

Grant Proposal Writing

(Increasing The Likelihood of Success)

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Foolproof formula?!



$$\frac{1}{\pi^4} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^4} = \frac{\pi^4}{96}$$

Boleq

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

Agenda

- I. Introductions and prior grant/contract experience
- II. Goals for workshop
- III. What is a grant and why seek grant support
- IV. Funding sources and types of activity funded
- V. Major sections/components of a grant application
- VI. Writing tips, dos, and don'ts
- VII. Budgets and budget justification
- VIII. Review of applications (briefly)
- IX. Common mistakes & Rules for success
- X. Questions and Wrap up



Workshop Goals

- Primarily an introduction to grant writing
- Most useful for new or relatively inexperienced grant writers (tips and things to work on)
- Will know what it takes to prepare and submit applications
- Will be able to effectively assist with the preparation of grant applications
- Will be able to read and critically evaluate grant applications
- Will have clearer sense of skills need to develop

Caveats & Disclaimers

- Material largely derived from my experiences
- Limited time for exercises and practice
- Not intended to “workshop” ideas or get individualized feedback
- Grant writers have different strengths & weaknesses (suggesting different needs)
- Focus is on applications for research, but suggestions more broadly applicable
- More than one effective writing style
- Review procedures and panels differ
- Practice, practice, practice is required



Jumping Ahead:

Take Home Points

- Source – appropriate and matches priorities
- Idea – important, innovative, impactful
- Presentation – clear and compelling
- Preparation – abilities and experience
- Scope – budget, timeline, and resources

Why seek grant support?

- You have a GREAT idea
- Need funds to support research or programs
 - Hard money
 - Soft money



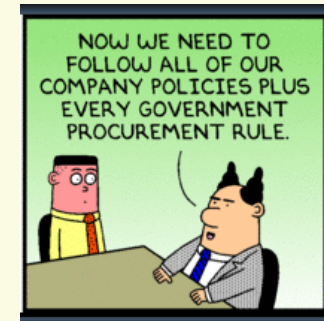
Pros

- Professional Reasons
 - Can set own agenda
 - Opens doors for collaboration
 - Salary
 - Establishes track record
- Institutional Reasons
 - Prestige
 - Staff support
 - Financial & resource benefits
- Personal Reasons
 - Character building
 - Requires planning
 - Teaches skills (research, writing, etc.)
 - Encourages taking perspective and prioritizing



Cons

- Professional Reasons
 - Time consuming
 - Responding to someone else's priorities
 - Potentially detrimental to other work
- Institutional Reasons
 - New & greater accountability
 - Regulations & oversight
- Personal Reasons
 - Uncertain & Uncontrollable outcomes
 - Rejection likely
 - Frustrating (e.g., collaboration, outcome)
 - Addictive



Sources of Funds

- Internal
 - Department or Division
 - Organization, Company, or Institution
- External



Sources of Funding

- Public sources
 - Federal government
 - State government
 - Municipalities
- Private sources
 - Foundations/Institutes
 - Professional organizations
- Flow through, subcontracts



Types of Activities Funded and Mechanisms (not exhaustive)

- Project/program support (including research)
- Demonstration projects
- 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 and time)



Notices About Funding Opportunities

- Letters of intent
- Program announcements (PAs)
- Requests for proposals (RFPs)
- Requests for applications (RFAs)
- Contracts
- Unsolicited applications

Major Sections in a Proposal

- Title
- Abstract/Summary
- Statement of Problem/Specific Aims
- Conceptual Framework/Logic Model & Background Literature
- Method/Design/Approach
- Data Analysis/Evaluation Plan
- Significance
- Appendices

Application organized around SMART goals/aims

- **S**pecific -- work that can be accomplished
- **M**easureable – there are clear criteria for success
- **A**ttainable -- project includes an effective strategy and an appropriately skilled applicant/team
- **R**ealistic -- goals/aims indicate progress and are possible to achieve
- **T**imely -- project addresses a pressing concern and proposes a reasonable timeframe for work

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

- Critically important: Do not under estimate the value of getting them right
- Articulation of the basic idea underlying the entire application
- Introduces significance and includes brief outline of conceptual framework or logic model
- Accomplishments for determining success of project
- Linked to approach or methods
- Relatively narrow in scope
- Relatively few in number



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Other Materials (Appendices)

- Sample materials
- Support letters
- Collaborative agreements
- IRB and other regulatory approvals



Writing Tips

"One should not aim at being possible to understand, but at being impossible to misunderstand."

- Quintilian



Writing Tips: Dos



- Use active sentences
- Use the language and terms of the funding source/program announcement
- Use specialized language when appropriate (being sure to define your terms), but avoid jargon
- Make ideas, findings, procedures the topics of sentences (not 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



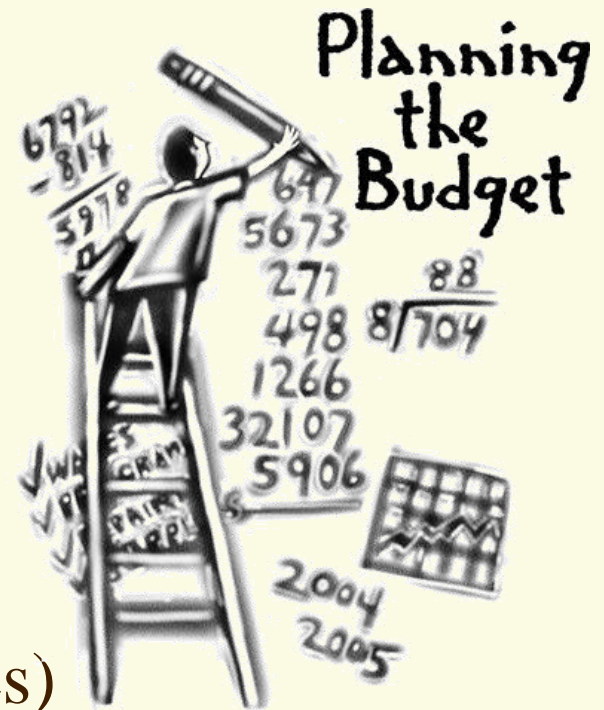
- Avoid negative (telling what hasn't been done or found) and non-informative filler sentences
- Eliminate all typos, incomplete sentences, font changes or extra spaces, etc.
- Minimize organizational or meta-organizational language
- Avoid talking about wishes, hopes, and desires
- Don't try to be cute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



Budget Justification

- Narrative description of direct costs
- Concise (but not necessarily page-limited)
- Key categories explained
- Basis for calculations outlined
- Changes over time/years noted
- Should dovetail with project plan
- NOT to be used for describing procedures or analysis plan (must stand separately)
- Be complete; could be used for budget cuts



Budget Tips

- Budget may be figured for total project and time, but can still itemize year-by-year
- Know institutional pay and fringe rates (may involve developing these)
- If applicable, know indirect cost rate and how to figure
- Inflate costs over years
- Avoid blatant padding
- Include all realistic and reasonable costs

Finalizing the Application

- Descriptive title and compelling abstract
- Clear goals, objectives, and specific aims
- Logical flow throughout
- Coherent and no inconsistencies
- Sufficient detail
- Confident presentation (“sell it”)
- Well written, economical language
- Proposed project matches the resources requested and available



Coordinating Proposal Preparation



MAJOR TASKS & SECTIONS OF PROPOSAL

- ✓ Identify and clearly state problem
- ✓ Consider institutional priorities and procedures
- ✓ Commit to project or research to address problem
- ✓ Formulate Goals & Objectives (Specific Aims & Hypotheses)
- ✓ Develop theoretical framework or program components
- ✓ Ground approach in literature or prior work in the area
- ✓ Conduct or expand preliminary research or experience
- ✓ Develop specific method for study or program
- ✓ Devise plan for evaluating program/data analyses
- ✓ Construct statement of significance of the project
- ✓ Integrate project components, tasks, and materials
- ✓ Prepare summary or abstract of program or project
- ✓ Write Executive Summary, if needed
- ✓ Prepare Table of contents, Title page with signatures (including institutional authorities)
- ✓ Write Cover letter, if needed
- ✓ Double-check proposal (including numbering of pages, quality and number of copies, etc.)
- ✓ Mail in plenty of time (Fed-Ex or certified mail for tracking purposes) or electronic submission

PERSONNEL & ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATION

- ✓ Devise plan for managing project
- ✓ Assemble appropriate project team
- ✓ Finalize timelines
- ✓ Obtain biographical information for key personnel
- ✓ Seek input on written proposal

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

- ✓ Devise dissemination plan
- ✓ Continuation and monitoring plan
- ✓ Obtain letters of agreement and appropriate approvals (e.g., IRB)
- ✓ Prepare supporting materials (e.g., graphic depictions, appendices)

FISCAL CONCERNS

- ✓ Prepare budget
- ✓ Secure matching funds if appropriate
- ✓ Write budget justification
- ✓ Match budget and justification to project plan

Review Process

- Program officers
- Review committees (including peer review)
 - Multiple perspectives/disciplines/stakeholders
 - Conflicts of interest
 - Personal and disciplinary politics and biases
- Site visits
- Revised applications

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

- Significance
- Innovation
- Approach
- Investigator
- Environment

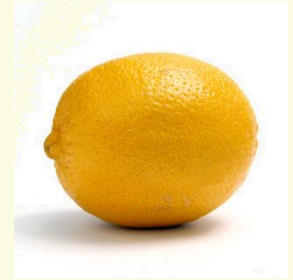


Other Considerations in Funding Decisions

- Funding priorities
- Institutional portfolio
- Politics



Reacting to rejection: Try to make lemonade



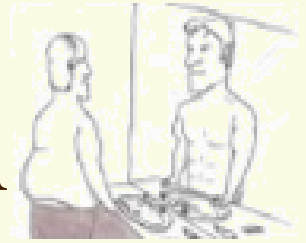
- Don't take it personally
- Try to get reviews/comments
- Seek advice from others (agency, program officers, experienced grant-getters)
- Consider all comments
 - Play up and expand on strengths
 - Constructively respond to negative points and concerns
 - Pay special attention to consensual (vs. idiosyncratic) criticisms
- Resubmit if possible
- Learn from experience and reviews/feedback

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!)
- Select an appropriate funding source and mechanism (aim at a target rather than scatter shot)
- 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)

Common Mistakes in Applications



Common Mistakes in Applications

- Significance is low or taken for granted
- Basic premises or hypotheses are flawed or insufficiently grounded
- Specific Aims are not carefully thought out and logical, or simply not presented well
- Project (or Specific Aims) includes too many dependent parts

Common Mistakes in Applications

- Application is overly ambitious
- Application is sloppy or incomplete, proofreading is inadequate
- Scope of work or topic does not fit the program announcement or mechanism
- Methods are unclear and/or too general
- Data analytic or evaluation plan is inappropriate or not well articulated



Common Mistakes in Applications

- Alternative approaches not acknowledged or adequately addressed
- The research team lacks sufficient expertise or experience
- Budget does not match scope of work
- Budget justification is insufficient
- Necessary regulatory approvals or arrangements are lacking/questionable

10 Simple Rules for Success



Rules

10 Simple Rules for Success

- Have a good idea and develop it
- Identify an appropriate funding source
- Clearly present your idea and (simple) plan
- Be specific about your outcomes and procedures
- Make sure the project is SMART and 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 plenty of time to revise and revise
- Be persistent and develop a thick skin (there are no guarantees)

And of course,
LUCK never hurts!!



Questions and Wrap Up

Thank you!

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