

The Perspective of a Granting Application

Granting applications should be “action oriented”. They should be:

- ✦ Provider centered – service attitude
- ✦ Future oriented – work you wish to do
- ✦ Persuasive- “sell” the proposed research/project to the reader
- ✦ Personal – conveys the enthusiasm of the applicant
- ✦ Team-oriented – feedback and peer review guided
- ✦ Concise – clear, simple, focused
- ✦ Accessible – cater to a broad audience

What makes a proposal competitive?

- ✦ Significance (important area of research, may be identified by granting agency)
- ✦ Original approach
- ✦ Significance (will it make a significant contribution to the area of inquiry)
- ✦ Knowledge and experience of the applicant and research team in the discipline
- ✦ Experience in essential methodology
- ✦ Succinct, logical and focused project plan
- ✦ Realistic amount of work
- ✦ Sufficient detail
- ✦ Cost effective

Top Ten Reasons for Application Not Being Funded (as identified by NIH)

1. Lack of original ideas
2. Diffuse, unfocused, or superficial Research Plan
3. Lack of knowledge of relevant published work
4. Lack of experience in essential methodology
5. Uncertainty concerning future directions
6. Questionable reasoning in experimental approach
7. Absence of acceptable scientific rationale
8. Unrealistically large amount of work
9. Lack of sufficient experimental detail
10. Uncritical approach¹

¹ Robert Porter PhD, “Coaching Researchers to Write Successful Grants”, June 15, 2014

Before you begin writing your application, ask yourself these questions as a starting point:

- ✚ What are you passionate about as a researcher?
- ✚ What is the problem that you want to investigate and why is it important?
- ✚ How is the existing knowledge or practice inadequate?
- ✚ Why is your idea better?
- ✚ How is it new, unique different?
- ✚ What will it contribute and who will benefit from it?

Common application pitfalls and strategies to avoid them:

SUCCESS = GOOD IDEAS-PITFALLS

²Pitfall 1: Poor Fit - *Verify the match*

- Develop your funding search skills
- Study program goals and eligibility
- Make contact with someone at the funding agency before starting your proposal
 - Read funding announcements and funding requirements carefully; note questions
 - Research previous awards
 - Where possible, send a brief overview of the proposed project to the funding agency
 - Inquire about alternative funding sources

Pitfall 2: Poor organization - *Structure the proposal*

- ALWAYS follow the format provided by the funding agency! Where none is provided build your own case in distinct sections:
 - i. Problem statement; or Significance of the Research
 - ii. Purpose, Overall goal + study objectives (always cite the “fit” with agency or program objectives)
 - iii. Research Design or Workplan (Activities + Timelines)
 - iv. Applicant Qualifications and Capabilities
 - v. Evaluation Plan: Expected Outcomes; Knowledge Translation
 - vi. Budget (Summary + Justification including quotes etc.)

Pitfall 3: Weak argument - *Prove the Importance of your Project*

- State your purpose and case for need up front; build a compelling argument
 - Sell your idea, Set the stage, Lay out the problem (Who Cares?)
 - Get the reviewer interested at the outset
 - Identify the importance – stress the need

² Robert Porter PhD, “Coaching Researchers to Write Successful Grants”, June 15, 2014

- Summarize the state of the art
- Describe technical challenges to solving the problem and potential benefits
- State the theme – Your solution
 - Describe the concept and establish credibility
 - Describe your project’s fundamental purpose
- Create a Vision (“So What?”)
 - Who how your work will advance the field
 - Envision the world with the problem solved

*** This should be the opening 2-3 paragraph of the proposal’s very first section (after the abstract) regardless of what it is called, INTRO, BACKGROUND etc***

Pitfall 4: Gyrating Jargon - Assume an uninformed but intelligent reader

- Use clear, accessible language
- Stick with direct statements and **active voice**
- Avoid insider jargon and acronyms

Pitfall 5: Murky Goals & Objectives – Formulate Specific Measurable Objectives

- Goal (hypothesis or research question): General statement of the project’s overall purpose(s)
- Objective: a specific measurable outcome or milestone

Pitfall 6: Unclear Project Description and Workplan

- Illustrate: Project concept and the work plan
 - Visualize the overall project with a drawing
 - Specify major tasks and timelines; use Gantt charts, calendars or flow charts

Pitfall 7: Deviating from the funding agency guidelines – Follow the application instructions exactly!

- Common occurrences
 - Late submission
 - Application too long
 - Fonts, margins, spacing too small
 - Signatures, certifications missing
 - Budget justification missing
 - Insufficient number of copies³

early review of your application by Research Services will help to ensure these don’t happen⁴

⁵Pitfall 8: Ignoring review criteria (See Appendix A)

³ Robert Porter PhD, “Coaching Researchers to Write Successful Grants”, June 15, 2014

- Read evaluation standards carefully
- Touch all the bases – not just the ones you’re comfortable with

Pitfall 9: Weak abstract - *Polish the abstract*

- Must be intriguing “First advertisement” of your proposal
- Should reflect entire scope of project
- Summarized project purpose and methods
- Must convey
 - What researcher intends to do
 - Why it’s important
 - Expected outcomes
 - How work will be accomplished
- Has to be both concise and complete

THIS MAY BE THE ONLY NARRATIVE THAT SOME REVIEWERS READ!!!

Pitfall 10: Writing solo – *Pre-submission review is NECESSARY*

- Ask seasoned colleagues for comments and suggestions
- Consult local peer review committee, consulting scientists, methods centre
- Ensure that those reviewing your application are qualified to critique proposal content
- Welcome other perspectives and opinions
- Allow time for rewrites

Pitfall 11: Document errors – *Have your application proofread*

- Proofreaders read for form not content
- Must be someone who has no stake in the project
- Root out inconsistencies in format as well as typos, misspellings, grammar etc.

Pitfall 12: Insufficient editing – *Write, rewrite and rewrite*

- Must allow time to prepare, write, review, edit, rewrite

⁴ Robert Porter PhD, “Coaching Researchers to Write Successful Grants”, June 15, 2014