“Convince Me”:  
How to Make a Strong Case for your Research

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| **A solid rationale**   * The big-picture problem * The sub-problem * The major unsatisfied need * What’s known and not known in the field? What’s been tried but unsuccessfully? * The major gap in knowledge or lack of success/accomplishment. What’s your hypothesis or research question? * The proposed project * The impact of your work upon completion | **An incomplete rationale,  as often seen in early drafts**   * The big-picture problem * The sub-problem * The major unsatisfied need * What’s known and not known in the field? What’s been tried but unsuccessfully? * The major gap in knowledge or lack of success/accomplishment. What’s your hypothesis or research question? * The proposed project * The impact of your work upon completion |

Early in the writing of your proposal, spend some time writing out the components of your project’s rationale. (An article or report, even with its less pointed argument, also uses a variation on this rationale in its introduction, showing readers why they’re there.) Ask a close colleague to review and comment on this, as well as a colleague or friend who’s scientifically minded but lacks your particular expertise.

The segments leading up to your proposed project can be thought of as a ***funnel***, starting wide with a compelling big-picture, real-world problem and then narrowing to focus in on the specific, critical need that (1) you, the ideal person/team for this job, will address, and (2) dovetails with the funder’s priorities.

The big-picture problem

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| What real-world problem does your project address? Express it in terms that resonate with the goals of the RFP and/or the funder’s overall mission. |

The sub-problem

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| What more specific aspect of this real-world problem will you address? Express this also in terms that reflect the RFP and the funder’s mission. |

The major unsatisfied need

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| What’s the need? Simply expressing the problem doesn’t get us to the need that drives your work. What is the need that motivates this project? |

What’s known and not known in the field? What’s been tried thus far but unsuccessfully?

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| Frame your project, showing how it fits into the field overall. Position it both in a macro sense and in a more technically specific way. |

The major gap in knowledge

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| What is the major gap in knowledgestanding between us now and the next significant advance in addressing the problem? |

The proposed work

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| Describe your project, making sure that the descriptions of the various tasks relate directly to the problem, needs, and gap you stated above. |

The impact of your work upon its completion

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| What desirable things will follow from the completion of this project? Here, too, make sure that the project’s impact resonates with the funder’s or RFP’s goals and reflects the fulfillment of, or progress toward, the needs you cited above. |

Good! The material you’ve generated here will be used in your proposal in either succinct or more extended form. In some places, such as an introductory paragraph or the abstract, you will move fairly quickly through your rationale in order to efficiently give the reviewers key information about what you will do and why the funder should pay for it. In other places, you will spend more time on one or more components of your rationale, offering more detail about the problem, the need, or the gap. Without having your own clear view of the needs your project meets, why they matter, and how they fit with the funder’s priorities, longer descriptions of the rationale can be diffuse and meandering, failing to articulate your value proposition clearly to the people holding the purse strings.