CRAFTING A WINNING RESEARCH PROPOSAL
OUTLINE

- Before you begin writing
- Customizing your proposal
- The genre of proposal writing
- Organizing your proposal
- After the first draft
- Proposal-specific writing tips and mechanics
- More resources
It's never too early to get started

- Most winning proposals are started 3+ months prior to deadline
- Summer and Winter Breaks should not be wasted!
- Allow ample time to pass proposals to colleagues, advisors
- Make a 5-year funding plan

Letter writers

- 6+ weeks notice
- Provide proposal, CV, bullets of most important aspects of your skillset and what you want them to emphasize in the letter

Set your own deadlines

- Use milestones to break up the task

Know word counts, eligibility, other specs before you start writing
Who is funding the grant/fellowship?
- Mission statements, key words

What is the goal of this particular grant?
- Expected results, types of candidates

What types of projects has the grant funded in the past?
- Quantitative or qualitative?
- Theory building or policymaking?
- Which disciplines?

What are the selection criteria?
- Often links with mission statements

Who reads the applications?
- Know your audience
**SALESMAНSHIP**

- Different grants, different pitches
- This is not the time to be modest. Talk yourself up!
- Are you qualified and competent enough to complete your project?
  - Previous training, languages, coursework, achievements, etc.
- What is significant about the project? Why is it important?
  - Fills a hole in the literature, tests an important theory, a step to World Peace
  - Importance is relative. How is it important to funders?
EVERY PROPOSAL MUST SHOW

What will we learn as the result of the proposed project that we don’t know now?

Why is it worth knowing?

How will we know that the conclusions are valid?

Why should you conduct the study, i.e. How have you prepared?
ORGANIZING YOUR PROPOSAL

- Grabber
- Research objectives
- Research questions
- Methods
- Literature Review
- Expected results and broader impacts
THE GRABBER

- Grab the reader’s attention
  - Provocative question based on central research question
  - Provocative problem/enigma
  - Provocative statistic
  - State your central point
  - Some combination of these

- The central idea/question should stick in the reader’s mind hour later

- Put the what and why up front
  - Grants are funded on merit, not need, so a good proposal begins with a clear idea of the goals and objectives of the project and why it is significant

Workers do not organize unions; unions organize workers.

Population growth coupled with loss of arable land poses a threat to North African food security in the next decade.
Avoid foregone conclusions
Clear hypotheses
Avoid a laundry list of Qs
Numbered or bulleted, boldface or italicized
Not all grants require full literature reviews, but almost all will require you show knowledge of the field:
- Who else has asked similar questions?
- What did they find, and what didn’t they look into (which your work will)?

Again, tailor literature review to the funding agency:
- E.g. SSRC focuses on humanities-based social sciences (interdisciplinarity), and Wenner Gren on anthropological theory.
Amount of detail depends on the specific grant

Clarity

Explicitly link methods and questions
  i.e. why is this method the best way to answer your question?

Methods sections often include time frames
  (e.g. “January–March, I will conduct semi-structured interviews with ...”)

METHODS
DESIGN METHODOLOGY

- Clear and well thought out
  - Link questions and methods explicitly
- Measurement
  - Survey research
  - Quantitative
  - Qualitative
- Details
  - Clear times frame
- Feasibility
  - Think carefully about consider time frame, environment (e.g. internet access)
CONCLUSIONS/BROADER IMPACTS

- Why is the project important, again?
  - The “So, what?”

- Why is your project innovative?
  - (sometimes finish with:)
    - I will do X, Y and Z upon finishing my studies or after the grant period (proving your further worth)

- Impacts on your personal/professional trajectory

- the impacts for the mission of the funder (and maybe also your field)
  - What is important (i.e. a broader impact) depends on the funder
THE GENRE OF PROPOSAL WRITING

- Get to the point quickly!
- Readability
  - Use boldface, italics, and anything to make the proposal easier to read
- Clear, confident, & specific statements (avoid conditionals)
- Always keep guidelines in mind
- A good proposal is always readable, well-organized, grammatically correct, and understandable
- Be explicit about time frame of your project
  - Make use of milestones
  - Often tables can be handy and save space
- Be explicit about outcomes, and how you will measure success
PROPOSAL GRAMMAR

- Repetition
  - Use space wisely, but it’s also important to reiterate your main objective/question and why it’s important

- Self referential

- Read aloud

- Proposal specific grammar
  - Sentences <25 words unless you have a direct quote or serial commas
  - No passive voice unless absolutely necessary
  - No contractions
  - try to avoid repeated "I + verb" constructions, especially as lead sentence of paragraph.
  - Consistency with verb tense, and avoid conditional
  - Avoid forms of the verb “to be”
Instead of conditionals like can, could, would, hope to

Use strong verbs of intent like plan, envision, imagine, seek to

I would like to attend the Summer Language Workshop

By attending the Summer Language Workshop, I will
# ACTIVE VERBS

- Identify
- Assess
- Contrast
- Apply
- Examine
- Employ
- Illustrate
- Debate
- Integrate
- Predict
- Suggest
- Measure
- Distinguish
- Infer
- Synthesize
- Differentiate
- Translate
- Revise
- Generalize
- Evaluate
- Appraise
- Compose
- Collect
- Complete
- Deduce
- More [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#)
- Estimated
- Gathered
- Instructed
- Assembled
- Detected
- Created
- Initiated
- Illustrated
- Guided
- Classified
- Compiled
- Critiqued
- Generated
- Hypothesized
Circulate your proposal for feedback

- Colleagues, advisors, friends, GGC, past winners of this fellowship. Choose readers in accordance with particular grant (e.g. NSF v. Fulbright)
- Allot 5+ weeks for longer proposals (especially during summer)

5-6 drafts

- Try explaining (verbally) what the project will do/accomplish and why it’s important
- Critical feedback is good feedback
HOW GRADGRANTS CAN HELP

- Databases for running searches
- Resources for grant-writing
- One-on-one consultations
  - External funding
- Open hours a
  - Internal funding, database searches, questions
- Workshops
  - Personal statements (February 24)
  - TBA (April 6)
- SAA Vacancies
- Twitter page with up-to-date funding opportunities @IUGradGrants

Wells Library, East Tower, 5th floor
PROPOSAL WRITING RESOURCES

- Indiana University
  - GGC
    - Proposal editing, office hours
  - Writing Tutorial Services

- Online Resources
  - SSRC’s The Art of Writing Proposals

- Grant-specific sites
  - NSF GRFP
  - Fulbright