**Template guidelines:** For your grant application, the SERCC strongly recommends using the words that are underlined below as well as retaining the formatting (e.g., underline or bold). The remaining bullet points are provided as suggestions.

**Specific Aims**

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| Opening sentence: *A sentence to immediately capture the reviewers’ attention and highlight an area relevant to the targeted program/funding agency.*  Why  Current Knowledge: *Information about what is known that will allow reviewers to understand the importance of the proposed research. Sets up the gap/unmet need.*  Knowledge gap or statement of need: *The subject of the proposal; must relate to the previous statements as a next step to advance the field. (Note: it is not essential to use the term “knowledge gap” in this sentence.)*  Consequence(s) of not addressing knowledge gap or need: *Explain why failing to address this gap/need will prevent vertical advancement of the field.* |

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| Long-term goal: *The goal of your research over multiple funding periods.* **[will NOT be suitable for all F aplications]**   * “Our *long-term goal* is to…”   Overall objective: *What will be accomplished through this project; must link back to the gap/need you are addressing.*   * “The *overall objective* of the proposed research is to…”   What  Central Hypothesis: *What must be tested to attain the objective. This should be broad; details will be provided in specific aims.*   * “Our *central hypothesis* is that…”   Data to support hypothesis: *Your preliminary data (just the punchline), and work by others if relevant.*  Rationale: *What attaining your objective will allow you to do and how that will advance the field (vertically); must link back to knowledge gap/statement of need.* **[Only if you can do this without being repetitive with the Why paragraph]** |

Specific Aims: *The aims paragraphs should each contain minimally a title and a working hypothesis. These should make it clear which component of the central hypothesis is tested in that aim—and why. Each title should be broad and open-ended; the working hypothesis can provide the focus of the aim. If you have no room to expand on how you will achieve your aim in an additional sentence or two, make sure that your working hypothesis gives a sense of approach and readout.*

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| **Aim 1: Title**  Working Hypothesis: | A**im 2: Title**  How  Working Hypothesis: | **Aim 3: Title**  Working Hypothesis: |

Payoff

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| Expected Outcomes: *What your aims are likely to produce, how that would contribute to the overall objective, and what broader impact this would have on this area of research.*   * “The *expected outcomes* are …”   Broader Impact   * “The *broader impact* is…” |

**Research Strategy**

**Significance** (subsection): *(1–1.5 pages) Place the proposed work within the context of the overall mission of the funding agency, justify the need for what you propose, explain previous findings on which you base your studies (including their rigor), and indicate the positive effect that completing the project will have on the problem you are addressing.*

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| Importance of the problem: *An extension of the information provided in the first paragraph of the Specific Aims page, e.g., what problem or critical barrier your research addresses (substantiated with documentation from the literature) and the negative consequences of not meeting the need. Be sure to go from* ***broad to specific****; do not interrupt the flow with a statement of what you plan/expect to accomplish—save this for the* ***Significance of the expected research contribution*** *subsection below.*   * Opening sentence/problem being addressed… * “It is widely appreciated that…” * “There is a clear lack of…” * “Thus, there is an *urgent need*…”   Rigor of prior research (previously, scientific premise): *The foundation on which your proposal is built and your evaluation of how reliable it is.* ***Organize by aim or overall.*** *Discuss: the strengths and weaknesses in rigor of the prior research (both published studies and unpublished preliminary data) that serves as the key support for the propose project. End this by including general statements (leave details for Approach section) about how weaknesses of prior research will be overcome. Cite only the strongest supporting publications.*   * “Numerous studies have…” * “However, none has…” * “Toward this end we will…” * “Thus, our proposed studies will circumvent the limitations of…by…”   Significance of the expected research contribution: *The research contributions you expect to make; these should be relevant to the mission of the funding agency. Write about contributions to science in general vs. your field separately as suggested below, or in a single paragraph. In each paragraph your argument should go from* ***specific to broad.***   * Impact of the project on scientific knowledge: *How the proposed project will improve scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice in one or more fields.* * Impact of the project on the field: *How the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field will be advanced (vertically) if the proposed aims are achieved.* |

**Innovation** (subsection): *(*≤*0.5 pages) Explain what makes your proposed approach a new and substantially different way of addressing an important problem.*

**[NOT relevant to most F applications (check relevant Funding Opportunity Announcement (i.e. FOA)]**

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| * Strategies currently used to address the problem of interest and their limitations: *Why they are unsatisfactory.* * What makes the proposed research is innovative: *How the proposed project differs from the status quo. This can include a new approach or the use of an unconventional technology, but should open new horizons.* * Advancements that are only possible because of this new approach:   Alternative: Provide a bulleted list of points that highlight what makes your proposal innovative. *For each include: what was done previously and why that was unsatisfactory; what new approaches or new technologies are being employed; and how the new approaches overcome previous limitations.* |

**Research Strategy (con’t)**



**Approach** (subsection):

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| **Issues Related to Rigor & Reproducibility:** *For paragraphs on* ***Addressing weaknesses in rigor of prior research,******Strategies to ensure rigor of the proposed research*** *and* ***Considerations of biological variables including sex****, authors should provide relevant information that clearly addresses all points. This can be done:*   * *at the beginning (as shown below) or end of the Approach subsection (advisable if applicable to all aims), or* * *in each aim (if information differs by aim).*   *The key is to make all information on the topic of R&R easy to find, i.e.* ***the paragraphs should be labeled****.*  Addressing weaknesses in rigor of prior research **–** *(0.25 pages)*  *Describe plans to address weaknesses in rigor of the prior research that serves as the key support for the proposed project.*   * “As described under Significance, the key weaknesses of past studies of xxx are yyy.” * “In the current study, we will address xxx.” * “In addition, we will ensure the proposed research is performed rigorously, as described below.”   Strategies to ensure rigor of the proposed research – *(0.25 pages)*  *Describe how you will ensure a robust and unbiased approach appropriate for the work proposed. Strategies may include:*   * *Randomization protocol for sample groups* * *Blinded data recording and analysis* * *Controls and replicates needed* * *Sample size estimation/power analysis (critical for studies using human subjects or higher vertebrates)* * *Principles of Good Laboratory Practice* * *Essential reagents and their authentication* * *Statistical analyses to be used*   [Adapted from Landis SC et al. (2012) A call for transparent reporting to optimize the predictive value of preclinical research. *Nature* Oct. 11; 490(7419):181-91.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=nature%5BJour%5D+AND+2012%5Bpdat%5D+AND+landis%5Bauthor%5D&cmd=detailssearch)  Consideration of biological variables, including sex, in the proposed research – *(0.25 pages)*  *Include discussion of:*   * *Sex (required; e.g. inclusion of equal numbers of each; sex impact on results; separate analysis of results; karyotype of cell lines)* * *Weight, age, and health status, if applicable* |

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| **Aim** **1:** *Title to be repeated verbatim from Specific Aims page.*  Introduction: ***Include the following points, combined into one paragraph of ~6-8 sentences.***   * Justification: *The question/problem that needs to be addressed (a part of the overall need).* * Objective of Aim: *Part of the overall objective stated on Specific Aims page; also how attaining this objective will help address/resolve the question posed above.*   + “The *objective* of this aim is to…” * Working hypothesis: *Repeated verbatim from Specific Aims.*   + “To attain this objective, we will test the *working hypothesis* that…” * Approach: *The approach you will use to test your working hypothesis.*   + “Our *approach* to testing the working hypothesis will be…” |

**Research Strategy (con’t)**

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| Justification and Feasibility: *Preliminary data and findings from the literature that support the rationale of this aim.*   * Preliminary data/data from the literature: * Rationale: *Future steps that will only be possible after the proposed work is completed. Include preliminary data that strengthen your rationale.*    + The *rationale* for this aim is…   Research Design:   * Subaim 1*Possible details to include – not an exhaustive list. Include statements on achieving robust and unbiased results and considerations of biological variables if not provided as a separate paragraph.* * Approach to be used * Overview of methods * Essential minor/major equipment * Detailed expectations * How results will be interpreted * Subaim 2*(as above)*   Expected outcomes:*Short paragraph that integrates outcomes from all proposed activities within this aim, and indicates how they will contribute to achieving your overall objective.*  Potential problems and alternative strategies:*Essential for every aim. Propose alternatives in case your hypothesis is proven invalid/critical reagents fail/approaches are inconclusive. These problems should not be major; even if they occur, the alternatives described here should enable you to achieve the main objective of your proposal.* |

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| **Aim 2:** (as above) |

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| **Aim 3:** (as above) |

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| **Timeline and benchmarks for success:** *Preferably in table format (makes it easy for reviewers to visualize). Demonstrate that you have thoroughly considered how long it will take to complete each subaim. Include when you expect to achieve certain benchmarks (be sure to specify what these are).* |

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| **Future directions:** *Brief summary of where you expect the science to be at the conclusion of the proposed research. Include the next expected steps and why they are important.* |