Excerpts from "Writing a grant: Dos and Don'ts"

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1. Planning a proposal

➢ Identify
- Topic
- Strategic area
- Expertise and interaction needed to do the project

Make sure that the proposal fits with the overall aims of the granting agency and that you are eligible

Planning a proposal

- ➢ Identify team of applicants with the complementary expertise and get them involved
- ➢ Identify and recruit non-University partners (*if applicable*)
  - Industry
  - Governmental
  - NGOs

2. Getting started

➢ Start as early as possible to be ready BEFORE the deadlines

➢ Get personal data forms (CVs) completed right at the start. Remember that you can ask the Research Support Center for help. Highlight accomplishments pertinent to the proposal.

Getting started

- Establish a to-do list:
  - Assign tasks
  - Establish time-table for completion of specific tasks (*1st, 2nd,… final drafts of the research proposal, budget, letters of collaboration, signatures, photocopies, etc*)
  - Recruit your Research Facilitator

3. The research proposal

- ➢ Describe the problem and why it is important

- ➢ Set objectives

  - Long term (*a vision of what you would like to be able to do but can't given the current state of knowledge*)

  - Short term (*a list of specific objectives to be achieved in the course of the projects*)

The research proposal

➤ Proposals should be hypothesis-driven. One or more testable hypotheses should be formulated in the form:

- We propose that '*The bigger they are, the harder they fall*' and we will use the following model, approaches, techniques… *to prove it.*'

Background

➢ An up-to-date summary of the state of knowledge of the field, including opposing theories and what directions other groups are taking

➢ Should serve to situate the research problem

➢ If possible, emphasize your work in the area

Methods

➢ A brief description of overall approaches and techniques that will be employed to tackle the problem (*if approach is novel, say so!*)

➢ Followed by relatively detailed description of model, techniques, equipment, criteria, statistics (*show that you know what you are talking about*)

Methods *(continued)*

➢ Try to include a graphical or tabular representation of the time-line of the project (*to show that it can be done in the course of the granting period*)

➢ If possible, add preliminary or otherwise representative data (*show that you are technically able to do it!*)

The research team

➢ Describe expertise, roles, responsibilities and collaborations among group members and those who provided letters of support/ collaboration (*important to identify the project-specific complementary expertise*)

➢ Also roles and responsibilities of non-University partners (*append 'GOOD' letter signed by somebody with authority*)

Training

➤ Personnel

- Describe technical skills required (can propose names with existing expertise or will hire and train new personnel)

➤ Students

- Why is the project an appropriate teaching milieu?
- What degrees they will earn

Relevance

➢ Why is the project important?

➢ Who will benefit?

➢ What important question will be answered?

➢ Future directions, depending on your results

Feasibility

➢ Have at your disposal all the required knowledge, skills, infrastructure and collaborations to do the project as described

➢ Be realistic when stating timelines, workloads, scope of the project and possible results or outcomes of the research.

4. The budget

➢ Justify and detail items as much as possible (add cost quotations where available)
- Participants compensations
- Materials
- Computer hardware and software
- Equipment (*provide quotation expensive ones*)
- Licenses and other fees
- Travel, conferences and publication costs
- Students, technicians (*justify number and pay scales*)
- In-kind contributions (*adds weight to feasibility*)

5. The CVs

➤ Don't be afraid to mention even minor or old presentations or accomplishments if they seem relevant to this project

➤ Be strategic in the presentation of your CV: make it look good and show the compatibility of skills and expertise with your teammates

➤ If you are requesting to be considered as new scholar, verify that you qualify as such

➤ If you had a career interruption, say so and make your case in the application

Address former reviewers comments!

- If you are reapplying with a similar project, don't forget to address the former reviewers comments. The committee will be expecting this sheet on your proposal

- Acknowledge positive comments

- Explain changes that you have made or positively and politely defend your previous position (*on an item by item basis*)

- Your tone is very important!

Photocopies

➢ Must be of high quality (*after all, this is what the reviewers are going to read!*)
➢ Pictures and figures are preferably all originals

General dos

➢ Use the summary to sell your project and remember that if approved, this is the information that will be used for promotional purposes

➢ Have a clear and simple hypothesis and provide clearly stated objectives, rationale and approaches

➢ Provide a clear perspective of relevance

➢ Provide a general introduction that describes both the state-of-the-art and your place in the field

General dos (continued)

- Discuss alternative approaches
- Provide an appropriate level of experimental detail
- Provide realistic expectations for outcomes and their impacts
- Establish the expertise and personnel necessary to accomplish the work
- Provide original, clearly labeled figures and easy to read copies
- Respect the format requirements throughout the proposal.

General don'ts

➢ Cut & paste from other sections in the summary
➢ Leave your hypothesis buried in the body of the grant
➢ Assume that the relevance of your work will be obvious to the reviewer
➢ Describe your accomplishments disproportionately
➢ Provide excessive numbers of figures or poor quality figures
➢ Fiddle with the length requires (*margins, fonts, spacing*)

General don'ts (continued)

➢ Claim outcomes that are unrealistic (*our results will cure all cancers!*)

➢ Overwhelm the reviewer with unnecessary details

➢ Try to fool yourself or the reviewer

➢ Go off on unnecessary tangents (*even if you find them interesting*)

Therefore

- Minimize their effort to assimilate the information
- Convince them of the field's importance, the relevance and clarity of the question and your ability to answer it
- Write lucidly and be grammatically correct
- Limit the number of abbreviations
- Be ready before the deadline so you can ask the Review Committee to comment on your proposal