Federal Grant Writing

Identifying Opportunities and Developing Proposals

Dana Catron, Deputy Director, Arrowhead Center | March 6, 2024

BE BOLD. Shape the Future.

Benefits of Federal Grants

- Non-dilutive funding source
  - Don't give up equity if you are a business
  - Don't have to pay them back
- Fund wide range of projects
- Leverage previous awards for additional funding

Finding a Grant

- **Grants.gov** (https://www.grants.gov/): This is the primary source for finding and applying for federal grants. It provides a comprehensive database of all federal grant opportunities, allowing users to search for funding by agency, category, or specific criteria.

- **USAspending.gov** (www.usaspending.gov): Offers open data on federal spending, including detailed information on federal grants, loans, and other financial assistance

- **Federal Funding and Technical Assistance for Climate Adaptation** (www.epa.gov): Lists competitive grant opportunities and other federal funding resources for climate adaptation and resiliency projects

- **Agency Websites**: Check often and sign up for newsletters/updates

Common Solicitation Phrasing:

- **NOFO**: Notice of Funding Opportunity

- **RFP:** Request for Proposal

- **FOA:** Funding Opportunity Announcement

- **RFA:** Request for Application

- **PA:** Program Announcement

- **BAA:** Broad Agency Announcement

- **SGA:** Solicitation for Grant Application

- **NOSI:** Notice of Special Interest

Who is Eligible?

What kind of organization/entity are you? Eligibility will vary based on the grant.

- Government
- Education
- Nonprofits
- For-profits
- Small Businesses

Common Registrations:
- Unique Entity ID (UEI)
- System for Award Management (SAM)
- Grants.gov registration
- Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Agency-specific registrations
- Contact APEX Accelerator for free assistance with registrations

*Never pay for registrations!!

Before you start…

Step back and think about why you are submitting a proposal

- Argument for why your project deserves funding

- **Remember:** the proposal should communicate and persuade both the:

  - Content of the work

  - Competence of the proposer

- Ultimately, your proposal should be persuasive

  - Don't use marketing and fluffy language

  - Be direct and to the point of what you are developing, who will care about it, and why they will care about it

  - Convince the reviewer (and agency) that you have the resources, expertise, and wherewithal to complete the project

Best Practices

Getting Started

- Print out and **<u>READ</u>** the solicitation
  - Make sure to read any "Important Information" or "Revision Notes" sections
  - Pay close attention to the "Instructions" section – this will contain all relevant information on how to format and organize your proposal
  - Read details of the topic carefully (e.g., if there are references cited, look them up)
  - Identify proposal sections – use these in your proposal
  - What are the acceptable font sizes, style types, character limits, etc.?
  - Are they picky about line spacing, page margins, page limits (almost always), etc.?
  - What are the formatting requirements for the title page and abstract, if required?
  - Do they care where page numbers go?

Getting Started

- Review agency priorities

- Identify the contact person(s) for that solicitation

- Keep an eye on the platform/website for any changes or amendments; **sign up for updates**

Getting Started

- **Re-read** the solicitation

- Create an **outline**; assign roles if working on a team

- Create a **timeline**/reverse calendar

- If the evaluation criteria aren't in the RFP, consider contacting the POC and clarifying

- Start writing sections
  - Strive for consistency (avoid sloppy and abrupt sections that don't flow with the rest of the proposal)

- Remember scope (both in terms of what you are proposing and how you are proposing it)

- **Leave time for review**

Also Think About:

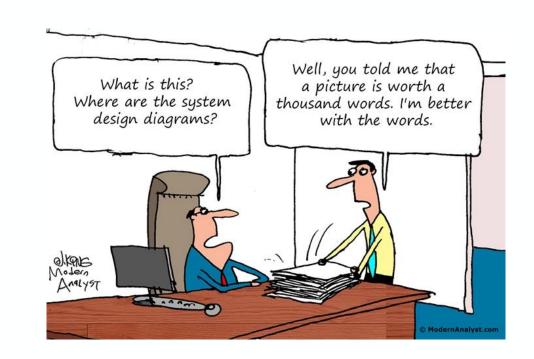|	
The Deadline	Is it feasible to put a quality package together?
Funding Amount	Is it enough to cover your project? Will you need to cost-match? Do you have the ability to cost-match?
Eligibility	Are you eligible?
Restrictions	Location, non-profit, specific projects, etc.
Goals	Do your goals align with those of the funder?
PI Experience	Are you and your team qualified?
Timeframe	When will the award be announced? What is the period of performance (POP)?

Align With the Funder

- Make sure your project aligns with the mission and goals of the funder
- Check the solicitation – it will have information on priorities and goals of the funding
- Explore the funder's website
  - Find out what they've funded in the past
  - Look for their goals and funding priorities
  - What is their mission?
  - Who will be reviewing the proposal?

A picture (or diagram) is worth a thousand words
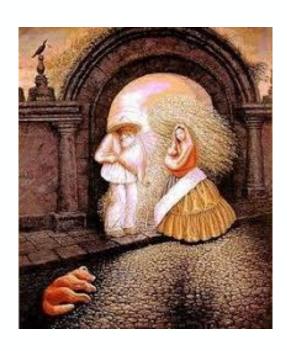
- Show your vision for the project
- Other diagrams
  - Research that has been conducted (diagram or chart)
  - How elements link together (flow chart)
  - Workplan schedule (Gantt chart or timeline)
- However:
  - Make sure you choose the right diagram for what you are trying to convey
  - Make sure it looks professional
  - Don't rely on color (reviewers may print in black and white)
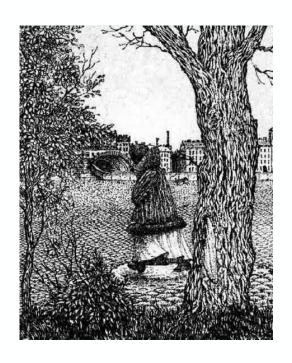 - Make sure you describe your graphic

A **picture** (or diagram) is worth a thousand words

What do you want the reviewer to see? What might they see instead?
Be explicit to reduce the chance that they come to their own conclusions.

SMART Objectives

Specific: Who? What? When? Where? How?

Measurable: How will you measure success?

Attainable/Achievable: Can it be accomplished without scope creep?

Relevant/Realistic: How aligned is your proposal with agency priorities?

Time-bound: What is the POP? When will activities be accomplished?

SMART Objectives

Objective	**Specific** Who? What? When? Where? Why?	**Measurable** How will you measure success? How will you measure progress? Typically a quantitative measure.	**Attainable/ Achievable** Can you accomplish it without scope creep? How will you carry out activities? Is it reasonable to complete the goal in the time allocated?	**Relevant/ Realistic** How aligned are you with agency priorities? How aligned is this with your business strategy?	**Time-bound** What is the POP? When will activities be accomplished? How long will activities take?
# 1					
# 2					
# 3					

Proposal Writing Process

- **Read** the RFP/FOA/NOFO (and then read it again)
- Review funder priorities
- Make sure you have necessary registrations, documentation, etc.
- Create a game-plan
  - Storyboard
  - Outline
- Start writing sections
  - Strive for consistency (avoid sloppy and abrupt sections that don't flow with the rest of the proposal)

- Remember scope (both in terms of what you are proposing, and how you are proposing it)
- Craft a story
- What is your angle? Align with mission/funding priorities!
- Establish trust
- Obtain letters of support
- Don't wait until the last minute to start writing
- Leave time for review

When You Are Writing:

- **Plan first.** Make an outline, use a storyboard.

- **Write for your audience.** Who will be reviewing? What do they care about? What do they know?

- **Avoid extraneous detail.** Be concise. Use diagrams and figures. Less is more.

- **Identify proposal sections and answer every item.** Pull sections from RFP. Make a checklist and use a compliance matrix.

- **Align your approach with needs of the funder.** What are their priorities? How is what you are proposing aligned with those priorities? Why should they care about what you are proposing?

- **Acknowledge challenges, highlight strengths.** What can you leverage? What resources and expertise do you have access to? Who can you partner with to ensure your project is a success?

Skim Test

- Think back to style and delivery – on first glance, what does your proposal look like?

- Reviewers may have 30+ proposals to evaluate

- Have a compelling first page with compelling imagery to pass the skim test

- Make key concepts visual

- The entire document should look clean and professional

Don't fail the skim test!

Evaluation – Common Areas

- Is the proposal formatted according to the instructions?
- Have you presented a plausible solution in the proposal?
- Is the proposal organized, and does it respond to the basic layout requirement?
- Are all other proposal requirements met?
- Have you provided an acceptable delivery schedule?
- Have you demonstrated your capability to perform?
- How have you demonstrated your related experience or past performance history?
- Is your financial situation stable?
- Are you proposing a reasonable price for the project?
- Are your costing methods credible?

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.wipp.org/resource/resmgr/gm5_podcasts_rev/RFP_Help.pdf

Proposal Pitfalls

- **<u>Not following directions/instructions</u>**
  - Failure to understand the solicitation and governing regulations
- Ignoring existing solutions (or failing to complete some level of customer discovery)
- Incomplete/late submission
- Failure to demonstrate significance both in terms of impact and market
- Overly ambitious (gives the impression of lack of understanding of the challenges)
- Lack of measures of success
- Lack of technical detail (work plan should be the meat of proposal)
- Lack of understanding of agency needs
- Evaluation criteria components are not addressed

Resources

- Arrowhead Center: https://arrowheadcenter.nmsu.edu/
- New Mexico Minority Business Development Agency Business Center: https://www.nmmbda.com/
- Grants.gov Learning Center: https://www.grants.gov/learn-grants
- EPA Grants Training: https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-grants-management-training-applicants-and-recipients

Thank You!

Dana Catron
Deputy Director, Arrowhead Center
dderego@nmsu.edu