How to write a grant proposal: The basics

1. **Identify the research question**
   a. What gaps exist in your field?
   b. What questions remain that have not been answered?
   c. What research would bring about a transformative change in your field?

2. **Determine what your needs are**
   a. What do you need that you currently lack?
   b. How much money will you need to answer your question?

3. **Determine your fit with the funder**
   a. Examine funder mission statements and priority areas.
   b. Consider how your proposed work aligns with the funder.

4. **Write your proposal**
   a. Thoroughly read the guidelines from the foundation and follow instructions **exactly**. Not following the rules will often get your proposal rejected without review.
   b. Know your audience and write in a way that engages them. Avoid passive tense when possible.
   c. Clearly state why your proposed project is important and describe how it aligns with the priorities of the foundation.

5. **Edit your proposal**
   a. Ask the Foundation Relations team to review and provide feedback on your proposal from the perspective of the funder.
   b. Consider asking others in your field for feedback to strengthen your proposal (both within and outside Ohio State.)

6. **Submit before the deadline** – allow yourself plenty of time to create a complete, compliant and well-written proposal.

Components of a grant proposal

Each foundation has specific guidelines for proposals, so read the funding announcement thoroughly before writing yours. In general, these are the general proposal sections required by many funders.

1. Title page. This gives foundations and reviewers the first impression of your proposal. Keep it specific and descriptive.
2. Summary / Abstract. The synopsis of your proposal. It should be written so that it could be understood on its own, often by both specialists and a lay audience.

3. Problem statement / statement of need. Describe what the issue is or what need will be met by the project. Identify the target audience who will benefit from the work in the proposal. Write this focused on the foundation's interest, rather than yours.

4. Specific research aims. These are the goals / objectives of your proposed research. These should be organized in a logical sequence.

5. Background and significance. Describe the current state of knowledge, what gaps remain, and why your proposal is important. Discuss how this will advance your field and / or how it will help your target audience. Emphasize the innovation of your proposed work and why / how it can do something that is currently lacking.

6. Preliminary studies. Incorporate any previous data you have that can support your proposal. Often, preliminary data is not necessary, but it does strengthen the proposal and give reviewers confidence that you can complete the proposed work. This could go into the Background section or serve as its own section.

7. Research plan and methods. Clearly describe how you will achieve your goals – for example, the activities or experiments you will conduct, the personnel required to complete the project, the data you will collect and how you will analyze it, how you will measure success of the project, and what your timeline is. You can also describe potential challenges or limitations and what you will do if you encounter them, which helps reduce criticism from reviewers.

8. Budget. Budgets must be reasonable and realistic. Most foundations ask for a budget justification, which explains budget line items in detail. Check the announcement guidelines to see what costs are allowed and what the maximum budget is.

9. Biosketches, resources and facilities. These are supporting documents that provide evidence that PIs are qualified, supported, and have the necessary resources to successfully complete the proposed work.