

AuthorAID Post-PACN-Congress Workshop on Research Writing

Accra, Ghana
November 2011

Supplementary Presentation: Writing an Effective Grant Proposal

Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH
Texas A&M University
bgastel@cvm.tamu.edu

Grant Proposals as Persuasive Writing

Proposals must persuade potential funders 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

Some Common Sections of Proposals

- Background information
- Statement of goals
- Research plan or program plan
- Budget
- Information on qualifications of staff
(for example, resumes or curricula vitae)

(Note: Depending on the requirements, proposals can range from one page to many pages.)

Some 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

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.

Preparing to Write the Proposal

- Carefully review materials from the potential funding source.
- Consult the program officer, if appropriate.
- Look at examples of successful proposals to the funding source.
 - From colleagues
 - From the program officer
 - Published or posted

Preparing to Write the Proposal (cont)

- If appropriate, consider sustainability.
- If appropriate, submit a letter or intent or a letter of inquiry (“pre-proposal”).

Writing the Proposal

- Start early—sometimes at least 6 months in advance.
- Consider including a writer or editor on the team.
- **Read the instructions carefully, and follow them exactly.**
- Match the technical level of the proposal to the background of the reviewers.

Writing the Proposal (cont)

- Remember to include the 5 Ws and an H: who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- Include reasons for your choices.
- Write the proposal readably. For example
 - Organize the writing carefully.
 - Present overviews before details.
 - Use simple, common wording where possible.
 - Avoid wordy phrases.
 - Make effective (but not excessive) use of such devices as headings, boldface, and italics.

Writing the Proposal (cont)

- Include a carefully prepared budget.
- If relevant, include a timeline.
- If relevant, include tables and figures.
- If the proposal will include an abstract, devote special care to it.
- If the potential funder has forms to use, complete them carefully.

Writing the Proposal (cont)

- If part or all of the proposal will consist of freestanding text, format it readably
 - Standard typeface
 - Large enough type and margins
 - Unjustified (ragged) right margin unless otherwise requested
- Give your proposal an informative, readable title.
- Have others review drafts of your proposal.
- Carefully follow instructions for submitting the proposal (often done electronically).

Common Problems to Avoid

- Failure to follow the instructions
- Seeming unfamiliarity with relevant previous work
- Lack of a valid rationale
- Lack of originality
- Superficial or unfocused plan; lack of detail

Common Problems (cont)

- Unrealistically ambitious plans
- Incomplete budget
- Unrealistic budgeting
- Failure to justify budgetary items enough
- Problems with the experimental or other approach
- Lack of experience with key methods
- Lack of preliminary data, if needed

Common Problems (cont)

- For service projects, lack of sufficient information on evaluation plans
- Inconsistencies in the content
- Excessive use of acronyms/abbreviations

A Suggestion

Imagine that you receive the grant and do the work as described. Will you then have all the needed information to write the appropriate report(s) or paper(s)? If not, revise the plan in your proposal, to make sure that you would gather all the needed information.

Wishing you much success!