

Eleven Steps to Funding Success

1. Start to research opportunities early.

Many applications must be submitted nearly a year before the funding would be received, and writing a good application takes time. If you will need funding for 2009-2010, the summer of 2008 is a good time to do your research. Range wide in your research on opportunities and be creative. For more ideas see <www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/funding/funding.html >.

2. When you identify an opportunity, make sure that you meet all the qualifications so that you don't waste time applying for things you won't get.

Unfortunately, you'll find that many fellowships require U.S. citizenship. If you're a foreign national and you don't offhand see any citizenship restrictions, it may be worthwhile to check with the funding agency and ask. Don't worry that you'll give them new ideas about restrictions. If they don't have citizenship requirements, they won't suddenly impose them just because you've asked. Some databases allow you to use citizenship requirements as a search criterion.

3. Pick a reasonable number of applications to write.

You usually want to apply for several things if it's really important to you to get at least one. On the other hand, you need to balance the requirements of quantity, quality, and the other demands on your time.

4. Understand the criteria for awarding funding and who will be making the decision.

Many funding organizations will provide information about previous awardees and successful proposals. There's a difference between funding given primarily on the basis of a research project and funding given primarily on the basis of development of a specific candidate. If funding is based on the former criteria, applications will probably be read by scholars in the field. If on the latter, the group reviewing your application may be more mixed. This has implications for how you write your essays and proposals.

5. Make sure you're set with a group of people ready to recommend you.

When possible have recommenders write directly to the funding organization. You might also want to establish a file of letters of recommendation for funding applications at Career Services.

6. If the funding application requires a research proposal, think through the development of a good one.

There's a lot you can do cosmetically to make a good idea seem like a really exciting one. There's not much anybody can do when an idea lacks substance.

7. As you write, always keep in mind that, whatever else is asked, you must also answer the implicit, "Why should we care?" question.

Give a context for your research. Explain why what you are doing is important and how it relates to broader questions in your field. Give yourself plenty of time to write. Be sure specialists and non-specialists can understand what you are saying. Organize your proposal into sections.

8. Develop a good list of key words and use them.

From reading a funding organization's material and possibly looking through lists of previous awardees, you can get an idea of current funding priorities. Describe your research in the light of these priorities. This may mean that the vocabulary you use changes a bit from one application to another.

9. Make everything about your application perfect.

Follow directions, proofread carefully, and provide all information requested. If you're asked for a budget, plan it carefully so that it sounds reasonable.

10. Get feedback.

Show what you've written to faculty members, colleagues, Career Services counselors, and anyone else who may be able to provide some input.

11. Don't get derailed by rejection.

Keep applying. It's often okay to get feedback from an organization as to why your application was not successful.

Some Resources on Writing Grant Applications

In the Career Services library

From Idea to Funded Project: Grant Proposals That Work, Jane C. Belcher and Julia M. Jacobsen, Oryx, 1992
(Also in Biomedical and Engineering libraries)

Graduate School Funding Handbook, by April Vahle Hamel, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002
(Also in Van Pelt Library)

Preparing a Research Grant Application to the National Institutes of Health, National Institutes of Health /Division of Grants (NIH)
See also NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/oe.htm>.

Proposals That Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals, Lawrence Locke, Sage Publications, Inc., 2001
(Also in Van Pelt, Biomedical and other libraries)

On the Web

The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions.
http://fellowships.ssrc.org/art_of_writing_proposals/

A Guide for Proposal Writing: Directorate for Education and Human Resources
Notices from the National Science Foundation
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubsys/ods/getpub.cfm?nsf9891>