GRANT WRITING 101
SEMINAR: WRITING A FUNDABLE GRANT

Susan L. Brown, Co-Director NCFMR
Overview of the Workshop

- Preparing to write a grant
- The proposal process
- The review process
- Funding sources
- Concluding remarks
Why Write a Small Grant?

**PI**
- Research support
- Salary support

**Institution**
- Indirect funding
- Salary savings
- Prestige

**Science**
- High quality research
- Advance the field
How to be Competitive

- Be a productive scholar
- Network with colleagues
- Be ready to respond to opportunities that arise
Identifying Opportunities

- Colleagues
- University
- Professional Organizations
- World Wide Web
The Proposal Process

1. Commit yourself
2. Do your homework
3. Develop project description
4. Assemble research team
5. Begin administrative tasks
6. Write proposal
7. Obtain feedback from colleagues
8. Revise and copyedit
9. Submit proposal
10. Obtain feedback from funder
Step #1: Commit Yourself

☐ Begin with an idea that evolves from your prior work and expertise

☐ Choose a deadline well in advance (if possible) and stick to it

☐ Send a letter of intent if necessary
Step #2: Do your Homework

- Review funder’s list of supported projects
- Read a successful proposal
- Begin to update your review of the literature on the topic (venture beyond your discipline)
- Identify data source/subjects
Step #3: Develop Description

Write a one page project description that includes:

- Research topic, primary research questions
- Significance of the research
- Theoretical framework
Step #3: Develop Description

- Specific hypotheses
  - Specify independent and dependent variables
  - State directional hypotheses
  - Identify mechanisms Methodology and data collection methods

- Estimated budget (direct costs)

- Time line for the project completion
Step #3: Develop Description

- Plan for disseminating research (and data, if applicable) findings

**THEN**

- Circulate your description to colleagues for feedback
- Email funder if you have questions
Step #4: Assemble the Team

- Consider whether you will conduct this research solo or with others
- Size of team will vary by the scope of the grant
- Complementarity is critical

**Team Members**
- Co-investigators
- Statistical programmer
- Interviewers
- Graduate research assistants
- Consultants
Step #5: Administrative Details

- Carefully review the application instructions
  - Substantive topic
  - Length and formatting
  - Budget (restrictions, maximum amount, indirects allowable)
  - PI qualifications
  - Due date and submission method (paper, email)

- Create your own checklist with all of the components of the grant
Step #5: Administrative Details

- Seek HSRB approval

- Begin developing and drafting your budget
  - Consult with department chair, other administrators

- Initiate contact with campus grants office to
  - Prepare budget
  - Submit application (what is the lead time?)
Step #6: Write the Proposal

☐ Follow directions!
  - Pay attention to the application instructions and conform to all requirements

☐ Use the format provided by the funder. Otherwise, use NIH sections as a guideline:
  - Specific Aims—what are your research questions?
  - Significance—why is this topic important?
  - Innovation—what is unique about your approach?
  - Approach—how will you conduct the study?
  - Prior studies—what are your qualifications?
Step #6: Write the Proposal

- Anticipate making several rounds of revisions
  - Aim to be logical, concise, and compelling

- Avoid fatal flaws:
  - Incremental contribution or failure to adequately articulate the potential impact of the project
  - Incomplete or outdated literature review
  - Inconsistencies in the proposal
  - Unrealistic goals; not feasible
  - Failure to follow application instructions
Step #7: Obtain Feedback

- Ask colleagues to provide feedback on your proposal (plan ahead to ensure enough time)
  - Ask both an expert and a generalist
  - Ask colleagues who have successfully competed for grants and/or serve on grant review panels

- While others are reviewing your proposal, you can be working on the administrative aspects of the application
Step #8: Revise and Copyedit

- This is likely your only chance to submit this application—make sure it is the best it can be.

- Revise your proposal in response to suggestions from colleagues.

- Set aside and re-read with fresh eyes.

- Give the application a final review for editorial issues (check references carefully).
Step #8: Revise and Copyedit

☐ Prepare a cover letter that briefly states:
  - Your topic
  - Why it is well-suited for this funding agency
  - Why it is significant and likely to move the field forward

☐ Spend some time on the abstract—it is the first (and could be the only) part of the application that gets read
Step #9: Submit your Proposal

- Be sure the complete application and materials are viewed and approved by various offices on campus.

- Plan to be in the office on the day that the grant will be submitted so you can assist with any problems.
Step #10: Obtain Feedback

- Even if your grant is not funded, the agency will likely provide some substantive feedback
  - Review the comments and think about how they would strengthen your research
  - Use the comments as a way to assess which parts of your application were weak

- Many good applications are not funded
  - NICHD payline is roughly 10%
  - NCFMR funds top 4 out of 25-35 applications
How the Review Process Works

- Top scholars in the area serve as reviewers
- Each reviewer is asked to evaluate multiple applications
- The evaluation form includes specific and general ratings as well as an overall assessment
- Overall ratings are summed across reviewers to rank order proposals
# Small Grants Competition Reviewer Form, 2011

## PI INFORMATION
- PI Name
- Project Title
- Reviewer Name

## RATINGS

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<th>1 - Poor</th>
<th>2 - Fair</th>
<th>3 - Satisfactory</th>
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## OVERALL REVIEW

Please indicate your overall assessment of the proposed project. Only 4 projects will be funded.

- Outstanding-definitely fund
- Recommend funding
- Proposal is acceptable, but low priority for funding
- Proposal should NOT be funded
Funding Sources

- Research Centers
  - NCFMR
  - Poverty Research Centers (Wisconsin, California-Davis, Stanford)
  - Center for Violence and Injury Prevention
    - Building Careers for Research in Child Maltreatment and Intimate Partner Violence
      (http://www.savirweb.org/assets/416_earlycareerscholarapplica.pdf)
Funding Sources

- Professional Organizations
- State and local funding opportunities
- University support for research and grant activities
- Private foundations
  - Robert Wood Johnson, WT Grant, Spencer
- Federal funding
  - NIH, NSF
Conclusions

Be aware
• Pay attention for funding opportunity announcements

Be ready
• Establish a strong research record to ensure you are well-equipped to respond to calls for applications

Be organized
• Create a checklist and budget your time
Conclusions

- **Be compelling**
  - Sell your idea—describe how will your work impact the field

- **Be responsive**
  - Share your application with colleagues and revise it according to their suggestions

- **Be determined**
  - If you are not successful the first time, don’t give up
thank you!
brownsl@bgsu.edu

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