

Grant Writing Basics: *SOE Doctoral Students*

Focus on Dissertation Funding, Fellowships,
and Small Grants

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Qualities of an Effective Proposal

- Compelling, specific problem
- Innovative idea to address the problem
- Appealing to the funding agency
- Speaks to the requirements
- Communicates the plan clearly and concisely
- Costs are reasonable
- Credible organization and personnel / recipient

But I'm sick of writing...

A Dissertation Prospectus is...	A Proposal for Funding a Dissertation or Graduate Study is...
A highly independent project.	A highly competitive project.
Judged by a group of faculty members who are experts in the field.	Judged by an anonymous committee who may be generalists or specialists.
An exhaustively detailed proposal that can be explained in many pages.	A thoughtfully crafted argument limited to a few pages.
Successful if it convinces the faculty that it meets department requirements.	Successful if it convinces the reviewers that it should be funded over someone else's.

Awarding Profiles

Federal

- Guided by a political agenda
- Solicited, competitive
- Strict application guidelines
 - Some mechanisms require that you have completed comps
- Peer review
- Fluctuating budgets

Private

- Long-term agendas for “good” causes
- Solicited and unsolicited
- Perhaps few guidelines
- Reviewers are not always experts
- Initiatives may cycle

Assessing Readiness

- What are your needs?
- Consider the idea
 - Is the idea innovative, significant?
 - Is the idea appropriate for the funder?
- Consider the competition
 - Look at awards lists, funded proposals
 - Look for patterns, gaps
 - Consider funding ratios, budget
- Consider the PI / Project team
 - Does the team have the qualifications, expertise needed?
 - Does the organization have resources needed to support the project?

Dissertation Funding Timeline

Spring

- Research funding opportunities
- Discuss options with mentors, advisors
- Join professional organizations

Summer

- Update / create CV
- Draft components of application
- Contact funding agencies with questions

Fall

- Submit drafts to mentors, advisors for feedback
- Request letters of recommendation
- Learn submission procedures

October –
February

- Most applications due, verify guidelines
- Verify recommendation letters received

February

- Forget about applications...

April

- Decisions made

The Proposal

Common Proposal Elements

- Title
- Abstract or Summary
- Introduction
- Background / Literature Review
- Research Plan
- References*
- Personal Statement, Previous Research Experience*
- Budget, Budget Justification
- Support materials (letters, CV, resources)*

Competitive Titles

- The title should be clear, accurate and succinct.
- Sometimes the title determines who reviews the proposal.
- It may be necessary to include the funding program name in your title – double check the guidelines.

Competitive Abstracts

- The abstract should make your proposed project clear to **anyone** who is reading it.
- The abstract should:
 - Capture the reader's attention.
 - Present a compelling idea.
 - Present the proposed project in a logical manner.
 - Use active, engaging language.
- Remember that the abstracts of funded projects are often published.
- Write the abstract last.

Competitive Introductions

- This is the time to engage the reviewers.
- Quickly establish the proposed project's connection to the interests of the funder.
- Make a compelling argument for why your project matters.
 - Use current, reputable data.
- Possible paradigms for defining how a study will contribute to the field:
 1. The project is a research topic that has never been done before.
 2. The project is a reassessment of a previously studied approach.
 3. The project will expose some new material, which will call for a reassessment of what has already been done.

Competitive Backgrounds / Literature Reviews

- Establish your disciplinary mastery.
- Establish the context of your approach.
 - Highlight points of intersection if it's cross-disciplinary.
 - Demonstrate how your work will resolve contradictions in the debate.
- Some funders expect preliminary results. Know this in advance.
- Avoid hyperbole and hubris.
- Be elegant, not expansive.

Competitive Research Plans

- May include several subsections: problem statement, goals, objectives, hypotheses, methods, procedures, outcomes, deliverables, evaluation, dissemination plan...
- Pre-empt all of the reviewers' questions.
- Competitive designs **make sense**.
 - Clearly articulated.
 - Show the logical connection between research objectives, questions, hypotheses, methods, and outcomes.
 - Categories of information (e.g. Objectives, Outcomes) are not scattered all over narrative.

Competitive Research Plans

- Competitive designs are **feasible**.
 - Avoid having too many hypotheses or objectives.
 - Design and methodology should be appropriate to research questions.
- Competitive designs are **reasonable**.
 - Research question is researchable.
 - Variables are limited. Recognize limitations.
 - Be flexible.

Competitive Budgets

- Does the funding agency provide its own budget forms?
- Determine what costs are allowable (e.g. conference travel, tuition, internet or cell phone).
- Research per diem rates for field work.
- Choose the most economical, but safe, options for local transport.
- For equipment, list the product name, model, and quantity.
- Present the budget in an easy-to-read format.
- Budgets are often accompanied by a separate document called a "budget justification".
- Be specific and detailed.
- Check your math!

Competitive Style

- Start with clear thinking.
 - Use outlines, diagrams, sketches, etc. to affirm logic.
- Be explicit.
- Write simply. **Use strong, declarative verbs.**
- Avoid jargon and define acronyms.
- Be confident and passionate, but not arrogant.
- Remember coherence: the entire application will be considered.
- Make the proposal readable.
 - Section headers, bold, bullets, Gantt charts, graphics

Other Considerations

- Do not underestimate or overestimate:
 - Timeline.
 - Budget.
- Know what you will have to do for IRB approval.
 - May impact design
- Know who you need to complete your team.
 - Do not collaborate for the sake of collaboration.
- Pick your referees carefully and treat them professionally.

Know the Reviewers

- Assume that the reviewers are tired and are not experts in your sub-discipline.
- **BUT**, be prepared for at least one expert on the panel.
- Speak the language the reviewers understand.
- Know what the funding agency expects from reviewers.
 - If possible, obtain a copy of the rating rubric.
 - Talk to people who have served as reviewers.
- Their comments are meant to be constructive.

Some Reviewers' Comments

Competitive

- Research questions were conceptually cutting-edge.
- Broadly pitched the conceptually-motivated introduction in the first page.
- Methods strongly related to hypotheses.
- Strongly argued that project would answer the questions posed.
- Exhibited some degree of independence from advisor.

Non-Competitive

- Sound, but not terribly exciting.
- Questions and inquiry are not conceptually rigorous.
- Poor scholarship.
- Poor integration of proposal sections.
- Lacks sufficient detail to determine...
- The proposal has been "broiler-plated".
- Sloppy presentation.
- Overly ambitious.

Your Turn to Review

Sample Proposals

Sample Proposals

- What did you like / not like about the proposal?
- What were the proposal's strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the sponsor's guidelines?
- What elements would you adapt to your own needs?
- What would you change?
- Would you fund it?
- Do you think the sponsor funded it?
 - What comments do you think the reviewers made?

In Conclusion

Some Final Comments

- Know your funding agency.
 - Hypothesis driven?
 - Require or reject science-style proposals?
- Read the guidelines. Then read them again. Then re-read them. Then read them with a hi-lighter. Then have someone else read them. Then read the agency website. Then read the guidelines again.
- Tell a good story.
 - Tell a story that the grantor wants to hear.
 - Put your project at the center of the proposal.
- Connect to big issues and trends.
- Write and re-write. Get input. Don't be insulted. Write again.

General Grant writing Resources

- A list of grant writing guides
http://www.research.vcu.edu/vpr/resources/grant_proposal.htm
 - Includes sample proposals
- UC Berkeley Dissertation Proposal Resources
<http://iis.berkeley.edu/content/dissertation-proposal-resources>
 - Includes sample proposals
- Verba, C. *Scholarly Pursuits: A Guide to Professional Development During the Graduate Years*. See Chapter V.
http://gsas.harvard.edu/current_students/scholarly_pursuits.php?mosmsg=Item+successfully+saved.
 - Includes sample proposals and budgets

General Grant writing Resources

- Michigan State University College of Education, Doctoral Student Support
<http://education.msu.edu/irtl/grad/>
 - Includes upcoming funding opportunities and a budget calculator
- Yale University, Writing Fellowship Essays
<http://www.yale.edu/yalecollege/academics/fellowships/application/essays.html>
 - Includes annotated sample proposals and sample budgets
- University of Kansas. Joyce, B., Moseley, B., & Porsch, K. *Guide to Proposal Development in the Humanities for Graduate Students*.
http://www.hallcenter.ku.edu/hgdo/development/pdf/082002_GS_Guide.pdf

General Grant writing Resources

- UNC, The Writing Center. *Grant Proposals (or Give me the money!)*

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/specific-writing-assignments/grant-proposals-or-give-me-the-money>

- Prezeworski, A. & Salomon, F. *On the Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to the Social Science Research Council Competitions.*

<http://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/7A9CB4F4-815F-DE11-BD80-001CC477EC70/>

- Gillis, C. M. *Writing Proposals for ACLS Fellowship Competitions.*

http://www.acls.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Programs/Writing_Fellowship_Proposals.pdf

Getting Assistance

- VCU National Scholarship Office
<http://www.honors.vcu.edu/nationalscholar/>
- VCU Writing Center
<http://www.vcu.edu/uc/writingcenter/>
- Grant writing courses...
- The Foundation Center, *Proposal Writing Short Course*
<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/training/online/>