

Grant Writing

USC Aiken

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"This book belongs on the desk of every researcher ready to up their game!"
- Christopher M. Clark, Professor Emeritus, Michigan State University



GOOD TO GREAT GRANT WRITING

SECRETS TO SUCCESS



JULIE CWIKLA PHD

Grant Writing is Marketing

The goal is to convince the reviewers that:

1. There is an important question that needs to be answered
 - Fits into the funding agency's goals
 - Will have a high impact
2. You have the skills and resources to complete the project
 - You are familiar with the topic
 - You have successfully performed similar research in the past
 - Preliminary data/ publication record
 - Logical plan including alternative approaches

Key points

- Tell the story
 - What happened in the past
 - What you plan to do
 - How this will impact the future
- Provide context for the audience
 - Don't assume they are experts in your field
 - Don't use jargon
- Refine it
 - Get others to read/edit it
 - Respond to reviewer's concerns

Organization

- Hook
 - Start with your big idea (get the reader interested right away)
- Introduction
 - Literature review (showing you know your stuff)
 - Pilot data
 - Research questions
- Work Plan
 - Methods, including alternative approaches, expected outcomes
 - Analysis plan
 - Partners and facilities
 - Timeline/Roles
- Impact

What Makes a Proposal Competitive?

The Good

- Potential for **high impact-Important**, not just Interesting.
- New, **original** ideas
- Focused, feasible project plan
- Articulated knowledge of subject area, published relevant work
- Experience in essential methods or approaches, and/or collaborator expertise
- Sound scientific rationale
- **Realistic** amount of work; sufficient detail; critical approach (pitfalls and alternative hypotheses considered)
- **Well written** and understandable to someone not working directly in the field.

Advice for Writing an Excellent Proposal

More Good!

- Start early!
- Read the solicitation!
- Identify your **audience**
 - Balance between general and specific subject area knowledge
- Frame a **big picture**
- Identify significant needs, gaps, and **hypotheses**
- Describe the plan to address the needs, gaps, and hypotheses
- Emphasize **creative** or innovative aspects
- Provide **proof-of-concept**
 - Preliminary data-especially if approach is new to you, or the field
- Speak with a Program Director

Additional Excellent Features

- **Expected outcomes** are described
 - Unexpected outcomes considered
- Outcomes related to original Goal(s)
- Ideally, negative results should be interpretable and meaningful
- Recognition of Reviewers
 - **Easy to read**
 - Neat and tidy
 - Budget is reasonable
 - All relevant and current literature is cited
 - You can suggest reviewers

Common mistakes: Scientific The Bad

- Work is too close to what has been done before - i.e., **incremental advance** or limited impact
- Project has too large a **scope** or is too narrowly focused to be exciting
- Proposed methods / research plan will not yield results that address the stated goals of the project
- Experimental / theoretical / analytical design is **flawed**
- Aims are **interdependent**
- Failure to be **transparent** in writing
 - Disconnect between what you are Thinking and what the Reviewer Reads
- Medically motivated.
 - Carefull, OK to mention disease in Broader Impacts.



What you don't want to see in your reviews

The Ugly

- The PI has not been very productive either during or since the Ph.D.
- This proposal is naïve / overly ambitious
- Potential pitfalls and alternate strategies are not described
- Alternate interpretation of data is ignored
- PI has failed to cite essential literature
- Necessary resources are not available, or the PI does not have demonstrated expertise
- Proposal is Strong in Intellectual Merit, but Broader Impacts are weak.



Common mistakes: Failure to follow guidelines

More Ugly

- Essential documents are missing
 - Departmental letter (if required)
 - Letters of collaboration
- Letters of collaboration are non-compliant
- Extraneous documents are included
- Document is not easy to read
 - Margins too narrow
 - Font size too small
 - Figures too small or low res. / legends lack detail
 - Excessive use of acronyms
- Sloppy
 - Typos, misspellings, incorrect figure placement
 - Conversion from Word to PDF is inaccurate



DON'T
wait
until the
last
minute