Left Lane Must Left Lane.

Understanding Funders' Guidelines

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Presentation outline

- Review the definition and purpose of funding solicitations.
- Outline the key information included in guidelines.
- Discuss strategies for interpreting guidelines.
- Practice interpreting guidelines.

Questions to resolve

- Does this funding opportunity fit with my interests, capacities, resources, needs, timeline, etc.?
- Is it a **good** fit?

"My epiphany came when I realized that grant programs do not exist to make me successful, but rather my job is to make those programs successful."

Cited in Porter, R. (2007). Why Academics Have a Hard Time Writing Good Grant Proposals. Journal of Research Administration, 38(2), 37-43.

WHAT IS IT?

Funders' guidelines

Are…

- Used to communicate the information needed to develop a fully responsive proposal.
- Meant to assure that proposals meet the goals and objectives of the funding agency.
- Often internally contradictory.

Are Not…

- A menu or a buffet of choices.
- A negotiable listing of performance expectations.
- Optional.

From University of Northern Colorado, Office of Sponsored Programs "The Strategic Role of the Request for Proposals" and Mike Cronan, Office of Proposal Development, Texas A&M University "TAMIU Grant writing Workshop, Generic Strategies for Competitive Proposals"

What is "it" called?

- Guidelines
- Solicitation
- Request for Proposals (RFP)
- Program Announcement (PA)
- Request for Application (RFA)
- Broad Agency Announcement (BAA), etc.
- Unsolicited opportunities
- *Something else…*
- *Nothing…*

What does it look like?

Common Elements (General)

- Funder's goals and objectives
- Expectations of applicants (performance goals)
- Topics that will be funded
- Scope of work that will be funded
- Expected outcomes
- Review criteria

Common Elements (Specific)

- Substantive requirements:
  - Purpose, Needs statement
  - Goals, Objectives, Research Questions
  - Research/Project Plan/Methods
  - Evaluation, Dissemination
  - Timeline
  - Partners, CVs, Portfolio
  - Budget, Justification
- Technical requirements:
  - Eligibility
  - Due dates
  - Award limits, # of Awards
  - Performance period
  - Formatting requirements
  - Contact Information

Thick language

Funding Priorities: Our Shared Past

"Funds are available to projects that will develop robust networks of faculty who possess the expertise to study world history curriculum (K-14, i.e., at pre-collegiate and collegiate levels) in a specific national or regional setting and who are positioned to propose alternative curriculum design based on that scholarship. Successful projects will make use of relevant distribution channels for all project deliverables. Priority consideration will be given to applicants with a demonstrated ability to reform curriculum design and identify partner organizations/individuals that can help put scholarly content or specific recommendations in the hands of educators and policy makers who can influence curriculum reform at national and local levels."

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WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

1. May I submit a proposal?

Issue	Look for
Solicited	• Attached to an RFP. • Requirement to be responsive to certain priorities. • Perhaps a deadline or set funding cycle.
Unsolicited	• Sometimes called "investigator-initiated." • A request for LOIs. • May not have firm guidelines or structure, but instructions that proposals coincide with general mission. • Applicants should discuss plans with program staff.
By invitation only	• "Unsolicited grants will not be accepted." • "Full proposals are accepted by invitation only."
Multi-stage application process	• Requires a LOI. • Requires a preliminary proposal. • Requires completion on an online eligibility survey. • Phase I, Phase II, etc. opportunities.

2. What is it for? *(conceptual)*

Issue	Look for
Purpose	• Funding agency mission. • Preference, priority areas. • "Proposals must address / have a focus on…" • Emphasis on keywords: incremental changes, creativity, advancement, unconventional, collaborative.
Scope	• Is this part of a larger funding effort? • Are impacts time-, location-, group-bound?
Collaboration	• Is the grant for interdisciplinary activities? • Use and emphasis on keywords: collaborate, team, international, co-investigators, partnership, program management scheme. • Are multi-site projects allowable? Sub grants?
Deliverables	• Use and emphasis on keywords: products • Require a timeline. • Allowable costs.

3. What is it for? *(financial)*

Issue	Look for
Seed money	• Award amount. • Keywords like: "start-up," "investigate," "preliminary," "pilot," "leverage," "exploratory," "developmental."
Research	• Title of grant program. • Emphasis of review criteria. • Activities supported. • Keywords like: "methodological approach."
Educational	• Keywords like: "curriculum," "professional development," "training."
Meeting, conference	• Purpose of the grant is to collaborate. • Keywords like: "planning," "training," "partnership," "disseminate results." • Expect product: white paper, policy brief / recommendations, research agenda.
Travel	• Funded activities include field studies, conference attendance, etc. • Allowable costs include transportation, accommodations.

4. Are we eligible?

Issue	Look for
Education and employment status	• Degree required? • Do you have to be full-time? • PI must meet commit minimum effort.
Citizenship	• Do you have to be a citizen of the country of the funder? Of the country where the activity is taking place?
Location	• Does the activity have to take place in a certain geographic location? • Does the applicant have to be located in a particular place?
Selected organizations, individuals	• "Funding is available only to member institutions / members." • Only open to individuals who have engaged in a previous activity (*e.g. alumni, past awardees*).
Limited submission, Limited number of awards	• Number of applications that may be submitted by a single organization.

5. What does the proposal have to look like?

Issue	Look for
Format	• Margins, length, font size, binding, number of copies. • Instructions on text formatting (*e.g. terms in bold*). • Instructions on subheadings. • Instructions on tables, pictures, URLs. • Use of citations.
Required sections	• Abstract requirement; length and content restrictions. • Timeline format; start and end date. • Requirements for certain activities or milestones (*e.g. engage with local schools, increase capacity by 50%, construction of new wing, raise 25% match*). • Budget template. • Required evaluation methodology (*e.g. logic model*)?
Attachments	• Are appendices allowed? • Is table of contents needed, required? • What / what types of letters are expected? • CV or narrative bio? • Proof of compliance with funder's rules and bylaw. • Proof of human subjects protocol submission.

6. What will this grant pay for?

Issue	Look for
Direct costs	• "Allowable costs include…" • "Appropriate expenses include…" • "This grant will not pay for…"
Indirect costs	• Are they allowable? • What is the rate?
Equipment	• Equipment as a line item. • Mention of "capital assets." • Language indicating that equipment use is dedicated to funded activities. • Ceiling or floor on costs.
Salaries	• General operating costs allowable. • Project / program costs allowable.
Contributions from others	• In-kind, in-cash match. • Mandatory or voluntary Cost-share.
Disallowed costs	• Sometimes indirect costs are disallowed. • Usually lobbying, propaganda are disallowed. • Often sub grants are disallowed.

7. What and how do I submit?

Issue	Look for
Required information	• Who is the authorized official? • Do I have all necessary information (*e.g. DUNS number, compliance numbers, congressional district*)
Proposal by invitation	• An LOI, preliminary proposal is required. • Stage 2: Letter proposal or large scale grant
Paper submission	• When do I contact OSP? • Who needs to sign it? In what color? • Verify attachments that can be submitted. • Verify number of copies needed. Do all need original signatures? • How must it be delivered to the funder? • What size paper? What are the margins?
Electronic submission	• How is it signed? • Can I add attachments? • Can I make corrections after it's been submitted?
Deadline	• Are proposals currently being accepted? Or is the program suspended? • Annual, Rolling, Continuous deadlines. • Multiple deadlines per year / board meetings.

8. How likely am I to get the grant?

Issue	Look for
Award amount	• Total program budget. • Individual award amount or range. • Previously funded grants award level patterns.
Funding ratio	• Number of awards expected. • Historical number of awards made. • Is it a new initiative? • What are funders interested in *(e.g. geographic representation*)?

9. What are the terms of the award?

Issue	Look for
Interview, presentation	• Initial vetting process or multi-stage review process. • Requirement to present proposal before a panel.
Meeting attendance	• You may have to attend the funder's annual meeting. Costs should be included into budget.

Reporting	• Midterm and final report requirements
	  • How must they be submitted?
	  • What level of detail included?
	  • What kinds of program changes may result?

Site visit	• Will funders' staff visit your site? What will they do during the visit?
Sub grants, sub contracts	• Are sub grants, sub contracts allowed? • Are honoraria, consultants allowed?
Citations, Inclusions	• Requirement to cite the grant in publications, exhibits. • Requirement to invite the funder to grant-related events.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Thick language

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Funding Priorities: Our Shared Past

"Funds are available to projects that will develop robust **networks of faculty** who possess the **expertise** to study **world history curriculum** (K-14, i.e., at pre-collegiate and collegiate levels) in a **specific national or regional setting** and who are positioned to **propose alternative curriculum design** based on that scholarship. Successful projects will make use of **relevant distribution channels** for all project **deliverables**. Priority consideration will be given to applicants with a **demonstrated ability to reform curriculum design** and identify **partner organizations/individuals** that can help put scholarly content or **specific recommendations** in the hands of **educators and policy makers** who can **influence curriculum reform** at national and local levels."

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Analyze a solicitation

- What is it for?
- What does it fund?
- Who is eligible?
- What does the proposal have to look like?
- What has to be submitted? How is it submitted?
- Does it give you any ideas?
- Does it raise any questions, issues? What additional information would you need?
- Who should you go to for assistance?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Tips: Don't skim…

- Read it many times.
- Read for detail, code words.
- Read the references, links, etc.
- Read within the context of the funder's mission and other programs.
- Have other people read it.
- Use: hi-liters, tape flags, different colored ink, checklists, task lists...
- Read it again.

Tips: Know what you're getting into.

- Sometimes there are ambiguities, inconsistencies.
  - Clarify questions well in advance.
  - Get someone else's opinion, then call the program officer.
- Not every RFP is well written.

Tips: Use the RFP to your advantage.

- The RFP is an organizational template.
  - Use it to develop the structure, order, and detail of the proposal narrative.
- Reviewers' criteria often mirror the RFP in form and content.
  - Explicitly address the review criteria in your proposal.