HELPFUL HINTS FOR WRITING GRANTS: A REFRESHER

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www.keepitsweet.co.uk

www.linkedin.com

Refresher Training

What is a proposal?

- The proposal is a "selling device"

- What are you selling?
  - You and your ability to do the work
  - The idea you have for solving the problem
  - Your institution as a setting for the work

thefsteam.com

Different Styles of Writing

Academic writing:

Researcher-centered:
Scholarly passion
Past oriented:
Work you have done
Expository:
Explaining to reader
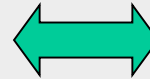**Impersonal:**
Objective, dispassionate
Individualistic:
Usually solo activity
Verbosity rewarded:
Few length constraints:
Specialized terminology:
"Insider jargon"

Thesis, theme, theory:
World of ideas

Grant writing:

Sponsor-centered:
Service attitude
Future oriented:
Work you wish to do
Persuasive:
"Sell" the reader
Personal:
Convey excitement
Team-oriented:
Feedback needed
Brevity rewarded:
Strict length constraints
Accessible language:
Broad audience

Project, activities, outcomes:
World of action

From a Robert Porter Workshop, UTK, 2012

Put yourself in the buyer's shoes

www.katescreativespace.com

- They have already thought out the problem
- Give them what they need
- Read the "Request (Call) for the Proposal" or "Program Announcement" *carefully*
- The "RFTP" or "RFP" or "PA" has details about what types of research or teaching problems can be addressed
- Your proposal should make it evident that you have read *and adhered to* the RFP instructions
- If there is more than one way to solve the problem, make them want to do it your way!

THE HOOK!

- Every proposal should have a "hook" that captures the reader attention and makes them want to fund you

- The hook can be a...
  - Unique approach or idea
  - Different methodology
  - Cost effective approach
  - Anything that makes your proposal really stand out from the other proposals

www.indiamart.com

RFP – FOLLOW EXACTLY

Request for Proposals

Will have the following:

- Program research themes
- Length and format requirements
- Who and which institutions are eligible
- Indirect cost rates
- Total amount of awards
- Due dates and much more

rootes-on-ice.com

writepass.com

CONTACTING THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

- Should you contact the program director? YES, but only after:

- You have the problem succinctly define and formulated

  First by email – briefly describe your idea and ask for phone call

  Then, a phone call no more than 3-5 minutes – elevator talk

- Ask if you idea fits the program

- Ask for any hints – what is expected, what the panel want to see

beefambassador.com

TOPIC 1: ADHERING TO FORMATS AND REQUIREMENTS

- Proper forms including budget, compliance, conflict of interests, etc.

- Title page with required institutional endorsements

- Conform to word and/or page limitations

- Order of presentation of sections; all sections that are required

- Submitted by deadline – consequences of missing the deadline

Topic 2: Choose Projects Carefully

- Are you really interested in the topic?

- Do you have the expertise for the project?

- Can you add significantly to the research?

- Are you "joining" the project solely to "receive a grant"?

- Do you have the time to complete your portion of the project?

TOPIC 3: RESTRICT THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

- Limit to one or two main themes or problems that are well related

- Don't try to answer all possible questions about the topic

- Reviewers will grade your proposal lower if you propose too much

- Have some preliminary data, but not too extensive

TOPIC 4: CHOOSE YOUR COLLABORATORS CAREFULLY

- Should they be your friends?

- Do you "buddy" a favor?

www.irc.vbschools.com

- Collaborators should have specific needed skills or knowledge

- Specific tasks and responsibilities

- Collaborators have interest, resources and time?

www.teachersparadise.com

- Multi-institutional and multidisciplinary?

TOPIC 5: LEADERSHIP OF THE PROJECT – THE PI

- Can be anyone with the experience – the person who has the idea and takes the lead in writing

- Project should have one senior or seasoned PI

- Break ties with supervisor (can be important)?

home.messiah.edu

www.dreamstime.com

TOPIC 6: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OR ABSTRACT

- Very similar to paper abstract except selling instead of results

- Should contain the problem, methodology, and impacts

- Should briefly mention how the proposal fits the RFP

- Typically character or word limitations – see RFP

- Arguably, the most important section of the grant

TOPIC 7-1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- Should be clear and concise -- do not couch/hide in verbosity

- Should reiterate how your proposal fits with the themes of RFP

- Should be early in the introduction/background
  Also in the executive summary or abstract

- Should be shortly followed by objectives or specific aims
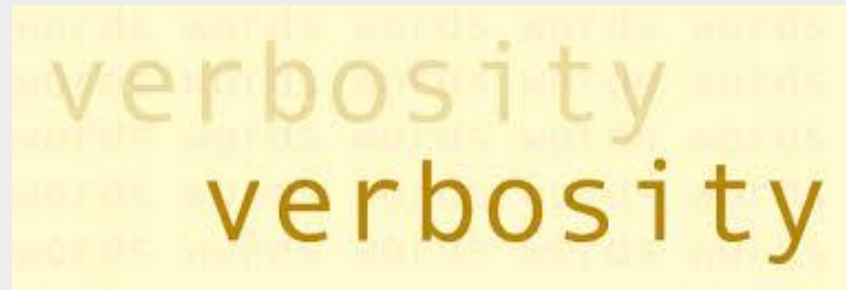
Topic 7-2: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction/Background/Literature Review

Should NOT include long literature review, but sufficient to familiarize the reader with the problem and what area you want to investigate

Experience with problem to be Investigated – a few relevant citations of the investigation team goes a long way of convincing reviews that the team is qualified to complete the tasks.

www.nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

introduction

TOPIC 8-1: BODY OF THE PROPOSAL

- Include sufficient methodology to allow reviewer understand the approach to the problem and convince them you know what you are doing

- Do not use citations (only) to describe you primary approach

Approach

www.teatreegullychildcare.com

- Be sure to include assessment of data as well as what make your project successful

- What are some of the pitfalls and what is your back-up plan?

Plan A
Plan B

lawrencemichaels.co.uk

yanado.com

TOPIC 8-2:   BODY OF THE PROPOSAL

patrickmitsuing.com

- What stakeholders or clientele does this proposal serve?

- Use of bullet lists is acceptable in most instances – typically very clear

- Have someone (other than the authors) proofread for consistency with abbreviations (e.g. h vs. hr.), grammar and style, and for clarity

www.theremarkablesgroup.com.au

- Be sure citation are all in the same format including journal abbreviations

- Impacts – Significance of ability to affect changes

dalicetrost.com

TOPIC 9: TIMELINE OR GANT CHARTS

Schedule of Activities in Proposal

www.quality-wars.com
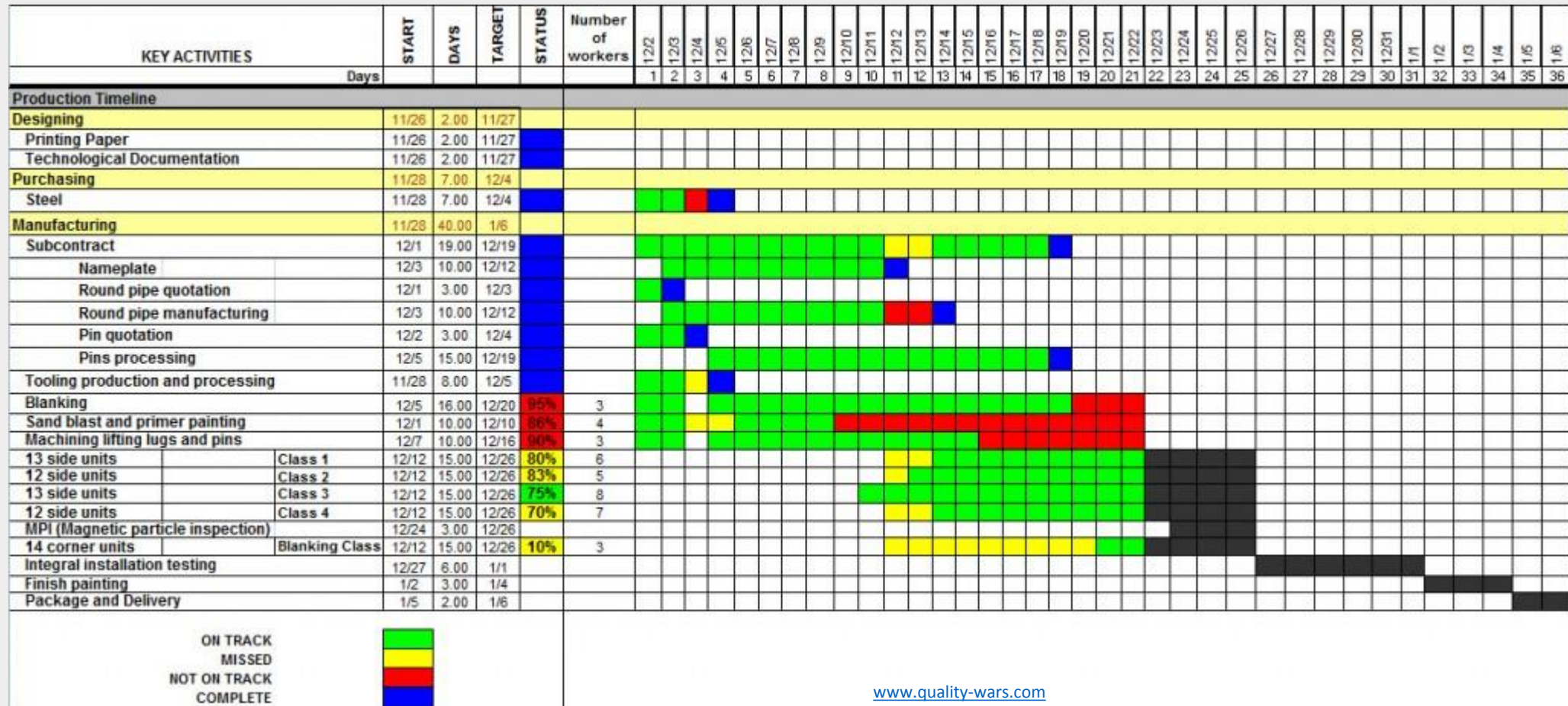
TOPIC 10: FACILITIES AT YOUR INSTITUTION

- Do **NOT** ask for extensive, durable (expensive) equipment

- Outline what your facilities are like – reviewers like to see well-supported centers

- Minor equipment is ok to request

- Request only what you need

www.nhm.ac.uk

www.labequip.co.za

TOPIC 11: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH COMPONENTS

Not all proposals required this, but many do:

tapinto.net

- High school students – especially in STEM areas

- Summer internships for high school and undergraduates

- More extensive undergraduate research experiences

- Stipends and tuition for graduate student training

- Outreach or extension activities – some grants require up to 30-35% of effort be this area (Brasil and USA)

www.who.int

TOPIC 12-1: BUDGET

- Be sure budget numbers are accurate and do not exceed RFP

- Calculation of overhead can be tricky (see budget expert)*

- Most funding will be spent on personnel and benefits

empowerla.org

- Distinguish between indirect and direct costs*

- Adequate travel (but must be necessary) -- meetings okay.

- Matching funds required?*

- Justification of budget – brief, but very important!

www.birchstreet.net

TOPIC 12-2: BUDGET – MODIFIED DIRECT COSTS

- Will need to calculate for Indirect Cost over Overhead

- Includes salaries, benefits, materials, travel, publications contracts, others

- Does not include non-expendable (durable equipment) and tuition for graduate students

growingthemoneytree.com

- Indirect cost (overhead or institutional costs) can range from 0 to 75% of the total direct costs

Topic 12-3: BUDGET – SAMPLE INDIRECT COSTS

GENERIC FEDERAL FUNDING SOURCE
BUDGET

2015

				DURATION PROPOSED MONTHS: ___ **Funds Requested by Proposer**	DURATION PROPOSED MONTHS: _____ **Funds Approved by CSREES** (If different)	Non-Federal Proposed Cost-Sharing/ Matching Funds (If required)	Non-federal Cost-Sharing/Matching Funds Approved by CSREES (If Different)
ORGANIZATION AND ADDRESS				USDA AWARD NO.			
PROJECT DIRECTOR(S)							
A. Salaries and Wages.........................	CSREES-FUNDED WORK MONTHS						
1. No. Of Senior Personnel	Calendar	Academic	Summer	50000			
a. _1__ (Co)-PD(s)...............	**6**						
b. ___ Senior Associates							
2. No. of Other Personnel (Non-Faculty)							
a. _____ Research Associates/Postdoctorates.................							
b. _____ Other Professionals..............................							
c. ___ Graduate Students....................................				15000			
d. _____ Prebaccalaureate Students							
e. _____ Secretarial-Clerical..................................							
f. ___ Technical, Shop and Other							
Total Salaries and Wages...........................→				65000			
B. Fringe Benefits (If charged as Direct Costs)				16250			
C. Total Salaries, Wages, and Fringe Benefits (A plus B) →				81250			
D. Nonexpendable Equipment (Attach supporting data. List items and dollar amounts for each item.)				15000			
E. Materials and Supplies				35000			
F. Travel (2 persons x $4,500 each)				9000			
G. Publication Costs/Page Charges				5000			
H. Computer (ADPE) Costs							
I. Student Assistance/Support (Scholarships/fellowships, stipends/tuition, cost of education, etc. Attach list of items and dollar amounts for each item.)				10000			
J. All Other Direct Costs (In budget narrative, list items and dollar amounts, and provide supporting data for each item.)							
K. Total Direct Costs (C through J)...............→				155250	**Excludes tuition and nonexpendable equipment**		
L. F&A/Indirect Costs (Specify rate and base) Modified total direct cost **25% x 130250**				32563			
M. Total Direct and F&A/Indirect Costs (K plus L) →				187812			
N. Other ....→							
O. Total Amount of This Request ....→				187812			
P. Cost-Sharing/Matching (Breakdown of total amounts shown on line O)							
Cash (both Applicant and Third Party) →							
- In Kind Contributions (both Applicant and Third Party)							
NAME AND TITLE (Type or print)				SIGNATURE		DATE	
Project Director							

Modified Direct Cost Method

TOPIC 12-4: BUDGET – MATCHING/IN KIND

Matching:

- Includes portion of Indirect Cost not allowed by granting agency, but part of Institutional Indirect Costs

- Could be part of salaries of investigators

- Salaries of technical assistance if not federally funded

- In-Kind includes equipment, donations of materials, etc. Need to provide adequate documentation for costs.

In-kind Donations

www.northernchildren.org

TOPIC BUDGET 12-5: Matching and In-Kind

echonet.org

doublethedonation.com

GENERIC FEDERAL FUNDING SOURCE
BUDGET

2015

ORGANIZATION AND ADDRESS			USDA AWARD NO.			
			DURATION PROPOSED MONTHS: ___ **Funds Requested by Proposer**	DURATION PROPOSED MONTHS: _____ **Funds Approved by CSREES (If different)**	Non-Federal Proposed Cost-Sharing/ Matching Funds (If required)	Non-federal Cost-Sharing/Matching Funds Approved by CSREES (If Different)
PROJECT DIRECTOR(S)						

	CSREES-FUNDED WORK MONTHS						
A. Salaries and Wages........................	Calendar	Academic	Summer				
1. No. Of Senior Personnel				50000		50000	
a. _1__ (Co)-PD(s)...............................	6						
b. ____ Senior Associates							
2. No. of Other Personnel (Non-Faculty)							
a. _____ Research Associates/Postdoctorates.........							
b. _____ Other Professionals.............................							
c. ___ Graduate Students......................				15000		5000	
d. _____ Prebaccalaureate Students							
e. _____ Secretarial-Clerical							
f. ____ Technical, Shop and Other							
Total Salaries and Wages...........................→				65000		55000	
B. Fringe Benefits (If charged as Direct Costs)				16250		13750	
C. Total Salaries, Wages, and Fringe Benefits (A plus B) →				81250		68750	
D. Nonexpendable Equipment (Attach supporting data. List items and dollar amounts for each item.)				15000			
E. Materials and Supplies				35000			
F. Travel (2 persons x $4,500 each)				9000			
G. Publication Costs/Page Charges				5000			
H. Computer (ADPE) Costs							
I. Student Assistance/Support (Scholarships/fellowships, stipends/tuition, cost of education, etc. Attach list of items and dollar amounts for each item.)				10000			
J. All Other Direct Costs (In budget narrative, list items and dollar amounts, and provide supporting data for each item.)							
K. Total Direct Costs (C through J)................→				155250	Excludes tuition and nonexpendable equipment		
L. F&A/Indirect Costs (Specify rate and base) Modified total direct cost **25% x 130250**				32563		32563	
M. Total Direct and F&A/Indirect Costs (K plus L) →				187812		101313	
N. Other ....→							
O. Total Amount of This Request ....→				187812			
P. Cost-Sharing/Matching (Breakdown of total amounts shown on line O)							
Cash (both Applicant and Third Party) →							
- In Kind Contributions (both Applicant and Third Party)						35000	
NAME AND TITLE (Type or print)			SIGNATURE			DATE	
Project Director							

PI actually working 12 months

¼ of stipend by department

Fringe benefits of above

Inst. Requires 50% IDC, but grantor only allows 25%. Other 25% MATCH

Donation of equipment – used tractor Document value carefully

TOPIC 13: Budget Justification

- Line by line explanation and calculation of funds requested. Number by budget line number

- Not over detailed, but sufficient for reviewer to know how you arrived at amounts shown

- Important to be complete. E.g. if calculating salary request, be sure to show base salary of PI

- Show how you calculated matching funds/in-kind

TOPIC 14: DISSEMINATION PLAN

- Refereed Journal Articles

- Trade Journals

- Website on Topic

- Extension Bulletins

- Talks with Stakeholder Groups

- Book Chapters

- Recommendations

poweredwebsite.com

www.thenationalcouncil.org

www.civilpolitics.org

TOPIC 15: PROOFREAD AGAIN AND GET REQUIRED ENDORSEMENTS

- Double and triple check all facets of your proposal

- Get institutional signatures (may be electronic now)

- Submit via grants office or other means

chumcubo.com

Common Problems with the Proposal Goals

www.linkedin.com

- Topic is inappropriate for the RFP or the mission of the funding agency

- Purpose of the study is not clear or detailed enough

- Proposal goals are not worthy of support – or is not new or novel

- No specific products or end-points included in the goals

Overall Presentation Problems

rziegenfuss.com

- Lack of a specific plan
- Reliance on past reputation rather than having a good idea or a solid plan
- Assuming that the reviewer will be familiar with your research work (and be impressed)
- Unbalanced presentation
- Sloppy formatting, spelling errors, grammatical errors, typos

Research Design Deficiencies

- Not enough or too much detail on the work of others
- Not being aware of published work of others that could invalidate your idea or approach
- Lack of coherence and lack of focus
- Sampling design not appropriate
- Survey approach may contain bias
- Lack of detailed methodology
- No approved IRB (human or animal) plan
- No assessment plan
- No dissemination plan

edt2.educ.msu.edu

Staff, Budget, Timeline Problems

- Specific tasks in the proposal are not related to personnel, time or budget

- Too little time commitment by the PI

- Too many persons each with too little time

- Research team members have expertise in disciplines unrelated to the proposal topic

- Needed expertise is missing from the proposal

www.palacewoodschools.org.uk

Comments Made by Actual Reviewers

- *"The problem statement, such as it is, is too global, showing no relationship to reality with no potential solution being indicated or even possible."*

- *"This problem has been studied to death. I'm surprised the writer doesn't know this."*

- *"It is almost impossible to understand what the author wants to study or what the main theme is. The problem is full of jargon and totally unclear as stated."*

- *"I cannot ascertain what approach the researcher will take in examining the problem as outlined."*

- *The writer has a flair for the dramatic. The world will not collapse if we do not fund a study of students' daydreams."*