Write the Winning Proposal

Mickie Swisher
392-2202, Ext. 256
MESwisher@ifas.ufl.edu
4031 McCarty Hall D

The Quiz

• The more grants you apply for, the more apt you are to get one.
• Contacting the donor before you submit a proposal is not a good idea – it’s kind of sneaky and may be illegal.
• The proposal selection process is pretty arbitrary – a lot depends on who you know.
• The size of the budget plays a big role in which proposals are funded – the bigger the budget the less apt you are to receive the grant.

Who Gives Away Money?

• Government
  – State, federal, local
• Foundations
  – Private, para-statal
• Corporations
  – Usually limited to goods and employee time, but not always

How Much Do They Give Away? For What? To Whom?

Giving Goes Up!

Foundation giving has nearly doubled since 1997.

Source: Foundation Center

Federal Grants 2002

$412 Billion Total
$16,350,000 to FL
Why Do People Give Away Money?

+ **Fun**?
+ **Power**?
+ **Kindness**?
+ **Boredom**?

Types of Grants

- To support superior scholarship or individual development (Fulbright, NSEP)
- To build the capacity of institutions
- To accomplish specific goals that are important to the donor

Foundation Grants by Type of Support Awarded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Support</th>
<th>% of $ Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Aid</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foundation Grants for Special Populations

% of $ Awarded
Totals 50% of All $ Awarded

- Youth/Child
- Poor
- Minority
- Female
- Disabled
- Seniors
- Male
- Other

What Does It Mean?

Think very carefully about how you present what you want to do.

You want to start a project to help Hispanic youth better prepare themselves to enter top-notch universities in Florida. How do you present your project?

You want to start a project to use environmental education as a way of helping abused children overcome trauma. How do you present it?
Writing a Winning Proposal

• 80% getting ready and 20% writing
• A short essay exam, not creative writing
• Persistence pays!

Writing a Proposal

Just a sophisticated form of panhandling.
You need a good line to succeed!

Never Ask Strangers for Money

• Like your mother told you
  – It's rude.
  – It’s usually a waste of time.
  – It can be dangerous.

Ward’s Rule

He has a 92% win rate for proposals submitted.

If the cover letter of your grant proposal does not begin with “based on our recent conversation…” or its equivalent, your proposal is junk mail.

What Donors Say… “Begin with Research”

Taken from GrantProposal.Com
Available at http://www.grantproposal.com

Ilene Mack, Senior Program Officer, William Randolph Hearst Foundation

I would suggest that the very first step and one that is most important prior to writing anything is doing research on the foundation you wish to approach. The buzzword is homework. Do it well and thoroughly. It is more efficient and in the end more beneficial to send appropriate requests to fewer organizations than to send a shower of appeals in the hopes that one may land in the right place….
Joel J. Orosz, Senior Program Officer of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

There are always two kinds of homework that an applicant must do before writing a proposal: homework about the project and homework about the foundation to which the proposal will be submitted….

Homework about the Project

The homework about the project is quite important: Has anyone else tried something similar? If so, what were the results? Are there any potential partners for this work? Are they interested in becoming partners? What other funders might support the project? All this information is necessary in order to place the request into a context.

Homework about the Donor

Is the donor interested in this topic? Has it funded similar projects in the past? Might the proposed project be improved by lessons from those past efforts? It is discouraging to receive proposals that make empty claims about their “uniqueness” … A good proposal describes the context of the idea and directly relates that idea and its context to the donor’s programming interests.

There is NO Substitute for a Good Idea

- Ideas abound. Yours must be outstanding.
- I have no suggestions about how to get a great idea.
- But there are some common themes that appear in virtually every RFP today.

Is the problem or topic important, significant?

- Not just to you.
- Not just because you say so.
- Can you prove it?
- Numbers, facts, statistics, etc.

Is your approach innovative?

- What are you doing differently?
- Why is your approach the best thing since sliced bread?
- Why is your stuff “really cutting edge?”
- Prove it.
What’s in it for the donor?
For the world?
So what? What are you actually going to produce? What will be different in the world when you finish? What will we know that we didn’t know before? You must justify your project in terms of what will change in the world – not just in terms of what you want to do.

The Multi Multis
• Collaboration is the name of the game
  – Multi-disciplinary
  – Multi-institutional
  – Multi-sectoral

After the Grant is Done?
• Continuity: how will you keep up the good work? Especially important for community projects.
• Dissemination – who will know about what you learned? Especially important for research projects.

What Donors Won’t Fund
• What you’re already doing, routine operating costs, what someone else is supposed to pay for
• Research that’s already been done (unless you can make a real good case that it was done wrong)
• Solutions/approaches that have already been tried

How Does the Review Process Work? What Happens to My Proposal after I Send it off in the Mail?

Points, Points
It’s All About Points
• Points get your proposal on the table
• Quality, innovation, detail and other factors weigh in heavily on final selection
• Budget usually comes last
Initial Review

- A panel of 3 to 5 reviewers
  - Often not specialists in the subject matter covered by your proposal
  - Almost always reading and reviewing your document on “overtime”
  - Almost always working from a pre-determined set of selection criteria with weight (points) assigned for each criterion

Panel Review

- Panel meets to discuss the proposals
  - May be the original reviewers
  - May be an unrelated group
- Black holes, sure fire winners and the “wannabes”
- A fine tooth comb!

So What Do I Do?

- Read, really really read the RFP and any other information -- word for word
- Mark it up, make notes, think about what it says. Know that document like you’re memorizing for an exam.
- Examine, in detail, the evaluation criteria. If they’re not available, ask for them.

Respond to the Specific Review Criteria

- Almost every RFP includes specific criteria that will be used to evaluate the proposals
  - This is where the points come from!
- You MUST respond to the specific criteria to win.

Make an Outline

Proposal writing is a short essay exam, not creative writing. Step 1 in actually writing is to develop an outline, preferably in the form of questions.

Answer the Questions

The proposal develops over time. Start filling in the answers to the questions. Make notes to yourself where you need more information or have a weak answer. Keep working on it. Remember – every answer must be strong to get that A and win.
No Due Date Panic for You

If you keep working, eventually you just cut out the questions. Your short essay answers stand alone and “bingo” you have the completed proposal!

In Short

• Get a good idea.
• Find the right donor.
• Get to know the donor.
• Understand the RFP – study it carefully.
• Respond to the specific criteria in the RFP.
• DON’T start with a blank screen. Be systematic about answering the questions.