

Effective Proposal Writing - What Works

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This paper is a description of an interactive workshop. Therefore, it will not present complete information on proposal writing, but instead will describe the format of the workshop and include the handouts distributed.

The workshop was developed on the premise that some of the best preparation anyone can have for writing an effective proposal is to serve on a review panel for proposals from your area of interest. Since small numbers of individuals are fortunate enough to have this experience, I decided to replicate the procedure during the workshop within the time constraints given.

Three proposals, funded by NSF through the Model Projects for Women and Girls, were selected. The P.I.s for each of these projects allowed their proposals to be duplicated and agreed to serve as panelists during the discussion that followed the workshop participants' review of proposals. The projects and their P.I.s were:

Women's Retention and Leadership Development in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics. Karan Watson, principal investigator, Texas A&M University.

Women in Engineering, Science and Technology. Judy Valyo, principal investigator, New Jersey Institute of Technology

TAP: Transition - Assimilation - Preparation. A Program to Retain and Prepare Women Engineering Students. Connie Stein, principal investigator, Milwaukee School of Engineering. (The original proposal was written by Firouzeh Keshmiri with Connie Stein as co-PI)

Each workshop participant took one or more of the proposals and using the NSF review criteria, wrote a review of a proposal. After a reasonable amount of time the participants then engaged in a dialogue with the project directors for the three proposals. Participants raised insightful questions about proposal review, interaction with agency program officers, and budget preparation and negotiation. The three project directors had a variety of experiences to respond to the issues raised.

Handouts distributed during the workshop were:

CHARACTERISTICS OF GRANT GETTERS

- ◆ They take a long-term view.
- ◆ They think in terms of developing partnerships.
- ◆ They make a commitment and spend the time to cultivate relationships with people in industries, businesses, corporations, agencies & foundations.
- ◆ They develop the habit of reaching out to people in various working environments.
- ◆ They develop an understanding of the various working environments and how they differ from the academic environment.
- ◆ They keep an open mind about the various working environments.
- ◆ They are flexible about programs/research that they are willing to do.
- ◆ They do not scorn "in-kind" contributions.
- ◆ They maintain a perspective on their own talents.
- ◆ They keep in mind that the first steps are always the hardest.

SOURCE: Wadsworth, E. "Preparing Proposals and Getting Grants." Presentation at the Women in Engineering Program Advocates Network (WEPAN) Midwestern Regional Training Seminar, Purdue University, October, 1992. Information from: *Some Characteristics of Successful Industrial Grants-Getters* by Dorin Schumacher

FIRST STEPS

1. Interact and Build a Network

- You can initiate contacts by phone, mail, face-to-face.
- You can ask people to share their areas of expertise.
- Colleagues can introduce you to other professionals.
- Colleagues will let you know about opportunities.
- Colleagues may be reviewers of your proposals.

2. Volunteer

- Participate in professional committees.
- Accept opportunities to serve on state, national and international efforts.
- Volunteer to be a reviewer for agencies in order to observe first hand the review process.

3. Visit and/or Present

- Establish and maintain direct contact with key people in government agencies, foundations, corporations and the public sector.
- Find appropriate administrator, have a face-to-face discussion, listen and take notes, leave brief printed description of your interests.
- Offer to present ideas at a seminar or workshop.

4. Develop Files

- Proposal File: create folders for each proposal section
- Resources File: collect information on government agencies, foundations, local businesses, etc.

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COMPONENTS OF A PROPOSAL (continued)

- ◆ **Problem and Need** - one or more pages including:
 - **Problem** - clearly indicate the problem:
 - specific manifestations that program will address
 - specific group that program will reach
 - **Need** - convincingly document the need for:
 - quantitative information-use statistics/research reports
 - qualitative information - use personal reports
 - extension of present programs-use author's suggestions
 - national effort - use evidence of demand/potential pool
- ◆ **Framework or Rationale** - a section including the:
 - Philosophy that guides the proposal
 - "State-of-the-art" work done in the field
- ◆ **Program and Procedures** - longest section including:
 - Sequence of Activities - what will be done/how it will be done/
who will be served/when will it be done
 - Groupings of Activities - putting similar activities together:
 - Preparatory Activities - preparing/recruiting/training/
 - Educational Activities - manuals/workshops/counseling
 - Evaluation Activities - measures/data collection/reports
 - Full description of activity under headings/subheadings
- ◆ **Evaluation** - one or more pages indicating:
 - Experimental research or accounting activities
 - Types of measures and suitability for program
 - Formative (process) or summative (outcome) evaluation:
 - process - # of services, # of programs, # of people
 - outcomes - # of changes, # of benefits
 - Tasks - identifying variables, deciding on sampling, developing measures, obtaining data, analyzing data, reporting results
 - Dissemination plans: program reports; research articles; special products; potential utilization
- ◆ **Timetable** - a table that explains the:
 - Length of the program and when activities begin and end
 - Activities need a line and arrow showing the start and finish

COMPONENTS OF A PROPOSAL

Check the Proposal Guidelines or Request for Proposals (RFP) for the order of materials required and be sure all of the necessary forms have been included, with required signatures and requested number of copies. Most of your organizations/institutions have grant officers who will help you in meeting guidelines for various government agencies. Be sure to have your proposal ready for their approval and submission allowing adequate time before the proposal deadline (usually two weeks).

◆ **Letter of Transmittal** - one page on letterhead including:

- Name, address, phone number of organization
- Overview--purpose, objectives, problem and need
- Reason why proposal is being sent to funder
- Statement of organization's capability & experience
- Willingness to provide more information

◆ **Title Page or Application Form** - including:

- Title of proposal (*Don't try to be "cute with the title, it should convey the focus of your project and represent the serious nature of the proposal.*)
- Name, position, address and phone number of organization
- Name of funding agency
- Date, program duration and amount of money requested

◆ **Table of Contents** - one page including:

- Major sections -- headings -- well organized
- Minor subsections -- subheadings -- well worded

◆ **Summary** - one or more paragraphs (an abstract) including:

- Highlight each section of the proposal: who will do what, to whom, how, when, where (*If guidelines for the program have a list of topics to address, be sure the abstract speaks to each of them.*)

◆ **Introduction** - one or more pages including:

- Name of applicant organization and funding source
- Description of program area: approach; activities; persons served; intended results; and national significance

◆ **Purpose and Objectives** - number of pages including:

- Purpose - broad goals (outcomes)
Ex. To establish a recruitment program for WIE students
- Objectives - specific statements (activities) - 3 to 7
Ex. To increase the recruitment rate (from ___% to ___%)



COMPONENTS OF A PROPOSAL (continued)

- ◆ **Organization/Administration/Staff** - pages including the:
 - Organization - chart/communication lines of boards & committees
 - Administration - demonstrate the capability of the organization for efficient management
 - Staff - listing of each position with description of the unique qualifications, responsibilities, level & period of effort.
- ◆ **Capability Of Organization** - number of pages including the:
 - History, philosophy, and mission of the organization
 - Experience, programs, achievements of the organization
 - Standards, size, budget, accreditation, endorsements, citations, and resources of the organization
 - Relationship between program and mission of the organization
 - Discussion of future plans for securing financial support for the program and mission of the organization
- ◆ **Budget** - number of pages including:
 - Personnel Expenses: Salaries - position/months/amount; Fringe Benefits - indicate rate; Consultants: type/pay rate/# hrs.
 - Other Direct Expenses: Travel - car or air/miles/costs; Per Diem - lodging/meals/# days/amount; Office Supplies: paper/pens/etc. Program Supplies - training materials or manuals; Equipment: desks/computers/copy machines/etc.; Telephone and FAX: estimated expenditures; Rent: # square feet & cost per foot/utilities; Other Expenses: postage/printing/insurance/etc.
 - Indirect Expenses: organization's share of expenses
 - Income: from fees/contributions/etc.
 - Summary: total expenses less income = net request
- ◆ **Appendices** (as allowed) - supporting documents including:
 - Resumes of the administrators and staff
 - Letters of endorsement
 - Professional publications of staff
 - Annual reports of the organization

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CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING PROPOSALS

◆ CLARITY

Clearly written so one can readily follow & understand
Logical flow of ideas using headings & subheadings

◆ COMPLETENESS

Cover every item and element specified:
complete necessary forms
include IRS tax exemption letter

◆ RESPONSIVENESS

To requirements: format/content/funder interests
To need: real and documented

◆ INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

All proposal parts related and consistent

◆ EXTERNAL CONSISTENCY

The proposal should be related to larger field

◆ UNDERSTANDING PROBLEM & SERVICE METHODS

Show your comprehension of the problem
Include effective plan to carry out service

◆ CAPABILITY

"Track Record" of carrying out activities

◆ ACCOUNTABILITY

To institution: managerial & financial system
To funder: responded to requirements

◆ REALISM

Promise only what you can deliver

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