

# Writing a Grant

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# STEP 1: KNOW THE 'WHY' BEHIND AWARDS

# THE MISSION

Before you drive right into writing a proposal, it is essential to know why funding agencies award grants.

**Grants are awarded for the sole purpose of having the applicant help the funding agency to achieve its mission.**

Knowing the funding agency's mission will allow you to craft and mold your idea in such a way that it becomes compatible with the funding agency's mission.

# THE MISSION

As a grant writer, you should present your idea in such a way that it is obvious that your idea will help the funding agency achieve its mission.

Visit various funding agency/sponsor websites to identify their mission and keep these on hand while you are developing and refining your idea.

# DEVELOPING AN IDEA

# THE IDEA

All grant applications begin with an idea about which you and/or your institution are passionately excited.

1. Define the problem or need that you want to address.
2. Collect and critically analyze relevant background information/needs assessment that pertains to the proposed area of investigation.
3. Generate a preliminary idea or activity pertinent to the problem or critical need that you have identified.
4. Assess your idea's potential for success and modify it, if necessary.
5. See constructive criticism of your idea from knowledgeable colleagues and the Program Officer.
6. Refine the idea or activity to maximize its potential for impact on your field.

# DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Your first task is to identify a specific problem, issue or need, or something that will add significantly to the overall sphere of influence of the field.

Formulate and write out a brief paragraph of an initial idea that is closely related to your area of interest or expertise.

# CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive review of what has already been done in this particular field or area is the next step in generating a fundable idea.

You need to determine:

1. What is known, has been established, or done earlier.
2. The extent to which that body of knowledge or information is reliable, accurate, or complete.
3. Who has already done what in this particular field or area.
4. Can you represent yourself as being among the leading experts in that particular area or domain?

As you read through literature, try to note any important information that was not addressed as well as any gaps in the knowledge base or concepts that the authors have identified as not known.



# GENERATE A PRELIMINARY IDEA OR ACTIVITY

As you work your way through the relevant material to the issue, you will become increasingly aware of what is known, what has been done previously, what has not been done or attempted by others.

Begin to identify gaps in the knowledge base and which areas of need are important to address. What are the needs in the field and how might these gaps be filled?

# ASSESS YOUR IDEA

Consider the following criteria as you assess your idea's potential for success:

1. Critically assess your own ability to pursue the idea. Regardless of how good your idea is, it must be one that is within your capabilities to pursue (knowledge, time, resources, etc.)
2. Critically assess your competition. Know what studies or activities have already been funded in the area for which you are considering seeking grant support. You want to avoid writing an application that is similar to one that has already been funded.
3. Critically assess your idea's funding potential. Because all funding agencies have missions, your idea must be framed in such a way that it is clear that it will help the funding agency achieve its mission.

# ASSESS YOUR IDEA

List, as bullets, the strengths, weaknesses, and deficiencies as to why this is a good idea for you to pursue.

List how you could “fix” any of the deficiencies you identified (e.g., consultants, collaborators, additional resources, etc.)

# SEEK FEEDBACK

Explaining your ideas to individual who are not in your field requires that you think very carefully about those ideas and why they are important in the more general sense. It also requires that you be able to explain your ideas in ways that individuals not in your field will still be able to easily understand them.

Because the ultimate objective of every proposal is to explain, in writing, your ideas in such a way that reviewers can both understand and get excited about it, seeking feedback from those within and outside your field will help with the refining of your idea.

YOUR AUDIENCE, THE REVIEWERS

# ROLE OF THE REVIEWERS

The objective of the reviewers will be to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of your ideas in comparison with the relative strengths and weaknesses of all of the competing ideas reviewed by the group.

Therefore, it is crucial that you understand what the reviewers are looking for:

1. Significance
2. Approach and Plan of Work
3. The Applicant
4. Environment and Institution
5. Novelty and Innovation

REFER TO THE RFP FOR  
THE DETAILED REVIEW  
AND SCORING CRITERIA

# SIGNIFICANCE

- Does this study address an important problem or critical need?
- How will knowledge in the field be advanced and/or why will the world be a better place if the aims or goals of the proposal are achieved?
- How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields?
- Will the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding?
- What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society?

# APPROACH AND PLAN OF WORK

- Does the proposal clearly indicate which important, outstanding questions will be addressed and how?
- Have the design, methods, analysis, and evaluations been adequately developed?
- Does the proposal clearly describe how the data will be analyzed in order to achieve the goals?
- Are the aims or goals of the project appropriate and achievable?
- Is the project sustainable?
- Are the amounts requested in each budget category reasonable to get the job done?



# THE APPLICANT

- Does the applicant have the appropriate level of training and experience required to successfully carry out the proposed work?
- Will other activities or commitments interfere with the time you would require to accomplish your goals as outlined in the proposal?

# THE ENVIRONMENT AND INSTITUTION

- Does the proposed study take advantage of unique features of the environment to use useful collaborative arrangements?
- Is there sufficient access to resources?

# NOVELTY AND INNOVATION

- What exactly is it that makes your project memorable or special?
- How is your project creative and original?
- Does your project include novel concepts, approaches, or methods?
- To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative and original concepts?

# PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION

# FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

The first step in the preparation of your application is to obtain the appropriate up-to-date instructions to applicants and applications forms from the targeted funding agency.

Carefully read all of the instructions to applicants as these requirements tend to change year over year.

Most funding agencies place strict restrictions on the format that is allowed and failure to adhere to these restrictions will result in the rejection of your proposal.

# FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

The RFP will note any formatting requirements/restrictions which may include:

- Page and word limits
- Page numbers
- Font size and type
- Margin dimensions
- Line spacing
- File naming structures
- Required headers and footers
- File type and size

# PROJECT SUMMARY

# PROJECT SUMMARY

The Project Summary will be one of the first parts of your proposal that the reviewers will read, so it is important to get the reviewers excited about your project right away.

The Project Summary should be written in a way that it summarizes what is truly important about your proposal and that it serves as a blueprint of your proposal.

Use the following slides as an outline as you draft your Project Summary...



# THE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

## Opening Sentence(s)

Will serve as the “hook” to capture the reviewer’s attention and bring the reviewer into your domain of thinking about the field of focus of your project.

Include sufficient information so that the reviewers will be able to understand what the proposal will be about.

## The Important Knowns

The sentences following the opener should be specifically designed to bring every reviewer “up to speed” with respect to important facts that will help educate them as to why this is an important area or topic.

Overall goal is to set the scene for presenting the gap in knowledge, the identification of a problem, or a critical need of society.

## Establish the Problem

Once you have educated the reviewers as to what is known in the field, you will need to introduce the issue that will serve as the centerpiece for your proposal.

This section need to be an obvious extension of the knowns and the solution to the problem needs to relate to the mission of the funding agency.

# PARAGRAPH 2 – WHAT & WHO

## Your Long-Term Goal

A statement of your long-term goal should be used to introduce the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph.

There should be a clear connection between your long-term goal, the key problem/need identified in paragraph 1, and the mission of the sponsor.

## Objective of this Proposal

The statement of long-term goal should be followed by the identifying what your objective is and explain exactly what you expect to accomplish by the collective activities described in your proposal.

The objective should fill the gap in knowledge, solve the problem, or address the need that you have detailed in paragraph 1.

## Statement of Rational

Describe to the reviewers why you want to carry out the activities that you have proposed.

This statement should inform the reviewers why you feel the need to do the proposed work and what would be expected after the proposed work is completed that is not possible to do now.

# PARAGRAPH 2 – WHAT & WHO

## Why You?

Why are you well prepared to undertake the study and how will your connections, environment, and institution will be an asset.

At the conclusion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph, the reviewers should know:

- What you are planning to do.
- How you will fill the gap in knowledge or address the problem.
- That you and your colleagues are well prepared to do the work.
- That you will have the resources necessary to do the work.

# PARAGRAPH 3 – AIMS, GOALS, & OBJECTIVES

## Specific Activities

The idea of this paragraph is to make clear to the reviewers what the specific major steps/tasks/objectives that you will take to achieve the overall goal identified in the second paragraph.

It is important that each of your aims/goals are related to the others but avoid having one aim/goal be critically dependent upon a specific outcome of a related aim/goal.

# PARAGRAPH 4 – THE PAYOFF

## Expected Outcomes

Provide reviewers with specific information on exactly what you will have accomplished once your project has been completed.

Include a summary of all key outcomes that the reviewers could expect if they decided to recommend your proposal for funding.

In general, there should be at least one outcome for each of your aims/goals noted in paragraph 3.

## Impact

To conclude the final paragraph, you should summarize, in 1-2 sentences, how the accomplishments and achievements that are expected to result from the successful completion of the aims/goals/objectives of the project will make a positive impact.

The impact that you expect should include a solution to the problem/need identified in paragraph 1 and relate to the mission of the sponsor.

# APPROACH & DETAILED WORK PLAN

# APPROACH & DETAILED WORK PLAN

This section is designed to provide the reviewers a detailed description of what will be done during the requested period of funding and will expand on the Project Summary.

When writing your work plan, keep these 5 questions in mind:

1. What will be done?
2. What are the means/strategies/approaches that will be used to accomplish what is noted in Question 1?
3. What might go wrong?
4. What alternative strategies would be used if something unexpected were to happen?
5. What will be accomplished if completed and why is this important?

# APPROACH & DETAILED WORK PLAN

At a minimum, the Work Plan should include the following sections:

***Specific Aim/Goal/Objective #1 : Title***

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Planned Studies/Activities/Approach:

1.2.1 Study/Activity #1 with explanatory heading

1.2.2 Study/Activity #2 with explanatory heading

1.3 Expected Results & Outcomes

1.4 Anticipated Problems and Alternative Strategies

***Specific Aim/Goal/Objective #2: Title...***



# 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory paragraph should be a brief overview of what is detailed in the reminder of the subsections and why it is a necessary part of the project.

This section should include a statement justifying why the work proposed under this aim/goal needs to be done and how you will go about attaining that objective.

## 1.2 PLANNED STUDIES/ACTIVITIES/APPROACH

The goal of this section is to present and discuss the actual studies, activities, or approaches that you will use to accomplish what you have set out to do in the related Aim/Goal/Objective. This section should consider the following list, which can be tailored to your specific project:

- Justification of need to do the work.
- Approach to be used and/or activities to be undertaken.
- Methods required to carry out the work.
- Critical materials needed (as applicable).
- Key equipment required (as applicable).
- Number of study subjects, animals, or individuals to be affected.
- Any controls to be performed.
- Summary of expectations.
- Time required to complete the study.
- Other considerations applicable to this study or plan of work.

## 1.3 EXPECTED RESULTS & OUTCOMES

The summary of expected results, findings, or accomplishments should highlight how this study will promote the mission of the sponsor and the deliverables that the sponsor can expect upon completion of the project.

The sponsor and reviewers want to know how the funds will be used and this section will help make that clear.

# 1.4 ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS & ALTERNATIVES

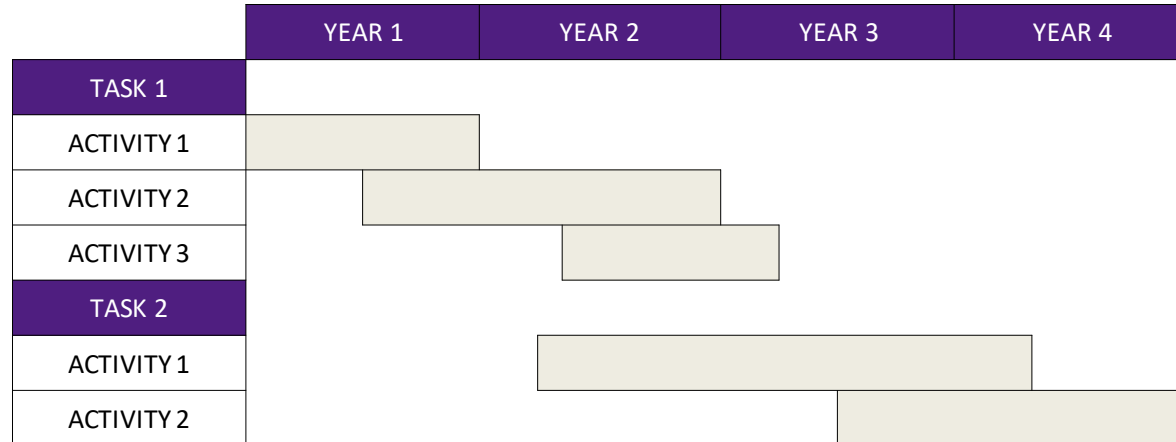
Anticipate, and then proactively rebut, any potential concerns that your reviewers might identify while reviewing your work plan.

Do this by identify at least one alternative approach or strategy that could be used to overcome any anticipated problems that might arise.

This section will show to reviewers that you have thoroughly thought through your project and plan of work and that you are prepared to deal with any problems that you might run into.

# PROJECT TIMELINE

Including a project timeline will provide the reviewers with a general understanding of when each aim/activity will take place in relation to the rest of the project and the anticipated duration of each aim/activity. The project timeline can be displayed in any format, but Gantt charts like the one below are commonly used.



# FUTURE DIRECTIONS & SUSTAINABILITY

This final paragraph of your work plan is to explain where you expect to be at the conclusion of your work and what your next steps are, if appropriate for your project.

- Will the funds establish a program that can be self-sustaining, or will more funds be required? Where will the additional funds come from and what do you need to do to obtain the additional funding?
- Will your results provide a foundation for future studies?
- Will these funds position you to be more competitive for another funding agency?

# LITERATURE REVIEW/NEEDS ASSESSMENT

# LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of your proposal will be one of the ways you will fully justify the critical need for the proposed study/project.

This section should educate reviewers by expanding upon the information you provided within the Project Summary and should contain the following information:

- Historical perspectives
- The current knowledge
- The gap in the knowledge base/critical need – the driving force for the proposed activities
- Your central hypothesis and how it was formulated
- Conclusion



# WHAT TO AVOID

# WHAT TO AVOID WHEN WRITING

- Avoid excessively long or short paragraphs.
- Limit the use of EMPHASIZED text.
  - You should reserve boldface type primarily for section headings and italics primarily for use within the body of text when you want to emphasize a specific point.
- Avoid complicated sentences.
  - Write clear, simple, declarative sentences.
- Avoid the use of cliches and empty generalities.
  - Be specific. Specificity and precision are what build credibility with reviewers.
- Avoid the use of nouns as adjectives.
  - Communicate your thoughts with maximum clarity.
    - “U.S. regional occupational training barriers are” is better off stated as “the barriers to occupational training with the United States...”

# WHAT TO AVOID WHEN WRITING

- Keep the use of acronyms and abbreviations to a minimum.
  - In the interest of maximizing communication and understanding, make every effort to minimize the use of abbreviations or acronyms unless such acronyms or abbreviations are universally recognized (e.g., AIDS, mg/ml, UNICEF).
- Avoid associating action verbs with inanimate objects.
  - Example: *“This project will enhance the mission of...”*
  - Instead, say *“The knowledge that is gained from the successful completion of this project will contribute to the mission of XYZ by...”*
- Avoid the use of weak words like *may, hope, believe, try, expect* which convey doubt or uncertainty.



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