The Top 10 Things You Should Know About Writing a Proposal

With Thanks to Dr. Tom Taylor, TIG
10. Preparation

• Know what the important questions are in your field of work.
• Know what’s already been done.
• **Talk to the program officer** who directs the program you are interested in. Visit if possible. Get to know them and help them get to know your interests and capabilities.
• Talk to International Programs too.
10. Preparation

• Check out the competition. See what other projects in your field are being funded.

• Pay attention to notices of webinars or FAQs about a particular grant program. They are there to help you.

• Get preliminary data through seed grants, etc.

• READ THE RFP CAREFULLY. READ IT AGAIN.
9. Opportunity

Set up a profile on grants.gov or other sites
Pertinent RFPs
Foundations
State—Centers of Excellence, APUC, etc
Private Sector

Creating your own opportunities
Sometimes these come from talking to your program officer
8. Collaboration

Many important problems fall in between specific disciplines.

Some grant opportunities require interdisciplinary collaboration.

Different players bring different skills to the team.

You can’t develop these relationships at the last minute.
7. Risk Taking

Too much risk and too little are both bad.

Don’t slice the salami too thin

It is easy to identify an impressive mountain. But that is not enough! You must convince your reader that you stand some chance of climbing the mountain. (Peyton-Jones & Bundy)
NSF and some other agencies have programs to fund “emergency” research; for example, on the Gulf Oil Spill in 2010
5. Communication

*Have a clear hypothesis.*

A Key Question: *How would a reviewer know if your research had succeeded?*

Regular team meetings are critical.

Charts and graphs can be useful. Make sure they will be clear in black and white copies.
5. Communication

Quality of writing matters: pay attention to grammar, syntax, punctuation. Get help if necessary.

If it’s a group effort, have one person edit the proposal so it’s all in one voice.

Keep reading the RFP. Make sure you are responsive to all of it.
4. Persistence

If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!

- Read your reviews carefully and think about them.
- To every unfair, unjustified, and ill-informed criticism from your reader, respond “That’s very interesting... here is what I intended to say... how could I rephrase it so that you would have understood that”?

(Peyton-Jones & Bundy)
4. Persistence

The most important word in grantsmanship is *persistence*.

Be positive in your response, thanking the reviewers for their insightful advice. But don’t be afraid to respectfully disagree if appropriate.

Frank Waxman, Oklahoma EPSCoR
3. Passion

You’re more likely to be successful if you are writing a proposal on a topic you care about.
2. Work Ethic

Writing a proposal is hard work!

Watch out for respectable substitution

"Wow, the house sure is clean these days. I'm guessing you have writer's block again... am I right?"
1. Time Management

Make a timeline for your grant preparation process.

Try to write something every day so that you maintain momentum.

If you are brain-dead from writing about science, work on the admin parts.
The Most Important Thing

Get to know your program officer!

Calls and visits are better than emails. Build a relationship