

Tips for Writing a Funding Proposal

As you progress through your graduate academic career, it is generally a safe bet to assume you will have to write a funding proposal at some point. Research is an intrinsic component of graduate school. However, a majority of the time research projects of high significance require significant funding. Unfortunately, being a graduate student also typically involves being broke (or close to it!). Therefore, applying to receive funding from as many sources as possible is a sound strategy to advance your graduate career. The purpose of this article is to give you a general overview and some broad strategies which should apply to most instances of writing a funding proposal, and will hopefully serve to get you started on the right track. The most crucial tip of all is to simply read the requirements of the funding proposal carefully.

Requirements for funding proposals will vary *highly*: there are likely almost as many small variations one can make to a funding proposal as there are sources from which one can receive funding. Nevertheless, there are some crucial key features in common between all funding proposals, and some general aims that a funding proposal should accomplish. Some of these principles will briefly be illustrated as follows.

Identify Your Needs and Focus:

This step may (hopefully) seem obvious to you. After all, how can you apply for funding if you don't know exactly what you're requesting funding *for*? But for the purposes of successfully getting funding for your research, this step is perhaps the most crucial. From the perspective of agencies that will grant you funding, both your needs and focus are paramount. Most agencies which will be potentially granting you funding are inundated with applications. Getting both a laser-sharp vision of your project and a precise amount of the funding necessary to execute your project successfully will ensure you have the best chance at standing out of the pack.

For example, compare:

“This research project will be studying underserved youth and will require a mid-tier amount of funding: somewhere between \$10-50K USD.”

With...

“This research project will investigate and determine the needs for 5 underserved schools in the West Los Angeles School District. The results of this project will be used to implement future plans for revamping the curricula of said schools. \$35,800 dollars is required for this project and the funds will be used to pay research staff, process necessary legal documentation, and create informational materials for those affected by or otherwise project (students, staff, and parents).”

- Compared to the first, the second is much more specific and focused. There is a very clear goal proposed for the research and a distinct measureable outcome/impact.

Moreover, there is a specific amount of money requested *and* a breakdown of how the

funds will be used. Not only does this show the organization that you are requesting funds from that you have a clear goal in mind (and thus more likely to succeed) but also that the potential funds received will be put to use successfully. There is simply an overall increased level of perceived professionalism stemming from someone who has carefully and completely thought out the purpose and amount of funding required for their research project.

Finding an Agency:

After sufficiently distilling the needs and focus of your research, the next step is to find a potential funding agency. Ideally, the interests of the organization should reflect those of your own. Taking the time to first grapple with and identify your needs and focus will highly aid in the process of discovering a funding agency which will align with your goals. As alluded to previously, there are *many* avenues by which one can pursue funding. To name a few: one can pursue funding from government agencies, churches, large family donations, small family donations, major corporate funding, or small corporate funding. Google is your friend here; to get you started the OEDB has a great [list](#) to begin your preliminary research. In addition, most universities should have research centers which house collections of potential agencies worthy of pursuit.

The most important factor to consider when deciding which agency to request funds from is whether or not the agency would be *interested* in your project. It is highly likely that each agency you apply to (unless the agency is particularly new and/or small) receives massive amounts of funding requests—perhaps even daily. Therefore, agencies must triage which

projects to ultimately provide funding to. Half the battle is providing a clear plan of your research and needs; the other half of the battle is ensuring a project is of interest to an agency. When faced with deciding between two projects that are equally well-prepared and itemized, an agency is likely going to choose the one which furthers and aligns with its own interests, mission statements, and goals.

Anatomy of a Funding Proposal:

As stated prior, there are likely just as many individual requirements for writing funding proposals as there are sources of funding. Nevertheless, there are some key components that every funding proposal should by and large cover, regardless of specific requirements issued by a given funding agency. They are as follows:

Summary:

- A brief overview of your project, needs, and impact.

Introduction:

- Introduce yourself—use this as a chance to establish credibility

Statement of Need:

- Describes the problem that your project will address and its significance

Objectives:

- Discuss what you aim to accomplish through addressing the problem discussed previously: what should your result be?

Methods:

- Discuss in detail how you will go about solving the problem mentioned in the prior sections

Evaluation:

- Discuss how you aim to *measure* the success of your project

Future Funding:

- Discussed the funds which will be required to sustain the project after your goal(s) has been accomplished (only necessary if your project initiates will be ongoing)

Budget:

- An itemized list of expenses detailing how all funds will be utilized

Depending on the project you are proposing, there can be a lot of money on the line when it comes to funding proposals. Thus, it is only natural that one be slightly nervous when drafting one. However, I hope this guide has served to put your mind at ease. Truly, writing a funding proposal is not a mysterious process. The most important tip to keep in mind is to make sure

you have sufficiently *thought* about your project. It is vital you have a complete and utter understanding of the significance of your project, your goals, your end result, and the amount of funds requested/how they will be utilized. Once you have all these steps completed, getting funding simply becomes a matter of researching organizations and selecting one that properly aligns with your own goals. Not all organizations will see eye-to-eye with you, but those that do will only jump on board if you know where you stand yourself. Thus, I propose that funding proposals are not so scary after all; get writing!