



How to Get Grant and Venture Funding

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Your Research Needs the Right Acronym

When I went to grad school, I assumed that I needed to do good research, but no one told me about the importance that acronyms have in the scientific community. Acronyms are absolutely necessary to call attention to good research. For instance, laser is a catchy name, but did you know that it stands for light amplification by the stimulated emission of radiation? It's one of the unspoken rules of science: Good research needs an equally good acronym.

Some acronyms are really punchy. For example, Xiaowei Zhuang and her students at Harvard call their microscopy technique STORM, which makes science writers' jobs easier because we can write headlines like "Microscopy technique storms ahead of the rest." By the way, STORM stands for Stochastic Optical Reconstruction Microscopy. Not all acronyms are created equal. A microscopy technique similar to STORM, called PALM, was invented at Florida State. I suspect that whoever came up with that designation was too mesmerized by the palm trees outside to come up with a good name.

A particularly terrible acronym is SCAR, which is short for the Society for Computer Applications in Radiology. I wonder why its founders called it that? Perhaps, in their self-loathing, they thought of themselves as scars of humanity. I hope not. The group must have seen the error of its ways and renamed the organization the Society for Imaging Informatics in Medicine, or SIIM, which is not so bad. It makes me think of simulation, Sim City, the Sims. But couldn't they have spelled it with one "I"?

Now I'm thinking of the organization NOSCART, which promotes a type of scarless endoscopic surgery – an excellent acronym if I've ever seen one. Would you believe that it means Natural Orifice Surgery Consortium for Assessment and Research? Sheesh. Why not just call it NOSCART and forget about what the letters stand for?

Six Degrees from Cancer

Your chances of getting a grant funded are slim. What do you do? There's a lot of funding for cancer, right? So you exploit any link there is to cancer, however far-fetched it may seem. I worked with a professor once whose grant dealt with biological clocks. How do biological clocks relate to cancer? I don't know. You should ask him. Everything causes cancer if taken to extremes, right?

Call It 'Nano'

Now that we're on the subject of marketing your scientific research, you might want to consider adding a little word to your proposal: nano. Nanotechnology is hot these days, and there's a lot of funding for it. Even if you don't exactly work with nanotechnology per se, you're bound to work with chemicals, and chemicals are made up of molecules, which are accurately described on a scale of – you guessed it – nanometers.