

Fundamentals of Grantsmanship

Prof. C. Jesse Uneke

*Directorate of Research, Innovation & Commercialization
Ebonyi State University Abakaliki*

1.0 WHY MUST RESEARCH BE FUNDED?

▶ Research is designed to solve problems for mankind. It is therefore a moral obligation for all governments, institutions, organizations, companies and international humanitarian agencies to invest in research.

▶ There is therefore a very large amount of fund going into research all over the world.

BUT THESE MUST BE SOUGHT & COMPETED FOR!

Because only individuals with the best ideas that can transform into solutions deserve to receive funding for research. This necessitates the need for capacity enhancement of researchers to be able to adequately transform ideas into solution, the process of achieving this is known as Grantsmanship.

2.0 WHAT IS GRANTSMANSHIP?

"Grantsmanship is the art of acquiring peer-reviewed research funding"

▶ Grantsmanship is an art!

▶ It is about getting researchers to focus on program planning, developing logical and compelling proposals, mastering powerful research tools, and building partnerships to increase impact.

Core Grantsmanship capacity requirements

▶ The fundamental principles of grant writing

▶ How to develop an irresistible, fundable idea for a grant application

▶ How to practice the art and ethics of grantsmanship

Current global requirements for fundable research

▶ Implementation/intervention/applied research

▶ Multidisciplinary research

▶ Inter-sectoral research

▶ Multi-country research

▶ Evidence-to-policy-to-action research

▶ With strong monitoring & evaluation (M&E) content

▶ **Your target:** to have funded research publications!

GRANT APPLICATION WRITING IS A SERIOUS BUSINESS!!!

3.0 WRITING GRANT APPLICATION

Grant Writing Tips

As a beginner, writing your first research grant proposal can be a very arduous venture. Most beginners lack the confidence needed to produce a fundable proposal. The truth however is that it is not impossible to obtain a research grant even as a beginner; you need not be intimidated because every expert in grantsmanship started somewhere. All you need is the requisite skill as well as the necessary capacity for grantsmanship which you can acquire via training and mentorship. It is important to realize that writing grants proposal is a serious business that requires adequate time, concentration and commitment.

In the book entitled: Grant Writing Guide: Writing Successful Proposals, A guidebook of State of Louisiana, USA, published in 2004 by Louisiana Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (see reference), some grant writing tips were outlined. In addition to these Kraicer (1997) also provided more tips in an article titled: The Art of Grantsmanship (see reference). I believe these tips will be of great assistance to both beginners and those who consider themselves as experts in grantsmanship. The tips include:

1. Make Sure You are Eligible: Your first step is to determine if your organization and/or your program is a good fit for the grant opportunity you are considering. You do not want to waste your time and effort developing a proposal if you do not meet the eligibility qualifications. Be honest with yourself. Move on to other opportunities if this one is not a good fit. Foundations and government agencies will define the organizational and program eligibility requirements in their proposal packets.

2. Create a Checklist Before You Start Writing: Every foundation and government agency that makes grants will have its own list or description of required proposal elements. Sometimes those lists are clearly organized and defined in their proposal packet and other times the required elements are spread throughout the proposal packet. Carefully review the whole proposal packet and create your own checklist of required elements. You can check off elements as you complete them. Read the general instructions CAREFULLY and follow them EXACTLY.

3. Use Plain Language: Do not assume that the reviewers of your proposal understand any slang or technical jargon related to the programs you offer. Also, avoid complex words and flowery language. Reviewers are not impressed with big words and complicated sentences. Your goal is to get the reviewers to clearly and easily understand your request. Simple and plain is better.

4. Comply with Length and Format Requirements: Some funders will include proposal length restrictions and format guidelines in their proposal packets. For example, a funder may request that you include an executive summary that is limited to 1 page or a statement of need that is no longer than 2 pages. They may also request proposal elements in a specific order. Make sure your proposal complies with any length restrictions and format guidelines. Even if there are no specific written requirements in the proposal packet, you want to find out what are the preferences of the funders. Just contact them and ask about their expectations.

5. Easy to Read – you can make your proposal easier to read by:

- Using short paragraphs
- Creating clear titles and subtitles to label each section
- Avoid overuse of bold text, all capital letters and underlines – do not try to emphasize everything

- Do not try to cram two pages of information on 1 page – use reasonable page margins and spacing between your paragraphs

- Font size should be 11 points or larger

6. No Desperation: You want your proposal to grab the attention of the reviewers and you want to make a compelling case for funding, but you do not want to give the reviewers the impression that you are desperate. Reviewers are likely to see that as a sign of organizational instability or weakness.

7. Keep it Real: You do not want to embellish or exaggerate any part of your proposal. Reviewers know that if it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

8. Find a Good Editor: Extensive and intensive internal peer-review is essential. Some people are better writers than others. If you are not a confident writer find someone you know who is.

Ask them to review and edit your proposal to improve the organization and clarity of the document, word usage, sentence structure, style, grammar, spelling, etc. A poorly written document will hurt your chances of success.

9. Quality Materials: Your proposal document does not need to be fancy but it should be clean and neat. Use good quality paper and get a good clean copy from your printer.

10. Comply with Submission Requirements: Each foundation and government agency has its own proposal submission instructions. Typical types of requirements you will find include:

- Number of proposal copies that you must submit
- Bound or unbound (many funders want unbound copies)
- Submission deadlines (specific date and time of day)
- Submission address (where to deliver your proposal)
- Submission methods (in-person delivery, mail, etc.)
- Cover Letters or Forms (some funders have their own cover form or letter that they require you to complete and place in the front of your proposal)
- Budget Forms (some funders will require you to use their budget worksheets and forms)
- Attachments (specific information they want attached to your proposal, some examples are financial statements, legal documents, etc.)
- Any Other Submission Requirements (before you submit your proposal, make a checklist of all the submission requirements)
- If attachments and/or appendices are not allowed, do not submit them. They will not be distributed to reviewers. Similarly, if reprints are not required, do not send them (they will be discarded).
- Do not submit additional information after the deadline (unless explicitly allowed).

11. Understand the review requirements: Remember that the reviewers are doing the reviews as a task over and above their daily mandated activities, and are often unpaid. They may be overwhelmed with applications and manuscripts requiring reviews. They often carry out the reviews under less-than-ideal conditions (evenings, weekends, holidays, at meetings, or even on the way to review committee meetings). They may wait until the last minute to begin their review. Reviewers often do their reading in bits-and-pieces. Have your application so organized so that it can be read in this way. You do not want them to have to go back to the beginning after each break. Assume that you are writing for a reviewer in a somewhat related field, rather than for an expert directly in your area.

4.0 STAGES OF GRANT PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Kraicer (1997), grant proposal development can be divided into 10 stages. In his publication Kraicer (1997), outlined some key activities in each stage which will enhance successful proposal writing as follows:.

Stage 1: (about 1 year before the deadline)

- (a). Start thinking of interesting projects. Try to find a balance between something "sure" and something truly innovative and even risky. These might be side issues of what you are currently working on.
- (b). Imagine what the possible outcomes might be.
- (c). Start reviewing the literature.
- (d). Set up a research team and discuss your ideas with members of the team and others. Just going through the process of trying to explain things to others is a great way to clarify things for yourself. Don't be disappointed if they do not share your enthusiasm. But listen to their criticisms.
- (e). Complete as many of your current experiments as possible; write up the papers and submit them for publication. It can easily take 6 months to have a submitted paper accepted, longer if there are several revisions.
- (f). A most important element of your application is your track record. What counts most in your track record is published papers in peer-reviewed journals.

Stage 2: (about 9 months before the deadline)

- (a). Obtain preliminary data. These will greatly strengthen your proposal. A reviewer can think of a hundred reasons why something that you propose will not work. These objections vanish if you can show that you have done it.
- (b). You may need to submit a small application to your local institution to obtain funds to do the preliminary experiments. Getting this support will enhance your application.

Stage 3: (about 6 months before the deadline)

- (a). Write an initial draft of the main proposal section. This can take a month of very intensive work.
- (b). This section may best be done in one continuous block of time; 3 to 6 hours per day each day of the week. You will get nowhere, working a few hours a week.

Stage 4: (about 5 months before the deadline)

- (a). Obtain comments from your colleagues. These are people who are willing to spend hours reading and rereading your grant, not someone who returns it with the word "fantastic" on the front cover.
- (b). Sit down and talk to them about their comments. Pay attention to what they failed to understand. Revise. Get more comments. Revise.

Stage 5: (about 4 months before the deadline)

- (a). Submit your proposed experiments for approval to local committees where appropriate: animal care, human ethics, safety, etc.
- (b). Integrate all recommendations by the various committees into your proposal as appropriate.

Stage 6: (about 2 months before the deadline)

- (a). Re-read the guidelines and your application. Take the instructions seriously. Do what they ask. Work on the other parts.
- (b). Get quotations for equipment. Work out the budget.
- (c). Get letters of confirmation from collaborators.

Stage 7: (about 1 month before the deadline)

- (a). Put together what looks like the final version: on the official forms, with figures and references.
- (b). Give this to your colleagues (members of the research team) for additional review. There is nothing like seeing the whole package. Obvious flaws suddenly become apparent at this stage.

Stage 8: (about 2 weeks before the deadline)

- (a). Type the final version.
- (b). Proof read it. Have it proof read by another member of the team.
- (c). Get all the necessary signatures.

Stage 9: (1 week before the deadline)

- (a). Get the necessary copies made.
- (b). Send it out by express mail/courier, or by electronic submission as stipulated by funder.

Stage 10:

Get some sleep.

5.0 COMMON ERRORS MADE

There are a number of common errors that are made by grant applicants and these errors have led to the rejection of proposals. Kraicer (1997), outlined some of these errors as follows:

Errors by New Applicants

- (i). The proposal includes a lifetime's work and is unrealistically ambitious. There are no clearly defined priorities and the timetable (if present) is unrealistic, with no sense of what can realistically be accomplished during the term of the grant.
- (ii). The literature and background reviews are uncritical. They read like an undergraduate review.
- (iii). There are no results of pilot studies or other preliminary data.
- (iv). The time listed to be spent on research should be at least 50%, and preferably over 75%. Anything less than 50% may be unacceptable (a smaller percent effort is usually acceptable for established investigators).
- (v). The budget is unrealistic.

Errors by Established Investigators

- (i). The application is fragmented and disjointed. Different parts were obviously written by different junior colleagues and then hastily assembled by the applicant.
- (ii). "I don't have to go into detail. Trust me and examine my track record. Rely on my reputation". This no longer works.
- (iii). The proposals tend to be too cautious and do not venture into new and unexplored areas. They tend to be "more of the same".

6.0 TEN MOST COMMON REASONS WHY PROPOSALS ARE REJECTED

1. The organization does not meet our priorities: Make sure there is a good match between your program and the funding priorities of the foundation. Even if the quality and clarity of your proposal is perfect, funders will not fund proposals that do not match their funding priorities.

2. The organization is not located in our geographic area of funding: Some foundations will only fund in a specific geographic region. Make sure you are in that region before writing a proposal.

3. The proposal does not follow our prescribed format: Follow the instructions carefully. You must write your proposal using the exact format and order (and length) that the funder requires. Ask questions if you are confused. After you have written your proposal (and added required attachments) go back through the proposal instructions to make certain that your document meets all requirements.

4. The proposal is poorly written and difficult to understand: Funders rely on proposals to make decisions about who will receive their grants. They are unlikely to take a chance on your organization if your proposal does not clearly describe the community need, your program solution and your ability to perform. It is important to avoid the use of unexplained technical words, phrases and acronyms that the average person will not understand. Get some experienced reviewers to look at your proposal before it is submitted.

5. The proposed budget and grant request is not within our funding range: Your budget request could be too big or too small for a particular funder. Look at the average size of the grants that they award. If the funder typically make grants under \$50,000 that is probably not a good match for your \$250,000 proposal.

6. We don't know these people – are they credible? If possible meet with the funder before you submit your proposal to establish the credibility of your board and your organization. Establishing credibility takes more than just polite introductions. It will take time and honest discussions to build a relationship based on mutual interests (helping others) and trust. (Note: building these relationships is important – but must also be combined with a competent staff and well designed programs that are properly matched to real needs.)

7. The proposal doesn't seem urgent – and I'm not sure it will have an impact: Your proposal needs to be convincing. Your arguments need to be clear and the readers must be able to see a strong connection between your program activities and significant community benefits. Using a writing style that grabs the attention of the reader is important also. However, you do not want to exaggerate the problem and describe a hopeless situation. Funders have no interest in funding a situation that cannot be improved. Find expert writers to help with your proposal language.

8. The objectives and plan of action of the project greatly exceed the budget and timelines for implementation: You need to be realistic. Make sure your goals, objectives and activities are reasonable and realistic for the budget and the grant time period. If your proposal is exaggerated it will not be taken seriously.

9. We've allocated all the money for this grant cycle: There will always be more requests than grants awarded. Do not take it personally. Evaluate your proposal, make improvements and try again at the next grant cycle.

10. There is insufficient evidence that the program will become self-sufficient after the grant is completed: Many foundations want to know how the program will survive after their grant funds are spent. Make sure you have a longer-term plan for funds included in your proposal.

REFERENCES

This handout was prepared from the following documents

Kraicer J (1997). The Art of Grantsmanship. Medical Sciences Building, Toronto, Ontario CANADA M5S 1A8.

<http://www.unige.ch/collaborateurs/recherche/financement/5/theartofgrantmanship.pdf>

Louisiana Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (LTANF) (2004). Grant Writing Guide: Writing Successful Proposals, A guidebook of State of Louisiana, USA.

http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/tanf/WORKBOOK_orgman.pdf

Rasey JS. **Fundamentals of grantsmanship.** Research Funding Service University of Washington Seattle, WA. <http://www.ucc.ie/research/rio/pdf/FundamentalsGrantsmanship.pdf>