The ABCs of Grantscrafting

Tips for writing a strong proposal

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Outline

• Why is it important?
• Getting started
• What makes a proposal competitive?
• Writing style and formatting
• Resources
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?
Challenges to achieving funding success

• Increasingly competitive funding environment = lower success rates
• The more competitive, the more reviewers will look for reasons to reject a proposal
• Reviewer fatigue due to high volume of applications
Review Committees

• Most committees are interdisciplinary and some include non-academics, so not everyone will be an expert in your field of research

• Reviewers want clear, non-complex language, clean presentation and complete information. Make sure to give them what they need in a format that is easily accessible!

• Preliminary review or screening of applications conducted by program staff
Common challenges

• Proposal does not fit program objectives or follow guidelines
• Proposal does not address the evaluation or review criteria
• Lack of originality or focus
• Lack of clarity or sufficient detail (e.g. research plan or methodology)
• Underdeveloped literature review or lack of knowledge of relevant published work
• Lack of awareness of current state of the art
• Poorly budgeted or insufficiently justified expenses
GETTING STARTED
Read the guidelines

• Eligibility to apply
• Budget
  – funding limits (min. and max. amounts, # of years)
  – matching funds or partner contributions
• Deadlines
  – internal and external
• Format and page limits
• Attachments
  – CV/CCV, letter of support, signatures, etc.
• Evaluation criteria
• Submission process
Key considerations

• Verify the match of the program (program goals and eligibility)
  – if in doubt, contact the program officer or ORS before you start writing the application

• Make a checklist and timeline

• Start early to allow time for peer review, revisions and completing/gathering required attachments

• Iterations are key!
Questions to ask before you start

• What are you passionate about and where do you think you can make a uniquely significant contribution to your field?
• What is the problem and why is it important?
• What data will you use to validate the importance of your proposal?
• How is existing knowledge or practice inadequate?
• How is your research new and unique?
• What will it contribute and who will benefit from it?
• How will you address the problem or challenge and how will you communicate your findings?
WHAT MAKES A PROPOSAL COMPETITIVE?
Key elements

• Importance of the research project/program
• Feasibility
• Contribution to training
• Excellence of the researcher/team
Importance of the research project/program*

• Originality, creativity, innovation, and significance
• Sound rationale
• Clarity and appropriateness of:
  – Literature review
  – Theoretical approach/framework
  – Methods/approach
• Well-defined goals and objectives
• Potential influence and impact (e.g., policy, technology, health-related knowledge)
Feasibility

• Quality of knowledge mobilization plans
• Accessibility to necessary equipment and resources
• Capacity to undertake the planned program given commitments to other research endeavours
• Realistic strategies, timelines, and deliverables
• Identification of potential challenges and appropriate mitigation strategies
• Appropriateness of, and justification for, the budget and cash/in-kind contributions
Contribution to training

• Quality and impact of past Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) training
• Suitability and clarity of the HQP training plan
• Enhanced training environment
• Quality of training and mentoring
• Opportunities for trainees to contribute to the research
Excellence of the researcher/team

- Knowledge, expertise, and experience of the researcher
- Evidence of contributions to the development of talent
- Quality and impact of contributions
- Potential to make future contributions
- Importance of contributions to, and use by, other researchers and end-users
- Appropriate level of engagement and/or commitment from the applicant(s)
- Appropriate research environment
Tips

• The power of peer review (and peer review manuals)
• Evaluation Criteria and Scoring / Assessment Criteria (aim for gold standard)
• Use the funding agency’s language
  – Knowledge Translation vs. Knowledge Mobilization, Highly Qualified Personnel vs. Trainees, “outstanding”, “novel”
• What are your weaknesses? Spin
• Cite people who may be on the reviewer panel
Does it tell a compelling story?
WRITING STYLE AND FORMATTING
Academic writing vs. grant writing

**Academic writing**
- researcher-focused
  - individual interest
- past oriented
  - work you have done
- expository
  - explaining to reader
- impersonal
  - objective; passive voice
- specialized terminology
  - “insider jargon”; expert audience
- length and formatting
  - few constraints

**Grant writing**
- sponsor-focused
  - service attitude
- future oriented
  - work you will do
- persuasive
  - convincing the reader
- personal
  - active voice
- accessible language
  - broad audience
- length and formatting
  - strict constraints
- impact and social benefits

Adapted from Robert Porter, Grant-Winners Seminars
Writing and formatting

• Include white space
• Use consistent font size, type and spacing
• Avoid lengthy and complex sentences
• Explain acronyms the first time they appear
• Use headings that reflect the evaluation criteria for easy reference
• Use graphics sparingly and only if they add to the clarity of the proposal
• Don’t overuse italics, bold or underlined font type
• Check for typos
Final observations

• Don’t be discouraged
• Consider reviewer feedback
• Use your resources
• Continue to improve and polish your application
• If a specific program is not the right fit, explore other opportunities
• Consider participating on review panels to gain experience
• ORS
  – Capacity building events
  – Regular funding opportunity announcements
  – Pre-Awards team
• Department/Faculty
  – Faculty Grant Officers, ADRs, Deans, Chairs
• Other
  – Peer reviewers
  – Committee comments for past submissions
  – Previous applicants