

Common Blinding Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Some funding opportunities offered by the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs require a “blinded” review, in which the identities of the PI, collaborators, and their organizations are concealed from peer and programmatic reviewers. This blinding may be required at the pre-application and/or full application stage. All applicants should carefully review the Program Announcement to which they are applying to determine which documents, if any, must be stripped of all identifying information. Applications or pre-applications that contain identifying information in any of the documents to be forwarded for peer or programmatic review will be administratively rejected. Revised documents that remove identifying information may not be submitted after the pre-application or full application submission deadline.

A few common blinding mistakes, and techniques to avoid them, are described below. Note that this is not an exhaustive list of potential blinding errors, and applicants should thoroughly review all documents prior to submission to check for information that may lead to the identification of people or organizations involved in the proposed project.

1. *Avoid identification of personnel or laboratories through references.*

Refrain from using words such as “I,” “we,” and “our” in the narrative text, particularly when references will be cited. Do not refer to published work in a way that reveals any connection with the PI or any collaborators on the proposed project.

Common Mistake 1: “We recently developed a method to purify XYZ cells from ABC tissue samples and successfully established the first PDQ assay (Reference),” where the reference cited is a publication authored or co-authored by the PI or another member of the research team.

Common Mistake 2: “Our laboratory has previously reported that Z protein phosphorylates B protein on Serine 370 (Reference),” where the reference cited is a publication authored or co-authored by the PI or another member of the team.

Common Mistake 3: “The PI is uniquely positioned to conduct the serotyping experiments due to experience with similar past work (Reference),” where the reference cited is a publication authored or co-authored by the PI.

Common Mistake 4: “The procedure will be performed as we have described previously (Reference),” where the reference cited is a publication authored or co-authored by the PI or another member of the research team.

Do not include highlighting such as bold, underlined, or italicized fonts that identify certain publications as authored by the applicant or a member of the research team in the *References Cited* section of the Supporting Documentation.

Do not include references to “in press” manuscripts, as they are not part of the public domain.

2. *Avoid inclusion of organization names or acronyms in blinded documents.*

Review all documents that are required to be blinded to ensure that no organization names or acronyms are listed within. This includes the PI’s organization, as well as the organization(s) of any collaborators and/or consultants.

Common Mistake 5: “Samples will be collected from patients recruited from the population available at Big State University (BSU) Hospital.”

Common Mistake 6: “Tissue sections will be paraffin-embedded and sectioned by the BSU Tissue Histology Core facility.”

When noting that IACUC and/or Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval has been obtained or will be sought, do not include the relevant organization’s name or acronym.

Common Mistake 7: “Animal protocols will be approved by the BSU Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) in accordance with the ARRIVE guidelines.”

Do not name core facilities to be used during conduct of the research, unless they are open to the public for use (e.g., fee-for-service) and this fact can be determined easily through an Internet search. In general, it is safer to avoid inclusion of any names, fee-for-service or otherwise.

Common Mistake 8: “All imaging for Aim 2 will be conducted at the Very Specific Name core facility at our institution.”

Common Mistake 9: “This procedure will be performed on a quadrupole mass spectrometer at BSU Mass Spectrometry Core Facility,” where it is not clear that the core facility is a fee-for-service facility that may be used by researchers not affiliated with Big State University.

Do not include the PI’s organization or a collaborator’s organization in the list of terms that are named and defined in the List of Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Symbols in the Supporting Documentation.

3. *Avoid inclusion of the PI’s name or that of other personnel in blinded documents.*

Review all documents that are required to be blinded to ensure that no names are listed within. This includes the PI, Key Personnel, other research personnel, collaborators, and consultants, paid or unpaid, who will be involved in the proposed project.

Common Mistake 10: “The reagent was provided by Dr. Jane Doe, who has agreed to consult on this project,” regardless whether Dr. Doe is included in the Budget as a paid or unpaid collaborator or consultant.

Common Mistake 11: “The cells will be grown and subjected to irradiation in Dr. Smith’s laboratory,” regardless whether Dr. Smith is included in the Budget as a paid or unpaid collaborator or consultant.

Do not provide names of people you have collaborated with, or are collaborating with, on other projects or past work, even if they are not involved in the proposed project, as this may lead to identification of study personnel.

Common Mistake 12: “Our collaborator, Dr. John Doe, has demonstrated uptake of the drug by the nanoparticles (Reference),” regardless whether Dr. Doe is included in the Budget as a paid or unpaid collaborator or consultant.

Ensure that names are absent from all headers, footers, titles, and figure legends.

People who provided specific reagents that are not commercially available (e.g., “cells kindly provided by Dr. Jones”) can be named, *provided they are not participating in any way in conduct of the proposed research.*