Excerpts from “Writing a grant: Dos and Don’ts”

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1. Planning a proposal

- Identify
  - Topic
  - Strategic area
  - Expertise and interaction needed to do the project

*Make sure that the proposal fits with the overall aims of the granting agency and that you are eligible*
Planning a proposal

- Identify team of applicants with the complementary expertise and get them involved

- Identify and recruit non-University partners *(if applicable)*
  - Industry
  - Governmental
  - NGOs
2. Getting started

- Start as early as possible to be ready BEFORE the deadlines
- Get personal data forms (CVs) completed right at the start. Remember that you can ask the Research Support Center for help. Highlight accomplishments pertinent to the proposal.
Getting started

- Establish a to-do list:
  - Assign tasks
  - Establish time-table for completion of specific tasks (1st, 2nd, … final drafts of the research proposal, budget, letters of collaboration, signatures, photocopies, etc)
  - Recruit your Research Facilitator
3. The research proposal

- Describe the problem and why it is important
- Set objectives
  - Long term (a vision of what you would like to be able to do but can’t given the current state of knowledge)
  - Short term (a list of specific objectives to be achieved in the course of the projects)
The research proposal

Proposals should be hypothesis-driven. One or more testable hypotheses should be formulated in the form:

- We propose that ‘The bigger they are, the harder they fall’ and we will use the following model, approaches, techniques… to prove it.’
An up-to-date summary of the state of knowledge of the field, including opposing theories and what directions other groups are taking.

Should serve to situate the research problem.

If possible, emphasize your work in the area.
Methods

- A brief description of overall approaches and techniques that will be employed to tackle the problem (*if approach is novel, say so!*)
- Followed by relatively detailed description of model, techniques, equipment, criteria, statistics (*show that you know what you are talking about*)
Methods (continued)

- Try to include a graphical or tabular representation of the time-line of the project (*to show that it can be done in the course of the granting period*)
- If possible, add preliminary or otherwise representative data (*show that you are technically able to do it!*
The research team

- Describe expertise, roles, responsibilities and collaborations among group members and those who provided letters of support/collaboration (important to identify the project-specific complementary expertise)

- Also roles and responsibilities of non-University partners (append ‘GOOD’ letter signed by somebody with authority)
Training

- Personnel
  - Describe technical skills required (can propose names with existing expertise or will hire and train new personnel)

- Students
  - Why is the project an appropriate teaching milieu?
  - What degrees they will earn
Relevance

- Why is the project important?
- Who will benefit?
- What important question will be answered?
- Future directions, depending on your results
Feasibility

- Have at your disposal all the required knowledge, skills, infrastructure and collaborations to do the project as described.
- Be realistic when stating timelines, workloads, scope of the project and possible results or outcomes of the research.
4. The budget

- Justify and detail items as much as possible (add cost quotations where available)
  - Participants compensations
  - Materials
  - Computer hardware and software
  - Equipment (*provide quotation expensive ones*)
  - Licenses and other fees
  - Travel, conferences and publication costs
  - Students, technicians (*justify number and pay scales*)
  - In-kind contributions (*adds weight to feasibility*)
5. The CVs

- Don’t be afraid to mention even minor or old presentations or accomplishments if they seem relevant to this project.
- Be strategic in the presentation of your CV: make it look good and show the compatibility of skills and expertise with your teammates.
- If you are requesting to be considered as new scholar, verify that you qualify as such.
- If you had a career interruption, say so and make your case in the application.
Address former reviewers comments!

- If you are reapplying with a similar project, don’t forget to address the former reviewers comments. The committee will be expecting this sheet on your proposal.
- Acknowledge positive comments.
- Explain changes that you have made or positively and politely defend your previous position (*on an item by item basis*).
- Your tone is very important!
Photocopies

- Must be of high quality (*after all, this is what the reviewers are going to read!*)
- Pictures and figures are preferably all originals
General dos

- Use the summary to sell your project and remember that if approved, this is the information that will be used for promotional purposes.
- Have a clear and simple hypothesis and provide clearly stated objectives, rationale and approaches.
- Provide a clear perspective of relevance.
- Provide a general introduction that describes both the state-of-the-art and your place in the field.
General dos (continued)

- Discuss alternative approaches
- Provide an appropriate level of experimental detail
- Provide realistic expectations for outcomes and their impacts
- Establish the expertise and personnel necessary to accomplish the work
- Provide original, clearly labeled figures and easy to read copies
- Respect the format requirements throughout the proposal.
General don’ts

- Cut & paste from other sections in the summary
- Leave your hypothesis buried in the body of the grant
- Assume that the relevance of your work will be obvious to the reviewer
- Describe your accomplishments disproportionately
- Provide excessive numbers of figures or poor quality figures
- Fiddle with the length requires (margins, fonts, spacing)
General don’ts (continued)

- Claim outcomes that are unrealistic (our results will cure all cancers!)
- Overwhelm the reviewer with unnecessary details
- Try to fool yourself or the reviewer
- Go off on unnecessary tangents (even if you find them interesting)
Therefore

- Minimize their effort to assimilate the information
- Convince them of the field’s importance, the relevance and clarity of the question and your ability to answer it
- Write lucidly and be grammatically correct
- Limit the number of abbreviations
- Be ready before the deadline so you can ask the Review Committee to comment on your proposal