

IMPACT AUDIT

Sample based on: Published SNSF project on stress biology

Title: A molecular roadmap to the acute stress response in health and disease

Intended audience: Intended audience: Academic research funders and grant evaluation panels (SNSF, ERC, Horizon Europe)

Word count: 538 words

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This SNSF project summary presents an ambitious molecular study of stress responses. The main research question is original and compelling; however it is not effectively communicated. Structural issues, dense terminology, and a lack of clear emphasis on the project's significance limit accessibility and engagement. This assessment focuses on increasing the document's legibility and ability to convince a multidisciplinary evaluation panel.

The Core

The core message of the proposal, "to precisely map the entire acute stress response", is scientifically intriguing, and original; however, it is only clear once the reader reaches the second-to-last paragraph. The summary introduces multiple research directions which instead of reinforcing, draw attention away from the main claim. Redundancies and long introductions blur the central message and reduce reader engagement which might lead to misinterpretations.

Structural Integrity

In a brief summary, the structure should guide the reader from a general background to the core issue and its significance. Although the topic of this project is important and the proposed effort is considerable, the document is weakened due to structural misalignment. For example, the paragraph explaining the project's main focus and the importance of the selected brain region is placed after the aims. Furthermore, the author references a previous study, but it is unclear how the current proposal would build on it or why this progression is necessary. Developing a more focused central argument would help the audience better connect with the subject and understand its implications.

Audience Alignment

This summary is scientifically strong but becomes overly dense for a multidisciplinary panel. The sentences are long and complex, including heavy technical language. In addition, key concepts such as “allostatic load”, “genome-wide molecular changes”, and “multiomic profiling” are mentioned without brief explanation or anchoring examples. For multidisciplinary evaluation panels, brief definitions would improve comprehension without losing precision. The summary would benefit from shorter sentences and a better balance of scientific or technical terminology.

Impact Articulation

The broader significance of this project is not communicated in its full potential. Why does a precise map of the entire acute stress response matter? How would this knowledge be used? Clarity is essential to position these results within a well-defined social, scientific, or economic context, immediately establishing the significance it deserves. The aims do not sufficiently delineate the main goals. Would it be a study of the differences between successful and maladaptive stress coping responses on a molecular level? Would it be a study mapping the cascade of responses to chronic stress or acute stress situations? Clarity and structure could help better communicate what this project seeks to demonstrate.

Key Recommendations

- Move the core intent to the second paragraph, after a brief introduction to capture the attention of time-pressured reviewers and build momentum.
- Review the document's structure to gain focus; multiple competing claims risk diluting the central message.
- Consider reducing or integrating illustrative examples (e.g., the rodent stress model) to maintain focus on the distinction between successful and maladaptive stress responses.
- Clarify the relationship between the current proposal and the previous study. What specifically does this project build on, and why is the new approach necessary?
- Include one sentence focused on the broader societal or clinical significance of understanding the stress response at a molecular level.