Tips for Writing Effective Grant Proposals

- **Consider your rationale for seeking grant funding.**
  
  External reasons and motivators may include:
  - Supports research, development, and training programs
  - Provides travel funds
  - Funds dissemination of research activities and products
  - Supports, invests in, and reinvests in the research infrastructure
  - Enables the production of publications
  - Creates salary savings
  - Generates indirect costs
  - Leads to academic economic independence
  - Contributes to economic development
  - Other(s)
  
  Internal reasons and motivators may include:
  - Facilitates academic freedom
  - Provides autonomy
  - Manifests professional commitment
  - Assists in fulfilling the “academic” work ethic
  - Contributes to self-actualization
  - Other(s)

- **Identify a significant need and propose a solution.**
  
  In your grant proposal, clearly articulate a problem or need, preferably one of current national interest. Describe how your proposed project will provide a solution to this problem or need. Support your proposed solution by citing relevant literature and describing the results of prior work in the field that you have done. Build on prior work or pilot studies. Describe the available resources and the expertise of the individuals that will be brought to bear on the problem.

- **Identify goals and objectives with measurable outcomes.**
  
  Clearly state the goals and objectives for your project and make sure that they are linked to the basic problem and the solution that you’ve proposed. Make sure that the goals and objectives have measurable outcomes and so are linked to your evaluation plan.

- **Look for grant agencies and programs that match your goals and objectives.**
  
  Research available funding agencies, and target agencies and programs that have the closest fit with your aims. However, do not limit your grant-seeking efforts to a single source. Study requests for proposals (RFPs) and past awards in specific programs to get an idea of the kind of projects that are likely to be supported. Check eligibility requirements to make certain you are eligible for funding. Contact the granting agency before you write your proposal to make certain that your idea fits the guidelines of the grant program.

- **Closely adhere to the requirements of the RFP.**
  
  Address the priorities and focus of the RFP. Follow the requirements for the proposal that are laid out in the RFP precisely. Many proposals are disqualified because they fail to include a required component. Organize the proposal according to the categories identified in the RFP, for example by using the same headings in your proposal as in the RFP. Format the proposal according to the requirements; granting agencies often specify things such as font, margins, spacing, and page/word limits. Make sure that all required attachments are included.
• **Develop a clear evaluation plan linked to your goals, objectives, and outcomes.**
  Make certain that your evaluation plan clearly links to your goals and objectives and can get at measurable outcomes. Your evaluation questions should guide the evaluation. Consider developing an evaluation plan that utilizes mixed methods and different assessment tools. Some granting agencies require an independent external evaluator; when that is the case, identify an evaluator with whom you can build a good working relationship and work with the evaluator to craft the evaluation plan.

• **Write in a clear and concise style.**
  Grant-writing is not the same as writing for publication. You need to be more concise and precise about what you intend to do. Use short, clear sentences and active voice. Avoid jargon; reviewers may not be familiar with it. Make sure to have someone proofread the proposal to eliminate errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation, which can leave a bad impression on reviewers.

• **Maintain a consistent theme throughout the proposal.**
  Keep a problem and solution focus throughout your proposal. Focus on the problem you seek to address, what you propose to accomplish, why you are qualified to conduct the project, and how you will measure your results. Make sure the proposal is well-written, interesting, and persuasive.

• **Be creative.**
  Take a unique or innovative approach to the problem that you’re attempting to address. Think outside the box. A different or unusual approach is apt to stand out from the crowd for reviewers who may be looking at dozens of proposals.

• **Address underrepresented and underserved participants/populations.**
  While it may not be appropriate for every grant proposal, many grant programs seek to address the needs of underserved populations, and even programs that are not overtly targeted at underserved populations may award higher scores to proposals that address these populations. In education, linking with schools that serve a high proportion of minority or free/reduced lunch students may help to meet this goal.

• **Work with the Business Office and provide plenty of lead time.**
  Work closely with the Business Office to develop the project budget and to make sure that requirements are fully addressed. Provide as much lead time as possible; the university recommends that proposals go to the Division of Sponsored Programs (DSP) at least a week in advance of the due date. Make sure you do not miss the deadline.

• **Build partnerships and collaborations.**
  Most grant projects require partnerships, e.g., among universities, among colleges, between the university and PK-12 schools. Build the necessary partnerships and collaborative relationships well in advance of when the proposal will be due. Make sure that all of the partners are supportive of the project and understand their roles. Get formal letters of support from project partners to confirm their commitment to the project to include as part of the proposal.

• **Be persistent.**
  After a grant is submitted, follow up and stay in touch with the granting agency. Don’t be pest, but politely check on the status of your proposal. If you are unsuccessful, don’t give up. Use the reviewers’ comments to improve the proposal and submit it again. Grant applicants are rarely successful the first time. It often takes several rounds of submissions and revisions to craft a successful proposal that receives funding.