

Ten Tips for Competitive Grant Writing

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Competitive Approach		Uncompetitive Approach	
Why This Is Beneficial		Why This Is Unwise	
Before You Write a Word			
Think through your needs and develop a fundable project with compelling outcomes	Develop a feasible project that advances your organization's mission and is likely to meet a funder's goals	Improvise and develop your proposal on the fly	Waste time solving problems and changing course, causing concern for collaborators, especially when submission deadline is near
Getting Serious about Your Project			
Develop reasonable goals and objectives	Demonstrate to reviewers that the project's scope is SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound). Organization will more likely be successful and gain credibility for future proposals	Set unclear or over-ambitious targets	Objectives can't be met or evaluated. Funder will view project as a failure and a waste of money. Organization will lose credibility for future proposals
Consult experienced grant seekers or grant writers	Talk through project scope and budget details, discuss funder search strategies, and look at example proposals	Develop project and proposal independently and ask for input when proposal is almost completed	Lose outsider's perspective in project/proposal development and evaluation. Reduce time and opportunity to make corrections or adjustments to proposal and budget
Research logical potential funders with similar goals/mission	Funders see an opportunity to advance their mission through your project. Is funder's timeline compatible with the project's timeline?	"Everybody loves a project about [your idea here], right?"	Funders will not dedicate money to a project outside their declared service priorities--waste of time for all. Organization will lose credibility for future proposals

Develop a Concept Paper , a short description (2-4 pages, with budget) which introduces the project to potential funders	Organizes and documents essential project information: Need, Goals/Objectives, Methodology/Personnel, Impact, Evaluation, Budget. Can be reviewed in advance by funder, then expanded into a proposal	"It's all in my head, so I can develop it as I go along"	Project organization and development consumes time when submission deadline may be pressing. Proposal components may conflict or be unclear or omitted.
Identify and begin discussions with collaborators in the community and/or at BSU	Demonstrate to reviewers that the project team fulfills grant requirements and has sufficient capacity in funding and expertise to implement the objectives successfully	"I know people. This will just take a couple of phone calls"	Negotiations about work and resource commitments take time and usually must go through channels. Project may lack key participants, expertise, or documented work plan or not meet proposal requirements
Writing Your Proposal			
Create a practical timeline for developing your proposal package and stick to it	Competitive proposals need significant time for development, partner negotiations, writing, editing, review, and revision	"I can whip this together" or "We can knock this out"	Reviewers will penalize weaknesses in proposal's concept development, partner agreements, and narrative text
Follow the directions in the funder's proposal guidelines to the letter	Provide reviewers with compelling project information in the prescribed format. Organization is credible and meets all requirements for proposal review	"I know what the proposal guidelines say, but my way is better"	Reviewers will wonder if organization can understand instructions and be a reliable project partner; funder may decline to review the proposal. Organization will lose credibility for future proposals
If an instruction in the guidelines is confusing, ask for clarification	With full understanding of the information required, organization can best describe how the project meets the funder's goals	"I assume that this is what they mean"	Organization may fail to provide key information about the project or fulfill a proposal requirement
Write clearly and concisely	Provide reviewers with all essential project details in compelling, easily understandable language, saving time and mental energy	Use grandiose prose, buzzwords, and jargon to make the project seem more impressive	Funders won't risk scarce resources on a project they can't understand