

## TIPS FOR WRITING A SUCCESSFUL PROPOSAL

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### A. Getting Started

- Before you begin, know the project for which you seek funding. Display knowledge, background, current information about the project or related field(s), its significance in the discipline, and the relationship of this research to your previous scholarship.
- Choose funding agencies whose priorities fund projects similar to the one you are proposing.
- Do not limit your funding search to one source.
- Look for all available information about funding source and proposal guidelines. Check eligibility, average size of awards and maximum amount available, previous awards, proposal requirements and format, deadlines, evaluation criteria and process.
- Speak with a program officer, previous reviewers, and successful colleagues so you begin the process armed with as much information as possible.
- Outline the details of the proposal before you begin to write ---- narrative, timetable, methodology, budget, personnel, and institutional commitment.
- Know the literature and use references to strengthen the need for funding your project.

### B. Suggestions on writing

- Base the proposal on a good idea that fills a gap in the knowledge of your discipline.
- Be realistic --- Ask for as much funding as you really need to support the period of time in which you can successfully complete the research.
- Use language that is straightforward, concise, and direct. Be sure that you clearly and completely outline the project.
- Write to the audience who will review the proposal. KNOW who the audience is (e.g., peer reviewers, foundation directors/trustees, etc.)
- Explain the urgency/timeliness of your work.
- Explain why YOU are the person to complete this research, i.e., provide evidence that the project can be completed successfully by you.
- Read the guidelines carefully. Then read them again. After you have completed the proposal, read them once more.
- Follow the directions COMPLETELY. Some proposals demand type size, margins, page numbers in particular places, etc.
- If appropriate, describe effective dissemination.
- If appropriate, describe credible evaluation plan.
- Be sure that your audience can understand your proposal. Write specifically to the reviewers and/or program officers who will read your proposal.
- Provide updated materials, i.e., c.v., literature references, etc.
- Be honest. State what you expect to be the outcomes, what pitfalls or alternative approaches could arise and contingency plans you might investigate.
- Use terminology correctly— e.g., Goals and Objectives: 1) Goals are broad statements of what you want to do; 2) Objectives are specific, measurable outcomes— promised improvements in the situation you described in the need statement. They can and must be evaluated and assessed.

- Make sure that you are consistent and that figures and/or text in the narrative, budget, and abstract, all say the same thing.
- Use a style that displays your competence, your excitement for the work, and the importance and timeliness of the project. (Passion and urgency are persuasive features in a good proposal.)
- After you have completed the narrative and the budget, write the abstract and create a title. It is important that these components represent the entire proposal. Since it is the first thing the reviewer and/or program officer will see, be sure that it is accurate, describes your proposal, and reflects the goals, objectives, and importance of your research.
- The abstract or proposal summary: May be the first (or only) thing a funding agency reads; it should be clear and concise; it should describe who you are, the scope of the project, and should give the project cost.

### C. Getting the Proposal Out the Door

- Understand that the first draft needs revision. Get help. Ask colleagues within and beyond your discipline to review it. Ask your grants director to edit.
- Check deadlines carefully. If the proposal is sent electronically, be prepared to submit days in advance. Make sure your institution is correctly registered. If the submission is not electronic, do not confuse “postmarked by” with “must be received in this office by.” Know that deadlines are not negotiable.
- Make sure well in advance that the key institutional officials are aware of your proposal application and are prepared to sign-off on it. If institutional commitment is a component, be sure you have written confirmation. (Some colleges/universities demand proof of matching funds before signing off on a proposal. Know the institutional policy of your institution.)
- Use the guidelines as a checklist and make sure everything in the proposal is included, in order, and send it correctly and punctually.
- Make enough extra copies after submission to send to those individuals and/or offices at your institution who have been involved in the process and/or who will be affected if the proposal is funded.

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#### **CUR Proposal Writing Institute – July 19-23, 2007 University of Nebraska, Kearney, Nebraska**

This Institute will bring together faculty and administrators interested in preparing proposals for submission to external funding agencies. The four-day institute will consist of one-on-one work with a mentor, small group discussions, writing and critiquing of proposals, and plenary sessions. The Institute has been developed to assist novice to experienced proposal writers in drafting complete proposals for submission.

Applicants are requested to submit a one to two paragraph outline of their proposal and the name of the intended funding agency and/or program in the on-line application. This will help us determine how we can best support your proposal efforts. You can go to the CUR homepage, click on programs, and find all the materials needed for application to the CUR Proposal Writing Institute. From 30-50 participants are paired with facilitators who are experts in their fields. Deadline is June 15. After June 1<sup>st</sup>, registrations will be accepted on a rolling basis until the Institute is filled. Cost is \$950 per accepted participant (CUR institutional members) \$1050 (non-CUR Institutional member).