

Introduction to Grants Writing

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Outline

- Why write grants?
- Types of grants
- Advance preparation
- Common sections of proposals
- Preparing to write the proposal
- Writing the proposal
- Successful grants writing
- Project implementation

Grants Writing

- Grants writing is a skill that requires investment of time and effort over time
 - You cannot just read about it, you have to write!
 - Practice with support from experienced writers/ mentors
- Requires additional expertise
 - Research methodology and programming
 - Good writing skills
- Grow your profile (CV): easier to market the person
 - You don't have to possess all expertise or experience: strategic collaborations are useful

Why write grants?

- Individual benefits
 - Career development: a requirement for promotions; employment in certain positions, ...
 - Conduct research and publish
 - Recognition/profile
 - Salary support
- Institutional/organizational development
 - Visibility/ranking
 - Overheads

Types of Grants (1)

- Classification by funding agency
 - US Government: USAID, CDC, DOD, etc.
 - US Intergovernmental agencies: Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), PEPFAR, PMI, etc.
 - Canadian Government: IDRC, Grand Challenges Canada, etc.
 - Other Governments: DANIDA, Irish AID, EU, etc.
 - Global funding streams: Global Fund, etc.
 - Foundations: Bill and Melinda Gates, Rockefeller, etc.
 - Local African grants: African Union, EAC; Country specific Government grants, other agencies, etc.

Types of Grants (2)

- Classification by type of activity and target group
 - Research, non-research/ service, capacity building, integrated, conference support, etc.
 - Target group of recipients: Young Investigators, Doctoral, Post-doctoral, etc.
 - NIH extramural (external scientists) and intramural (NIH scientists)
 - Extramural grants
 - Research Grants (R series); Career Development Awards (K series)
 - Research Training and Fellowships (T and F series)
 - Program Projects/Centers Grants (P series)

Packaging the proposal: Persuasive Writing

The proposal must persuade the potential funder that

- the goal of the proposed work is worthwhile
- the goal is relevant to the funder's mission
- the proposed approach is sound
- the staff is capable of doing the work
- adequate facilities will be available
- the requested amount of funding is reasonable

Components of a Typical Proposal: Three Core Elements

■ Program/Research

- Background
- Statement of need/problem/justification
- Narrative: Objectives; Research/Program Plan (Methods/implementation); Evaluation

For NIH

- Specific aims
- Research strategy

■ Financial

- Budget & justification
- Future Funding
- Cost sharing

■ Marketing

- Cover letter
- Letters of support
- Capacity statements
- Staff qualifications/CVs
- Appendices

The NIH Research Plan

- Specific Aims: Not more than 1 page
- Research Strategy
 - Significance
 - Innovation
 - Approach
 - Preliminary Studies
 - Either as a subsection of approach or integrated into any or all of the three main sections.
 - If you do the latter, mark the information clearly, for example, with a bold subhead

Appendixes

- Optional to include
- Examples
 - Papers accepted but not yet published
 - Letters of support from potential collaborators
 - Additional details about activities planned
- Remember: Reviewers typically are not obligated to look at appendixes

Other Items Sometimes Included

- Letter of transmittal (cover letter)
- Title page
- Abstract
- Table of contents
- Lists of tables and figures
- Description of predicted impact
- Plan for disseminating results
- Information on facilities
- Reference list

Advance Preparation

Know your Grantor

- Is there a fit between your research and the focus of the granting agency, FOA/RFA?
- Make sure you have the entire request for proposal **Read it in its entirety** before proceeding
 - A checklist of requirements is very useful
 - Review evaluation criteria!
- Contact the grantor/ask questions if necessary
- Determine how you will package and deliver proposal
- Review examples of successful proposals
- Follow the RFP format exactly, if one is provided

Is the FOA a Good Match?

- In your field of expertise
- Goals that are consistent with what you want to do
- Size of the grant Vs your idea
- Requirements such as cost sharing, counterpart financing, reimbursement, etc.
- Other eligibility requirements,

Assign Roles and Timelines (1)

- Who will write the proposal or components of it
 - Team approach with clear tasks and timelines
 - Have a lead writer to assemble and track all pieces
 - Do you need a reviewer, editor, ..
- The best grant writer will be one with the ability to write clear and concise documents, and can commit the time

Assign Roles and Timelines (2)

- Decide who will be the contact person that the funding agency may call
- Determine key personnel upfront
- Give ample time to draft the proposal
 - Do you require a letter of intent; letters of support, proof of eligibility, etc.
 - Submission processes: do you need prior registrations: DUNS, eRA Commons, be familiar with the system, etc.
 - CVs of proposed key personnel, including potential hires?

Needs Assessment?

- Do you require one or do you have sufficient understanding of the context, preliminary data?
- A needs assessment is a systematic appraisal of the available evidence, services and/or gaps
 - Systematic review of the literature
 - Gathering new data: rapid assessment or pilot project

Writing the Proposal

Key Elements of Writing Style

- Your writing in a proposal should be:
 - Clear
 - Concise
 - Persuasive
 - Well-formatted

Writing the Proposal

- Start early!
- Write the proposal readably
 - Organize the writing carefully
 - Present overviews before details
 - Use simple, common wording and avoid wordy phrases
 - Effective (but not excessive) use of headings, boldface, etc.
- Devote special care to the summary and/or abstract
- If the funder has forms, complete them carefully
- Carefully follow instructions for submitting the proposal (often done electronically)

Resubmitting a Proposal

- Note: For some funding sources (e.g. NIH), revising and resubmitting proposals is common
- In revising the proposal, use the advice from the reviewers
- Consider consulting the program officer
- In general, accompany the revised proposal with a list showing, point by point, how the reviewers' advice was followed

Resubmission (2)

- Resubmission as new application
 - Need not demonstrate substantial changes in scientific direction
 - Must not contain an introduction to respond to the previous comments
 - Advisable to critically review and address comments
- New Investigator Ro1 resubmissions
 - Resubmit Ro1 application by the next New Investigator resubmission due date: check NIH website for details
- FOA resubmission
 - At the next cycle for cyclic FOAs
 - Closed FOAs: Look for other options e.g. upcoming FOAs, other Funding Agencies

Re-competition

- Different from “continuing applications” which are restricted to awarded applicants
- Re-competition happens at the end of the funding period of the grant to continue related activities
 - It is competitive
 - Not guaranteed: many have lost such Grants!

Successful Grant Writing Strategies

- Follow the application guidelines
- Be concise and specific
- Prove Capacity
- Define your goals, how you will reach them, and how you will measure your success
- Show how the project relates to the funders and your organizations goals
- These tips are generic: Remember to follow the guidelines in the RFA/FOA!

Grant Management

- Timelines: quantity and quality of the deliverables
- M&E Plan and indicators
- Reports (Financial and Technical)
- Managing partnerships: Can be complex in a big consortium
 - Clarity of roles
 - Individual, institutional, cultural differences!
- Communication: Funding agency, within the team
- Financial management: Compliance to funding agency regulations