Grant Writing 101

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Where are we from?

[Map of the United States with a location marker over Mexico]
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
School of Rehabilitation Services and Counseling
Presentation

Background
Key terminology
Types of external funding
General principles
Writing the proposal
Common sections of a grant
Peer Review process
Addiction related funding resources
Why Write a Grant?

Why ask for this insanity?
Reality

It’s *very* hard work.

Often feels like the recognitions and rewards are not in line with the efforts.

*If* you get the grant, then it means more work for you.

Successes can create animosity with peers.

“There is no such thing as *free* money.”
Rewards

To provide needed community services.
Program expansion.
To keep or create jobs.
The competition.
Salary bonus or other rewards.
Other reasons???
Successful Grant Writers

Typically, entrepreneur types.
Strong writing skills.
Ability to conceptualize new projects.
Creative.
Competitive.
Able to form teams that work.
“What’s in it for me?”

Need to have good answers to this prior to writing.

What’s in it for me is also,
  ◦ “What’s in it for us?”
Key Terminology

Requests for Proposal (RFP)

Requests for Application (RFA)

Program Announcement (PA)

Application Kit
RFPs

Many standard sections.

Deadline, amount, eligibility, etc.

Will tell when and how to get the application kit.
RFPs

This will be the first formal announcement of the competition; called “hitting the streets.”

You may have known about it and had fairly solid information but nothing is set until the announcement.

Contains critical information.
Application Kit

Will come out after the RFP.

Usually long, detailed. Not always in a logical order.

May have (frequently) very important information buried in it that if not followed can disqualify the proposal.

This happens when sections are written by different entities at different times.
Kit

It is an important early task of all grant team members to **thoroughly** analyze the kit. Sometimes multiple times and aloud.

Common sections:
- Notice of invitation (may have more information than the RFP).
- Introduction (eligibility; project manager; closing date; funding levels; dates of funding; etc.)
Terminology

- “Soft funds” versus “hard funds”

- Baseline Data

- Operational Definitions
  - A very clear and precise explanation of the items being measured or the terms that are used to ensure comprehensive knowledge of the terminology.
Types of External Funding

Grants
  ◦ Federal/State
  ◦ Foundation

Cooperative Agreements

Contracts
Grants - Federal/State

Typically federal & state although can be other government or corporate sources.

Tend to be very exacting in rules, regulations, funding priorities, and awarding criterion.

Can be extremely competitive.

If funded, the grant proposal is what is followed.
Grants - Foundations

Funded by corporate or philanthropic organizations.

Literally thousands of funding sources.

Vary greatly on the amount of money, competitiveness, funding priorities, length of proposals, etc.

Usually funding is awarded by the Board of Directors who may meet monthly, quarterly, or yearly.
Cooperative Agreements

Have many similarities to grants except that, if funded, the funding source maintains more control and involvement.

May be the best method (especially for the funding source) when trying something new and innovative.
Contracts

As the name implies, this involves a contractual agreement often for one year.

Not always an “open competition” but rather the funding source may approach the contractor for *fee for services*.

Can involve submitting a mini-proposal (also called “*scope of work*”) which may then be negotiated into a formal contract.
How to find grant opportunities?
Internet

Search..search..search.

Lot of information available – reducing it to your needs can be the issue.

Examples of using the internet:
- Key word searches.
- Listserves of funding alerts.
- Web resources.
Networking

We all develop networks, often out of necessity.

Colleagues, former classmates, former co-workers, mentors, etc.

Volunteering time and energy with established grant writers can lead to their sources.
Paid Consultants

Grant consultants can assist in a number of ways including:

• Locating funding
• Being a grant team member
• Writing the grant
• Being an external reviewer
Paid Consultants

Payment can be negotiated in 2 main ways:

- Flat fee - $500 plus per day would be common; of course, some may do for less as part of their contribution to the “cause.”

- As the evaluator. Amount of money is built into the budget; consultant/evaluator gets paid only if funded.
General Principles

There is no such thing as “free money” – always comes with “strings attached.”

Grant writing is an art form, not a science. In other words, there is frequently not one correct way.
Principles

Except for ‘pure’ research grants (e.g., in “hard” sciences), grant writing does not occur in a vacuum – involves many people (co-writers, key collaborators, key supporters) and requires major amounts of time managing other people.

Can be one of the most time-consuming and frustrating aspects of grant writing.
Key Principles

Writing styles

• Descriptive – this is not creative writing.

• Write to all categories (will cover later) – this means you are sometimes repetitive.

• Be very aware of the point-scoring criterion when writing – spend the most effort on the highest scored sections.

• Use the same language as in the Request For Proposal.
Key Principles (cont.)

• Clear, concise. Little jargon. The goal is to communicate clearly, not demonstrate mastery of the English language.

• Utilize sources of external and internal data throughout the proposal. For example, use U.S. Census data for demographic and socioeconomic profiles of the area to be targeted.

• Use accents (bold, underline, etc.) for key points; don’t overuse.

• Effectively use charts and tables.
Key Principles (cont.)

Write to the peer reviewers; think like a reviewer. Self-identify the ‘holes’ in the proposal concept, then in the narrative, try to patch the ‘holes.’

Be very aware of the requirements (sections, format, number of copies, etc.) of the RFP and Application Kit; be a “literalist.”
Key Principles (cont.)

Be realistic in goal setting – either under-estimating or over-estimating outcomes can be damaging.

Be realistic about your ability to “pull it off,” if funded. If you can’t do it, don’t compete. Reputation with the funding source for future funding is imperative.
Key Principles (cont.)

This can be a very competitive process (for example, I have peer reviewed on grants where there are 250 – 300 proposals for 10 – 15 awards). Therefore, what may appear to be minor things may make the difference between being funded or not.

By writing, getting written feedback, attending grant writing training, and working with successful grant writers, you greatly increase the odds of getting funding for your projects.
Key Principles (cont.)

- Need to develop a “thick skin.” Everyone must be able to constructively criticize the proposal.

- Grant writing is usually intense, especially as the submission date is looming. Pick your partners well.
Grant Writing Teams

- With the team, you need to discuss/establish leader (Project Director/Principle Investigator) early on – establish role of the leader.
  - Clarity of roles!

- Teams that have worked well tend to stay together – sometimes, due to the nature of grant writing; it is difficult to bring in new members.
Grant Writing Teams

Common model - You want people that can get along, yet bring different skills, perspectives to the process.

- Conceptualizer; dreamer; big picture
- Logical; realistic; details
- Budgets
- Strong writer
- Community connector
- Editor/critical feedback
Writing the Proposal

Clearly delineate responsibilities – use team members’ strengths.

Example:
- Budget
- Support Letters
- Grant sections

Establish timelines – use the “backdoor” method.
Writing the Proposal

Know institutional/agency rules and regulations.

Establish technical controls – computer software, disk management.

Schedule regular meetings.

Establish method of sharing work.

“Edit down” technique of writing.

External reviews, when possible.
WRITING A GRANT PROPOSAL

2 MONTHS TO GO

- Only 20 pages! No problem!
- Everyone is keen to help!
- We can do this!
- Um, are they getting my emails?
- I know nothing about this topic
- Nobody is helping

2 WEEKS TO GO

- HORRAY! We have Research Objectives & Methods!
- We SHALL SUCCEED!
- Collaborators are pulled out
- Oops... we forgot about the budget
- We need a University signature?

2 DAYS TO GO

- Final edit...
- Everyone is writing now!
- Hey! Everyone is answering emails now!
- $*!*$#&* stupid references

SUBMIT!

zzz
Create an Outline

Use the headings and sub-headings of the selection criteria to create your proposal outline. You then can be assured of at least minimally covering all the categories. Don’t make the reviewers search to see if you’ve covered the criteria.

With experienced grant writers, this activity is one of the first ones done.

You can choose to add other categories but must always cover the established criteria.
Common Federal Grant Sections

I. Introduction
II. Problem Statement or Needs Assessment
III. Objectives
IV. Methods
V. Evaluation
VI. Personnel
VII. Future Funding/Sustainability
VIII. Budget
The following discussion is general in nature; the specifics of the competition will dictate the structure of the proposal.

What is presented are common sections.

The order of presentation in this lecture generally follows the order in a grant.

However, this is not the order in which you write them.
Introduction

Strongly recommend this section even if not part of the scoring criteria; you are introducing, in broad terms, your project to the reviewers.

You are beginning the process of building the case that you can accomplish the goals of the project. You need to excite the reviewer into reading the whole proposal.
Introduction

You might also be introducing what is unique about you or your area. You should keep in mind operational definitions, like ‘South Texas’ or ‘Rio Grande Valley.’

Especially important when you are an unknown commodity.

“Readability” is extremely important.
Documentation of Need

Also known as “Problem Statement.” Show the funding source you have the understanding of the problem.

This is why the funding is available – because someone (the funding source) thinks there is a need.

Your overall goals in this sections are:
   1. Document the need.
   2. Show that you have the analytical abilities to find the information.
Need

Use different types of data, internal and external.

“Hard” data – citable, established. Examples: U.S. Census, Center of Disease Control, etc.

“Soft” data – anecdotal, quotes of key people.
Sometimes the best you can do is to “extrapolate.”
- Example: Number of people in the LRGV who use wheelchairs.

Reviewers are *not* looking for “trust me statements”
- Example: “It is well known that the border economy suffers when the peso declines.”

Turn needs or problems into positive statements and opportunities.
Goal & Objectives

Differing terminology is used – not all grant people use these terms the same way.

**Goals:** The overall goal (sometimes plural but not usually) of the project.
  - Often long-range impact.
  - Typically taken from the RFP. Example: Improve access to college for students with disabilities.
Objectives

Measurable outcomes of the project. These tie into the need and will tie directly to the evaluation section.

Who, what, how much, when.

Typically not a lot of objectives in the proposal but can greatly vary.
Methodology

Sometimes called the “Management Plan.”

This section should be very detailed, explaining how you will accomplish the objectives.

This is where you demonstrate you have a detailed understanding of what you are going to do.

Directly tied to the Objectives of the grant.

Some writers use *activities* or *action steps*.
Methodology

Visual displays of information are generally in this section; can be very important – also demonstrates an ability to visually represent information.

Many varieties including:
- Charts
- Gantt charts
- PERT charts

![Diagram of task flow](image)
Evaluation

Often a difficult section for many grant writers.

Important to show the funding source that you know how to evaluate the project – is their money being used wisely?

Although important, often not that many criteria points...so?
Evaluation

Formative (outputs) versus Summative (outcomes).

Often proposal want to see a “loop” that will tie formative results back into the management plan to improve the process (outputs).
Evaluation Definitions

Have you distinguished outputs from outcomes?

Outputs (Formative) – provide data (feedback) in order to improve implementation of the activity

vs.

Outcomes (Summative) – provide data (qualitative or quantitative) on the results of implementing the activity

How will the outputs be used in the continuous development of the grant?

Will the outcomes measure the success of the activities?
Evaluation

Who should do the evaluation?

Directly tied to the objectives.

**Triangulation** – what does this mean? (This isn’t trigonometry class, is it?)

- Collect data from multiple sources – don’t forget the benefactor of the project.

Quantitative versus qualitative methods.

Charts can be effective
Quality of Personnel

Usually focuses on the PI/PD.

Also other key personnel.

Like all parts of a proposal, if this is a strength, you include more. If not, you try to address by future hiring's.

Frequently a section that gets “edited down.”
Future Funding or Sustainability

If this is part of the criterion, it’s usually not weighted heavily.

The more specific the better but is often vague, “wish” statements.

Part of the “game” is to show that you are thinking of other funding options – to show the funding source that their money is an investment.

Possible funding options?
Innovative Practices

Although you should “weave” this through your proposal anyway, there may be a specific section on it.

What do you think it is? Statements from others?
Supporting Documents

Abstract

Budget
  ◦ Budget chart
  ◦ Budget narrative or justifications

Appendices

Letters of commitment/support
Abstract

Use the abstract to get Letters of Commitment.

Utilize key concepts and words of the narrative in the abstract (cut and paste is okay). As a result, it is usually the last part of the proposal to be written.

Important pieces:

◦ Introduction
◦ Summary
◦ Goal(s) & Objectives
◦ Amount requested and for how long.
Abstract

Often called a “Summary” in the text.

You are really “painting the picture” of your proposed project.

One page, usually can be single spaced.

Does not count against your narrative page limit.

It summarizes the entire proposal. Probably the most important section since this is where you ‘hook’ the reader.
Budget

Some categories are very specific and well defined such as salaries and fringe benefits. Others are not such as postage – you end up deciding upon exact amounts when you are “fine tuning” the budget.

In-kind versus Indirect
Budget

Very much dictated by the grant restrictions.

You have to learn what is allowable, what categories there are, and some operational definitions (e.g., “equipment”).

Remember that your budget proposal is an estimate—not the total amount, but how it is distributed.

The budget should reflect the narrative and the narrative should reflect the budget throughout the proposal.
Budget Narrative

Budget narrative – may be required. If not, usually a good idea. It will explain to a reviewer how you came up with the estimates.

The budget should reflect ‘allowable costs’:
Reasonable, Allocable, and Consistent
  - Difference in budget proposal and budget management.
Appendices

Remember, frequently these do not have to be included in scoring by reviewers – so if it’s vitally important material – get it in the narrative.

Letters of supports, charts, job descriptions, samples of training modules, etc.
Attachments

Forms that are required to be completed and included.

Important to not miss any of these.

Also called Assurances.
Letters of Commitment

“Letters of support” vs. “letters of commitment.”
Quality over quantity.
Selecting the right, most effective supporters.
Strategies for increasing the return rate.
Tip: “Table of contents” for letters of support
Activity: Outlining RFP Criteria

I. Background: Project HERE is public-private collaboration funded by:
   I. Massachusetts Office of Attorney General
   II. GE Foundation

II. Project HERE Scope: To provide every public school in Massachusetts access to educational resources to teach healthy decision-making skills, invest in social emotional learning, & educate about substance abuse.

III. Eligibility:
   I. Individual Massachusetts public middle school (e.g. 6th, 7th, & 8th grade, curriculum must be implemented in at least one grade)
   II. Massachusetts public school district comprising multiple middle schools
   III. Massachusetts educational collaboratives approved by the Board of Elementary & Secondary Education
   IV. Utilization of evidenced based curricula (select one):
      I. Botvin LifeSkills Training
      II. Michigan Model for Health
      III. Positive Action
(cont.) Outlining RFP Criteria

IV. Funding & Budget
   I. Target & cost effective
   II. Commensurate with the proposed scale of the program
   III. Allowable Costs
      I. Curriculum Training
      II. Travel Training Costs
      III. Curriculum Materials
      IV. Grant Administration (10% of proposed budget)
      V. Community prevention partner stipend (up to %5 of budget)

V. Grant Proposal Submission Deadline: June 15, 2018 by 4:00 p.m.; Electronic submission: http://www.here.world.grant

VI. Grant Duration: Up to 2 years; project must be complete by June 30, 2020; No extensions allowed

VII. Grant Contact Information:
   I. Email only: info@here.world
   II. RFP Q&A may be found on Project Here website: www.here.world/grant
Project HERE: Evaluation of Proposals

Identified need for prevention curriculum in the school and local community

- Staff and school capacity to implement the program with fidelity
- Number of students reached and cost-effectiveness of the proposal
- A specific, measurable, attainable, and time-bound plan for implementation
- A plan for integrating resources from the Project Here toolkit
- A plan for continuing curriculum implementation following conclusion of the grant,
- A budget that is detailed, specific, justified, and appropriate for the proposal.
Project HERE Outline

I. Identify Need
   I. School
   II. Community

II. Capacity to implement the program
   I. Staff
   II. School capacity

III. Cost-effectiveness
   I. # students served compared to overall budget
**Project HERE Outline**

**IV. Plan for Implementation**
- I. Specific plan
- II. Measurable plan
- III. Attainable plan
- IV. Timeline

**V. Integration to *Project Here* toolkit**

**VI. Plan of continuation**

**VII. Budget**
- I. Budget chart
- II. Budget narrative
After Submission

Contact from funding source assigning a proposal number.

Thank you notes to writers of letters of support.

Contacting key legislators and other people for support (optional).

Hurry up and wait...wait...wait.
If Not Funded

Letter of denial.

Peer reviewers’ comments.

Consider rewriting.

Reviewer 1: Reconsider your frequent use of similar terms. Try "loathe" instead of "hate," for example.

Reviewer 2: This communication would benefit from a thorough copy editing and spell check.

Reviewer 3: I do not recommend this comment for publication.
If Funded

Usually a telephone call.

Peer reviewers comments.

Official notification.

Get the word out; another round of “thank you” notes.

Grant management - Now the work begins!
Peer Reviews
Purpose of a Peer Review

The primary purpose is to provide outside (individuals who are not applying for funds; “conflict of interests”) assessment of proposals.

When done correctly, helps eliminate charges of favoritism, etc.
How will it be judged?

Ideally, this information is presented in a clear, concise format within the application kit.

Federal grants, in particular, give detailed information; whereas foundations sometimes give virtually none.

Be a “literalist”; it is these published criteria that the proposal is supposed to be graded against; nothing else.
The Peer Review Process

The peer reviewers will (or should!) use these same criteria to rate your proposal.

Get the written review score and comments from the agency whether you get funded or not, especially when you are denied funding.
Type of Competition

With foundations, the peer reviewers will be board members, professional staff, and/or possibly key family members of the foundation.

With grants, it tends to be outside, impartial authorities.
Peer Review Process

Invitations to designated reviewers are made; teams are compiled.

Proposals are then sent to each reviewer approximately 2 weeks before the panel meeting.

Each reviewer individually reviews and scores each proposal using criteria forms provided for that competition.
Review Panels

Peer reviews are conducted by panels of reviewers. A three member team is common although larger ones are also used.

When composing a team, the funding source usually looks for some balance of skills, experiences, perspectives, etc.
Review Process (con’t)

The panel discusses each proposal separately.

Consensus is sought but is not mandatory.

Individual reviewer can and do change their scores based upon discussion with other reviewers; changes are documented.

Funded source usually uses a statistical formula to control for lack of “inter-rater reliability.”
Review Process (con’t)

After discussion, each reviewer has a final individual score and the team then has a total score. Also, the team votes to “fund” or “not fund.”

The lead then writes up a summary report.

The panel is then done. The funding source has the final decision making.
Potential Problems in the Review Process

Reviewers don’t follow the selection criteria (and the staffer doesn’t stop it).

Reviewers don’t document why they gave certain scores.

Reviewers allow own biases into the process.

Politics are allowed to influence the selection process after the peer review.
Funding Resources

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance
www.cfda.gov/

Federal Register
https://www.federalregister.gov/topics/grant-programs

Federal Information
https://www.ntis.gov/

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
https://www.drugabuse.gov/funding-app/rfa

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)
https://www.samhsa.gov/grants
Funding Resources

Grants.gov

www.grants.gov

The Foundation Center

www.foundationcenter.org

GuideStar

www.guidestar.org

Census Bureau

www.census.gov

The Grantmanship Center

www.tgci.com
## DIY Grant Database

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Conclusion

As a grant writer:

• “You can not win, if you do not play”!

  ◦ Keep submitting; success rates increases. Accept failures (not fun but necessary).

  • Become a reviewer, which helps you think like a reviewer when writing.
    • Although painful sometimes, keep reviewers’ comments for future reference.