

## Sample Outline: Personal, Relevant Background & Future Goals Statement

**Part I. Introduction:** In 3-5 sentences, make an interesting point about your unique background, your goals, or your vision for benefitting society. These first few sentences must quickly convince the reviewers that you are intelligent, innovative and articulate. Your writing must be original, sincere and engaging. Avoid clichés and the mundane. Your aim is to so intrigue the reviewers that they will want to read the rest of your statement carefully.

### **Part II. Body**

**A.** Outline your educational and professional development plans and your career goals.

- Describe your plans to attain a master's degree and/or doctoral degree.
- Describe your professional development plan. How will you acquire transferable knowledge and skills to become a well-rounded professional? (leadership, team building, project management, scholarly writing, public presentations, etc.)
- List your short term (1-5 years) career goal: Postdoctoral training?
- Describe your vision for a successful career. What do you want to accomplish?

**Make this connection for reviewers:** How will graduate school prepare you for a career that allows you to expand scientific understanding as well *as* benefit our society?

*Tip:* To learn about professional development plans, try [myIDP](#) from AAAS Science Careers. By identifying your skills, interests, values and goals, you can devise a sensible plan for becoming a well-rounded professional with a clear vision and career path.

*Tip:* Also consider international research opportunities through Graduate Research Opportunities Worldwide (GROW) and Graduate Research Internship Program (GRIP). Both are NSF programs.

**B.** Describe specific personal, professional or educational experiences that motivated you to pursue advanced studies.

*Tip:* Reflect on different experiences: teaching; outreach; leadership; mentoring; research; internships; jobs; scholarship; campus engagement; service learning; volunteer work; service with underrepresented groups; study or travel abroad; or inspiring role models. Identify what you learned, or how your thinking changed. *Why* did those experiences motivate or prepare you to undertake a research-based graduate degree?

**C.** Give specific examples of your previous research and/or professional activities.

Present a concise description and highlight the results. Discuss how these activities have prepared you to seek a graduate degree. Specify your role in the activity including the extent to which you worked independently and/or as part of a team.

*Tip:* State the research, scholarship and project management skills you acquired. For example, how did you successfully use your leadership and communication skills on research teams and in interdisciplinary settings? How will you be able to use your skills in graduate school? If you worked with people from other countries, how can you apply your cultural literacy to connect with international researchers in the future?

### **Part III. Intellectual Merit (required). “Describe the contributions of your activities to advancing knowledge in STEM fields.”**

*Tips:* The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses **the potential to advance knowledge**. For this portion of your statement you will need to clearly summarize activities that document your intellectual merit. For example, you can summarize the scope of your previous research and highlight significant findings; the number of scholarly publications and presentations; academic honors and awards; the quality/reputation

of your intended graduate program; engagement in disciplinary organizations; and any research or career goals that align with NSF priorities. Be careful how you word this section! Stick with facts. Avoid grandiose or inflated claims. You can sound confident of your goals and aspirations for discovery, but do not sound too arrogant about your intelligence or potential. Don't forget to use **boldface** to draw reviewers' attention to the required heading *Intellectual Merit*.

**Part IV. Broader Impacts (required).** “Describe the contributions of your past activities...[to demonstrate] broader societal impacts.”

*Tip:* Point to specific examples of your broader impacts and desired societal outcomes in your previous research, research activities and complementary research activities (examples.) Specify *who* benefited from your research and activities and how they benefited. Highlight any work you have done to engage people from underrepresented groups in science literacy or other STEM education efforts. Use **boldface** to draw reviewers' attention to the required paragraph *Broader Impacts*.

**Part IV. Conclusion:** In 3-5 sentences, conclude your essay. **Examples:** Reiterate how a graduate degree will help you achieve your career goals; or explain how the GRFP will enable you pursue a particular line of research; or describe how you intend to contribute to your profession as a scientific leader or address social needs or global challenges. Your last sentences should convince the reviewers that - without a doubt - you are exactly the type of researcher/innovator/educator that will help the NSF achieve its goals.