Tips for Writing Successful Grant Proposals

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If only...

“It’s a foolproof formula for writing grant applications”
Agenda

I. Why seek grant support?
II. Funding sources and types of activity funded
III. Major sections/components of a grant application
IV. Writing tips, dos, and don’ts
V. Budgets and budget justification
VI. Review of applications
VII. More material to consider
VIII. Questions and Wrap up
Take Home Points

- **Source** – appropriate and matches priorities
- **Presentation** – clear and compelling
- **Scale** -- budget and resources
- **Scope** -- abilities and preparation
- **Idea** -- important, innovative, impactful
Why seek grant support?

- You have a GREAT idea
- Need funds to support research, project, or program
- Job depends on getting grants
Sources of Funds

- Internal
  - Department or Division
  - Organization, Company, or Institution
- External
Sources of Grant Funding

- Public sources
  - Federal government
  - State government
  - Municipalities
- Private sources
  - Foundations/Institutes
  - Professional organizations
- Flow through, subcontracts
Types of Activities Funded and Mechanisms

- Project/program support
- Demonstration projects
- Research
- Development and training
- Supplements
- Contracts
- Conferences/meetings
- Equipment
Funding Amounts and Scope of Work

- Seed money
- Matching funds/Cost sharing
- Project funding (recognizing that projects vary in size as well)
Major Sections in a Proposal

- Title
- Abstract/Summary
- Statement of Problem/Specific Aims
- Conceptual Framework & Literature Review
- Method/Design
- Data Analysis/Evaluation Plan
- Significance
- Appendices & Supporting Material
Goals and Objectives

**Goals**
- General
  - Focused on an ultimate “end” or bottom line
- Visionary

**Objectives**
- Steps to be taken to achieve goals
- Measurable
  - Focused on near-term outcomes
- Basis for evaluation
Specific Aims

Accomplishments by which the success of project will be determined

Related to methods being proposed

Relatively narrow in scope

Relatively few in number
Writing Tips: Dos

- Use active sentences
- Use the language and terms of the funding source/program announcement
- Use specialized language when appropriate (and be sure to define your terms), but avoid jargon
- Make ideas, findings, procedures the topics of sentences (rather than investigators or theories)
- Make the application user friendly (and do not assume too much specialized knowledge)
Writing Tips: Dos

- Use headings
- Incorporate graphical displays if they help but include appendices only sparingly
- Use direct, forceful declarative statements (about your research or programs)
- Explain from the participant’s perspective
- Provide summaries
- Get feedback from others and use it
Writing Tips: Don’ts

- Avoid negative (telling what hasn’t been done or found) and non-informative sentences.
- Eliminate all typos, incomplete sentences, font changes or extra spaces, etc.
- Minimize organizational or meta-organizational language.
- Avoid talking about your wishes, hopes, and desires.
- Don’t try to be cute or funny.
Writing Tips: Don’ts

- Avoid long, dense sentences, especially those loaded with prepositions.
- Don’t overstate your case or be self-congratulatory.
- Don’t make excuses (e.g., “page limitations preclude a full description of the method”).
- Don’t be defensive about your own research or background nor overly offensive in criticizing the work of others.
- Don’t directly address the reader or suggest what the reader may be interested in knowing or thinking about.
Common Budget Items

- Direct costs
  - Personnel
  - Equipment
  - Supplies
  - Travel
  - Other

- Indirect costs (institutional rates)

TOTAL COSTS = Direct + Indirect

Budget justification
Review of Applications: What is Being Judged? (NIH)

- Significance
- Approach
- Innovation
- Investigator
- Environment
Other Considerations

- Funding priorities
- Institutional portfolio
- Politics
Skill check: What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- Organization
- Multi-tasking
- Writing
- Planning
- Problem-solving
- Persuasive
- Financial
- Responsible
- Interpersonal & collaboration
- Ability to simplify the complex
Self-reflection & Preparation

- Develop your idea
- Get feedback from others
- Assess your qualifications & assemble a project team
- Read and reread program announcements (take notes and refer to them often!)
- Select an appropriate funding source and mechanism (rather than a scatter shot approach)
- Make preliminary contact with key people
- Familiarize yourself with the literature and prior work
- Bolster your qualifications (e.g., set up a pilot project or conduct preliminary research; start small)
10 Simple Rules for Success
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- Have a good idea and develop it
- Identify an appropriate funding source
- Clearly present your idea and plan
- Be specific about your outcomes and procedures
- Make sure the project is feasible (organizational capacity, budget, etc.)
10 Simple Rules for Success

- Anticipate potential problems or concerns and address them in the application.
- Only make promises that you can keep (expertise, resources, timelines).
- Closely follow instructions, including mentioning (and possibly labeling) all components requested by the funder.
- Leave yourself plenty of time to revise, revise, and revise.
- Be persistent and develop a thick skin (there are no guarantees).
Questions and Wrap Up

Thank you!

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