No attention to cost/benefit analysis.
- No signatures
- Asks for more than than limited specified in the RFA.

