

General Video-Based Research Funding Proposal Tips for Faculty¹

Goal: To help faculty craft compelling, short videos to support competitive research funding proposals by blending scientific rigor with strong storytelling and visual engagement.

If you need assistance filming and/or a place to film, a great resource is the Center for Instructional Technology and Training. Their services range from instructional design, video production, assessment technologies, to exploring emerging teaching and learning tools. Please [reach out to their team to schedule a consultation](#). More information is also available directly on the [UFIT CITT webpages](#).

Video Proposal Tips

1. Embrace the Medium's Strengths

Film ≠ Paper: Video is style-heavy, substance-light. Translate your scientific depth into engaging visuals and narrative. Avoid info-dumps: Resist the urge to pack in all the facts. Focus on clarity, emotion, and pacing.

Action Items:

- Identify 1–2 key ideas you want viewers to remember.
- Write a short script emphasizing clarity and emotional connection.
- Replace jargon with plain language and analogies.

2. Think Visually First

Show, don't just tell: Use visuals to convey your message. Talking heads analogous to a traditional, scholarly classroom lecture alone likely won't engage viewers (it may bore them!). Silent test: Play your video with the sound off—can viewers still grasp the core message?

Action Items:

- Create a storyboard with at least 3–5 visual elements (e.g., lab shots, animations, field footage).

- Plan for B-roll that illustrates your research in action. B-roll is the secondary, supporting footage that complements the primary, core narrative footage (i.e., the A-roll). There is readily searchable information on this on the web.
- Do the “silent test” on your draft video and adjust visuals for clarity.

3. Structure Your Story

Use the classic three-act structure (or ABT framework):

- *Act 1 – Setup: Introduce the system or context. End with a compelling question.*
- *Act 2 – Exploration: Present hypotheses or possible answers. Build tension.*
- *Act 3 – Resolution: Deliver the key insight and wrap up with clarity and satisfaction.*

Action Items:

- Draft a 3-part outline before scripting. Consider the ABT framework for narrative taught by UF Strategic Research Development.
- Write one sentence for each act to keep the story focused.
- Ensure the final act clearly answers the question posed in Act 1.

4. Create Tension Through Questions

Frame your research around a central question to hook viewers. Curiosity drives engagement—make them want to stay for the answer.

Action Items:

- Write your research question in plain language (e.g., “What if we could...?”).
- Open your video with this question or a surprising fact related to it.
- Test the question on a non-expert—does it spark curiosity?

5. Use Specific, Memorable Details

Avoid vague generalizations. Concrete anecdotes and examples stick with viewers. One vivid story can outshine a day’s worth of data.

Action Items:

- Identify one real-world example or anecdote that illustrates your research impact.

- Replace abstract terms with tangible images (e.g., “a forest the size of 100 football fields”).
- Include at least one visual that reinforces this detail.

6. Arouse, Then Fulfill

Start with something relatable or surprising (sports, pop culture, humor). Then deliver the science—this sequence helps non-experts (e.g., outer circle reviewers) connect and stay engaged.

Action Items:

- Brainstorm 2–3 relatable hooks (e.g., a common misconception, a surprising stat).
- Script the transition from the hook to your research insight.
- Test the opening on a colleague—does it make them want to keep watching?

7. Cast Thoughtfully

On-camera presence matters: Choose speakers who are engaging and visually comfortable. Consider voiceovers or animation, if permitted, if your best expert isn’t camera-ready.

Action Items:

- Identify the most engaging communicator on your team.
- Schedule a short screen test to check comfort and clarity.
- If needed, plan for voiceover narration or animated explainer segments.

8. Collect the Right Footage

Support claims with visual evidence—don’t just say forests are dying, show it. Treat filming like data collection: be thorough, intentional, and patient.

Action Items:

- Make a shot list before filming (e.g., lab work, field sites, close-ups, science in action).
- Capture extra B-roll for flexibility in editing.
- Use natural light or simple lighting setups for clarity.

9. Keep It Short and Focused

Funders and reviewers appreciate brevity. One clear message (i.e., singular narrative) per video—don't try to cover everything.

Action Items:

- Limit your script to only what is needed. Don't be too wordy.
- Cut any content that doesn't support your main message.
- Time your draft video and trim until it's under the sponsor's limit.

10. Test with Real Viewers

Show your draft to non-experts (i.e., your mock reviewers). Ask: What did you take away? Revise based on feedback—clarity and impact are key.

Action Items:

- Share your video with 2–3 people outside your field.
- Ask them to summarize the main point in one sentence.
- Revise based on their feedback for clarity and engagement.

Reference

1. Adopted from Olson, R. (2018) *Don't Be Such a Scientist, Talking Substance in an Age of Style, Second Edition*. Island Press.