

GRANT WRITING

- Tips & Techniques -

Grant writing is part art, part academics. You are trying to convince someone that the research you're proposing is worth their money. Think of yourself as a customer being sold a bill of goods – are you buyin'?? Listed below are a few tips for writing a successful grant.

MAKE LIFE EASY FOR THE REVIEWERS – grant review panels usually read tens to hundreds of proposals. It is therefore important to catch the reader's attention immediately – it has been estimated that you have approximately one minute to do so. Then the job is to keep it....

Also, consider using subheadings throughout your proposal to help you, and your reader, keep track of what you're trying to say. To keep reviewers on your side, make your application super user friendly

THE “SO WHAT” QUESTION– never lose sight of why your research is important. Do not assume that it is immediately obvious to the reader, state it up front and make sure you continue to answer the question throughout the proposal.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL – state your purpose up front, preferably on the first page. Don't make the reviewer search for the reason for your project. They won't.

ADDRESS THE GUIDELINES – each grant asks a series of questions and expects a certain format for the proposal. Be sure to check your proposal point by point and be sure the questions are clearly answered in the order they are asked. It's not your job to decide which questions are important – the reviewers are given a set of guidelines that generally follow the stated questions. Blow 'em off at your own peril.

WRITE TO YOUR AUDIENCE – one grant proposal won't work for all grant applications. Pay attention to the interests of the granting agency. Consider doing some homework on line. You can usually find information about the group on-line.

Also keep the following in mind about your reviewers: Start with basic ideas and move progressively to more complex ones. State the key points directly, and write basic concepts as non-technically as possible. Avoid jargon. For any sub-discipline of anthropology, you may want to use *Scientific American* as a model for the level of writing to use for your non-technical parts.

STRUT YOUR STUFF...WITHIN LIMITS -- The reviewers will be looking for evidence that you know the work of others in the field. This evidence may take the form of a short review as well as representative references. If you have any preliminary data

(always a good idea), it is worth discussing.

While you are usually proposing to do new work, beware of being far outside the mainstream of thought. If your proposal is highly innovative, you'll need to make a very strong case for why you are challenging the existing paradigm and have data to support your innovative approach.

LOOKS MATTER -- your reviewers will be paying attention to the scholarship of your proposal, but remember they're human too. They will be influenced by the writing and appearance of your application. If there are numerous typos and internal inconsistencies in the document, your score will suffer. Pay attention to the overall esthetics of the document.

PRACTICAL MATTERS -- avoid using URLs. Many reviewers won't take the time to check 'em out, so don't rely too heavily on them to provide supporting information. Some of the large federal agencies specifically discourage the application of web sites.

Also, include only information that will photocopy well since your application will be xeroxed before it is sent to reviewers. If you have colored or glossy materials, put them in the appendix -- reviewers get originals of those. Do not paste photographs into the application.

BREAK THE HABIT -- grant writing is not college paper writing. Procrastination won't work as a rule, don't leave your application till the last minute. When rushed, it is difficult to pay attention to the above. Also, most grants have definitive application deadlines, extensions are rare.

GET THE MONEY FIRST, WORRY ABOUT THE DETAILS LATER -- make a budget that's realistic and straightforward, but remember that research designs change when subjected to the light of real-world events. Be sure to produce the results promised, but you may find your path (and hence expenses) may stray from the original budget.

THEY CAN'T SAY "YES" IF YOU DON'T ASK -- write many grants. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. That said however, be aware that the 20% rule holds true for even the most accomplished grant-writers. In the grand scheme of things, you'll get 1 in 5 proposals you submit.

THICK SKIN -- rejection on the first submission is not uncommon (see above). Read the reviews, get mad, get over it, and then address the criticisms. If at first you don't succeed, *definitely* try, try again. The second or third times are usually the charm.