Strengthening Your Proposal Writing

Jackie Stein, Director of Research Development
Old Dominion University

October 2018
Some of the things that inspired this workshop...

- Feedback from reviewers that PIs have shared with the Office of Research.
- Discussion with Grant Development Specialists about common challenges that faculty face.
- The recognition that there are a lot of unwritten rules in academic research proposal writing.
Position yourself for success.

Understand what funders expect.

Your cv must reflect you are qualified to undertake the proposed work. Typically, that means publications.
Building a “Fundable Résumé”

- Develop a positive reputation in your discipline’s “community”
- Apply for awards and recognition
- Early Funding Strategies:
  - Foundation grants
  - State grants
  - Smaller government grants
  - Partner on a project with a more experienced agency or with an educational institution
If you’re working with a team on a large/interdisciplinary project, make sure it includes people with *all* of the kinds of expertise needed for the project.

Being especially interested in or well-read in another discipline is not enough.
Allow yourself enough time.

Remember who won the race...
How *much* time is enough?

It depends on the scope of the project... but writing a competitive grant proposal usually takes at least 6 weeks.
Don’t allow the page limits to determine the time you devote to developing a proposal.

Sometimes it’s more challenging to write a shorter grant.
Your completed proposal is **DUE to the Research Foundation** at **least 5 business days before the funder’s deadline.**

If that deadline is not met, the Research Foundation **cannot guarantee** on-time submission.

**Plan ahead** to prevent problems like...

- The stress of an impending deadline, which can contribute to errors.
- No time for an appropriate review by the GCA.
- ODU’s proposal transmission systems could go down.
- Other proposals are likely to be ahead of yours in the queue.
- The department chair or dean may not be available to provide required signatures.
Know your AUDIENCE

Do your homework on the funder.
Research the funder’s website and read everything you can find about the funding program.
Know your AUDIENCE

- Funder’s Mission
- Funding programs
- Program goals
- Who has received this funding in the past?
- Who are the reviewers?
Make sure your goals align with those of the funder.

How will your project help the funder accomplish their goals?
Plan thoroughly.

Feasibility check: Plan out your project and identify the resources you need before you begin writing.
Plan thoroughly.

Use a Project Timeline or Gantt chart.

**Project Timeline:** January 2011 - June 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT ACTIVITY</th>
<th>PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. PROJECT COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact members to schedule meeting date and time and to confirm attendance.</td>
<td>Graduate student project staff*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate lunch and meeting materials and supplies.</td>
<td>Graduate student project staff*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and finalize agenda.</td>
<td>A. Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate meeting of Advisory Council, a resource for project implementation strategies, as well as a means of networking for members.</td>
<td>A. Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop/analyze identified measures to evaluate activity.</td>
<td>Social Science Research Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. ONLINE PRESENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create project website by January 10, 2011. It will be updated continuously throughout the grant period.</td>
<td>Graduate student project staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create project's interactive Facebook page by January 15, 2011. It will be updated continuously throughout the grant period.</td>
<td>Graduate student project staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop/analyze identified measures to evaluate activity.</td>
<td>Social Science Research Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. RESEARCH CONFERENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Etc..</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plan thoroughly.

**Goal:** To promote Head Start teacher awareness of attitudes and experiences that impact social interactions with children and others, to assess the dynamics of interpersonal interactions; facilitate understanding of the ways interactions impact classroom outcomes, develop strategies for reflection and application of new understandings; and facilitate competencies to promote long-term changes in relational, classroom management, and teaching practices.

**Priorities:**
- Identify teacher attitudes, bias, and experience that impact practice
- Develop self-reflection on teacher-child interactions
- Promote prosocial skills needs of unique population
- Impact positive classroom management strategies
- Support HS Path to Positive Child Outcomes
- Facilitate HS Social and Emotional Development Domains leading to increased achievement.

**Action Year One**
1. Identify contributing teacher attitudes, bias, and experience that impact interaction practice
2. Conduct interviews and observations
3. Collect documents and data
4. Assess current practice and child behaviors - support process of self-reflection
5. Develop collaboration and coherence
6. Refine reflection-action cycle

**Action Year Two**
1. Continue and refine reflection-action cycle
2. Implement training model
3. Increase intentional strategies for positive behavior guidance
4. Support children’s social skills development
5. Increase responsive teacher-child engagement
6. Increase enriched classroom learning experiences.

**Action Year Three**
1. Continue and refine Cycle of Action
2. Facilitate organizational self-efficacy (belief in success for all children sustained by research-based practices)
3. Sustain cycle of self-improvement
4. Increase collaboration and communication
5. Maximize role of directors as imbedded model
6. Support the Head Start Framework
7. Develop longitudinal follow-up study

**Outcome Goals**
- Reflective self-assessment
- Identified training strategies
- Interaction based competencies of reflection-action cycle with embedded mentorship modeling
- Responsive classroom teacher-child interactions
- Intentional prosocial skill support
- Increased cognitive achievement
- Long-term teacher change
- Long-term child optimal development

**Assumptions:** The self-reflective process, with resulting growth of teacher self-efficacy and competence, will provide ongoing support for sustaining changes in responsive teacher-child interactions, positive classroom management approaches, sensitive social emotional support, and the intentional facilitation of children’s prosocial skills. Personal factors, perceptions and beliefs are influential in decision-making choices, along with social persuasion and the functional value of successful models, therefore a cyclical reflection-action cycle of change with embedded modeling and cognitive strategy will increase and sustain professional growth of interaction, collaboration, and self-competencies for teachers, therefore impacting long-term organizational self-efficacy and resulting optimal achievement for children.
Construct a clear argument for funding your project.

Understand related work that has been done. Where are there gaps? How will your project address them?
- Understand how the final grant will be submitted… format, page limits and character count.
- Identify all grant components – including ‘extras’ like letters of support, data management plans, etc.
Sweat the small stuff.

- Prepare an outline using the headings given.
- Use section headers provided by the funder in the order given in the solicitation.
- Check the criteria and make sure you address each fully in the appropriate section(s).
- Write the Abstract or Project Summary LAST.
Include directions and criteria for selection in your writing outline:

**SAMPLE PROPOSAL WRITING OUTLINE**

**SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT.**
- Identify major themes and activities of project; explain how activities will address the concerns in the Call for Proposals.
- Identify activities to be delegated to sub-contractors.

**DETAILED TIMETABLE.**
- Specify dates for starting and completing the project (typically January 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012).
- Provide a timetable for carrying out EACH ACTIVITY of the project, including any dissemination of results.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

2.A.1. Activities: Conferences and/or Competitions.
- Provide a summary of all conferences and/or competitions, including when they will take place.
- For each, indicate: themes, any resulting information products, means of dissemination, and expected results.
- How will activity further the goals in the Call for Proposals?
- Provide measurable criteria for evaluating implementation.

2.A.2. Activities: Publications, Information Booklets and Brochures about Europe and the EU.
- Describe all publications, booklets and brochures and any other information products such as posters, leaflets, newspaper features, radio/TV programs, including quizzes and talk shows, videos websites, and advertising of project events, to be implemented during the grant period.
- Include when they will take place, targeted audience(s), and likely number of recipients.
Sweat the small stuff.

Request Letters of Support **at least** a month before you need them!

- Make sure Letters of Support are allowed by the funder.
- Request letters from individuals who are logical sources of support for your project.
- Ask if you can provide a draft Letter of Support or informational bullets on your agency’s experience and the project you’re proposing.
- Write the draft from the perspective of that individual/organization.
Speak to your audience.

Make sure your entire proposal speaks to the FUNDER’s goals.

It’s easy to forget this as you get caught up in explaining your project.
Get feedback from people you trust.
We know what we meant to say…

This makes it very difficult to proof-read our own writing.
Get feedback from people you trust.

- Ask a trusted colleague or mentor.
- Contact the Office of Research to work with a Grant Development Specialist.
Walk a mile in the reviewer’s shoes.

Apply to review proposals. It’s the best grant writing school in the world.
After you have some success with proposal writing, serve as a mentor.
Questions