

## Perfect Proposal:

# How to Get Grant Money for Your Project

**Y**ou have a great idea for a research or community service project, and you've just read about a foundation offering the perfect grant. Outside funding can allow you to pursue projects beyond what the University of Georgia can fund, strengthen your teaching efforts as you involve undergraduates in your project and help build both UGA's national reputation and yours. All you have to do now is write a winning proposal.

### Proposal-Writing Basics

The basic proposal-writing rules and strategies are always the same, regardless of the size of the grant for which you're applying. The bottom-line requirements for writing a successful proposal, says Sarah Tate, grants officer for UGA's Office of Supported Programs, are the ability to read and follow instructions, simple math skills and an idea worth funding.

First, some basic terminology: "Grant-writing" is a misnomer. You write a proposal in order to apply for a grant; you do not write a grant. The vehicles through which organizations provide funding are grants, contracts or cooperative agreements. An agency announces that it has funding available by issuing a request for proposals (RFP), request for applications (RFA), program announcement (PA) or broad agency announcement (BAA).

### Do Your Homework: Find the Right Fit

Most of the work on your proposal happens before you start writing. Once you've identified a funding opportunity, you must research your project idea, the grant and the funding agency. You are far more likely to be awarded a grant if your project objectives closely match the agency's mission and the purpose of the grant. When you demonstrate this compatibility in your proposal, along with knowledge of the research field and the funder, you build valuable credibility.

Read online as much as possible about the agency to which you're applying. Carefully review the call for proposals. Talk to colleagues who have won grants from the funder or similar agencies; ask for copies of their successful proposals. Finally, call the funding agency for clarifications or to discuss whether your project is eligible. Be sure, though, that you're

not asking for information covered in the call for proposals or some other readily available source. Find out whether the agency funds your type of institution, your type of project and in your geographic area. On your end, make sure that your project is necessary, feasible and can be done with the amount of money you're requesting.

### Writing and Submitting

Create a "skim-able" proposal with graphs or diagrams, bold section headers and frequent paragraph breaks to visually divide the text. Closely follow any formatting guidelines in the call for proposals. Generally, you should use 12-point Times New Roman type, with no "fancy" fonts, and highlight important text with bold, not underlining. Start each major section at the top of a new page. Use one-inch margins and left-justify the text. Include a table of contents.

Adhere to all page limits set by the funder (without fudging) and proofread your proposal several times. If you are asked to submit a hard-copy proposal, do not permanently bind it (staple or clip the left-hand corner) and be sure to send the requested number of copies. Include a cover letter. Be aware of the time, not just the date, of the deadline, and check whether the proposal must be postmarked or actually received by the deadline. For electronic submissions, don't wait until five minutes before the deadline in case your computer or their Web site crashes.

### Anatomy of a Proposal

When you've done all your homework and are ready to write that grant-winning proposal, you will craft three important components: a cover letter, the narrative of the proposal and appendices or attachments. (For state and federal agencies, you will probably also have to include required forms.)

**The narrative** is the body of your proposal, where you make the case for yourself and your project. The vital body parts are, in this order:

**Summary or Abstract:** A paragraph or two in which you present your project clearly and concisely. Some agencies require very specific things in the abstract. Follow their instructions carefully.

**Introduction or Literature Review:** Here is where you acquaint your reader with the existing knowledge that pertains to your project and demonstrate that you are familiar with it yourself. Write this section so that it naturally leads into the next.

**Problem Statement or Rationale:** The most important part of the proposal, this is where you provide the reasons for your project. Be both qualitative and dramatic as you explain the problem and how you will solve it or add to the existing body of knowledge about it. This section should make the reader care about your project.

**Goals and Objectives:** Tell what the outcomes of your project will be. A goal is a broad statement outlining your direction, purpose or intent (e.g., "Increase middle-school girls' competencies in science.") Objectives detail the things you will do to meet your goals, stated in quantifiable terms (e.g., "Teach 30 geology classes for 90 middle-school girls.")

**Methodology/Action Plan:** Tell how you're going to achieve your goals and objectives. Be detailed and explicit about what you will do. Communicate clearly how your planned actions are linked to your objectives. Write "I will" rather than "I will attempt to."

**Evaluation:** Describe the method you will use to evaluate your project and its success. You can do a process evaluation (e.g., "I did x to ensure that 90 middle school girls attended 30 geology classes;") or an outcome evaluation (e.g., "Post-test scores of participants' science competencies increased by x percent over pre-test scores.")

**Budget:** Your proposal written in numerical terms. What do you need to complete your project, and how much will it cost?

Following your proposal narrative, include any appropriate maps, newspaper articles, letters of support or other documentation as appendices or attachments. Never put anything that is critical to your proposal in this section, as reviewers do not always read it. If necessary, your narrative must be able to stand alone. ■

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*Based on the Graduate School seminar "Grantmanship Basics" by Sarah B. Tate, Office for Sponsored Programs. To view this seminar in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.*

### Proposal-Writing Resources

Want to apply for an outside grant or contract while you're at UGA? Start by talking with the grants officers in UGA's Office for Sponsored Programs. They are available to assist graduate students and faculty research and write grant proposals. Visit <http://www.ovpr.uga.edu/sponprog/> to learn more about the office or to contact a grants officer. Other places to look for help writing that winning proposal are:

- <http://www.fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html>
- <http://www.grantproposal.com/>
- <http://www.learnerassociates.net/proposal/links.htm>