FREE TEMPLATE

Specific Aims Page Template with Example (Free PDF)

A fill-in structure for a specific aims page, a fictional annotated example and a ten-point check to run before you share the page with readers.

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> A specific aims page tells a reviewer, in a small space, what you will do, why it matters and what will be known when you finish. This template gives a common structure to fill in. It is not an official form. The funding opportunity and the funder's current application guide always come first.

Application details

Funder and program:

Funding opportunity title or number:

Working title:

Page limit for this section, copied from the funder's instructions:

The National Institutes of Health says on grants.nih.gov that Specific Aims is limited to one page for activity codes that use that section, unless the funding opportunity or a related notice says otherwise. Checked November 2026. Programs and rules change, so confirm on the official site.

Part 1. Opening: the problem and the gap

Two to four sentences each. Move from what is known to what is not known.

The problem and why it matters:

What is already known:

The gap, meaning what is not known and why that holds the field back:

Part 2. What this application will do

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Long-term goal of your research, beyond this project:

Objective of this application, meaning what this project alone will achieve:

Central hypothesis:

Rationale, meaning why you believe the hypothesis and what completing the work makes possible:

Why this team and setting are suited to the work, in a sentence:

Part 3. The aims

Most pages have two to four aims. Start each with a verb. Each aim should be worth doing even if another aim does not turn out as expected.

Aim	Aim statement	Working hypothesis	Approach in one line
1			
2			
3			

Part 4. Closing: expected outcomes and impact

What will be known or available when the aims are complete:

Why that matters to the field, and to the funder's mission:

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What it makes possible next:

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Annotated example

This example is fictional. The crop, the disease, the microbe and the findings are all invented to show structure only. Do not cite or reuse any of it.

Example text	What it is doing
Gray-leaf wilt destroys part of the marsh barley harvest in the Example River valley most years, and growers have no dependable way to prevent it.	Problem. One plain sentence a non-specialist can follow
Earlier work shows that wilt is less severe in fields where the soil microbe Examplebacter is abundant. It is not known whether the microbe protects the plant or simply thrives in the same conditions.	Known, then the gap. The gap is stated as a specific unknown
Our long-term goal is to develop soil-based methods that protect marsh barley without added chemicals.	Long-term goal. Bigger than this one project
The objective of this application is to determine whether Examplebacter protects marsh barley from gray-leaf wilt and, if so, how.	Objective. What this project alone will deliver
Our central hypothesis is that Examplebacter protects the plant by colonizing its roots before the wilt organism can. This is based on our pilot greenhouse trial, in which treated seedlings showed fewer wilt symptoms than untreated ones.	Central hypothesis and rationale. Testable, and tied to the team's own early work
Aim 1. Determine whether adding Examplebacter to soil reduces wilt in greenhouse-grown marsh barley. Working hypothesis: treated plants will show less wilt than untreated plants. Approach: a controlled greenhouse trial comparing treated and untreated soil.	Aim with a verb, a working hypothesis and a one-line approach
Aim 2. Identify when and where Examplebacter colonizes the root. Working hypothesis: colonization happens in the first weeks of growth. Approach: root sampling at set intervals with microscopy.	A second aim that is still useful if Aim 1 gives a mixed result
Aim 3. Test whether early colonization blocks the wilt organism. Working hypothesis: roots colonized early will carry less of the wilt organism. Approach: a timed exposure experiment.	Tests the mechanism. Builds on Aims 1 and 2 without depending fully on them
When these aims are complete, we will know whether and how Examplebacter protects marsh barley. This will give growers and researchers a tested basis for field trials of a soil treatment.	Expected outcomes and impact. Says what will be known and what comes next

Aims page check

- [ ] A reader outside my specialty can say what the problem is after the first paragraph
- [ ] The gap is one specific unknown, not a general call for more research
- [ ] The objective can be achieved within this project's time and budget
- [ ] The central hypothesis can be tested and could turn out to be wrong

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- [ ] Each aim starts with a verb and is not just a description of a method
- [ ] No aim depends entirely on the success of another
- [ ] The aims together achieve the stated objective
- [ ] The closing says what will be known and why it matters to this funder
- [ ] The page is within the funder's limit and follows its format rules
- [ ] Every claim about earlier work is accurate and can be cited in the full application

Want help with this? The Complete Grant Architect is a free 16-week grant writing course, and you can hire a grant writer for your next proposal. Both are at subthesis.com.

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