

Grant Proposal Preparation Guidelines

The following paragraphs introduce the general routine at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point for preparing and submitting a proposal for extramural funding. These steps should be used as a guideline, as the sequence can be completed in succession or in random order. However, a preliminary budget is usually needed to identify potential funding sources.

All extramural funding requests need to be presented in a professional and organized manner. This application may be the only contact external reviewers, program officers and business entities have with the university. The funding request gives an overall impression of UWSP. The goal of the Grant Support Services Office is to ensure the enhancement of the university's image while securing funds to support scholarly and research endeavors.

Step 1: Get Early Administrative Concurrence

One of the last steps in the proposal process is getting various academic administrators to sign the Extramural Support Transmittal Form attesting that the proposed project has the approval of the department, the college and of the university.

However, major headaches, delays and disappointments can be avoided if the department chair and the academic dean are informed of proposal ideas before any intensive proposal efforts are begun. These colleagues may be in a better position to know how the proposed project may dovetail -- or interfere -- with that of ongoing or proposed grants or with the goals and policies of the department and of the university.

Step 2: Planning and Strategy

Start early! Depending on the length and complexity of the project, it can take several months or more to prepare a proposal. Sometimes six months may elapse before notification is received from the funding agency after the proposal is submitted. Devising an appropriate development strategy for a proposal can facilitate achieving deadlines.

One of the first decisions made, and often the most critical, is that of which funding path to pursue. Applying to a governmental agency like the National Science Foundation or the U.S. Department of Education might provide the best chance of success. A corporate foundation, a charitable trust, a private foundation or non-governmental funding organizations provide other options. If requested, the Grants Office will help with research for potential donors.

Step 3: Prepare a Budget

Project cost is a prime factor in selecting a funding source. A \$100,000, one-year project won't be funded by a foundation whose largest grant over the last few years was \$50,000. Work on a preliminary budget while trying to match the project with a funding source.

Project costs are spelled out within the budget. Most budgets are divided into various categories such as personnel, equipment and materials, travel, consultants, indirect costs, etc. Any cost sharing or cost matching amounts should be included. When submitting the proposal for internal approval, make sure to include a signed Matching Funds form. After detailing each of the budget elements, review the budget in order to be sure that the overall plan is logical and consistent.

The following PI incentives can be written into a proposal: faculty release time if appropriate staffing is added through the grant; possible full-time summer salary; and faculty development leave. Principal investigators can also benefit from successful grants with resume building, research recognition and publication.

Step 4: Decide on a Sponsor and Obtain Guidelines

Foundations, most of them at least, have varied but very specific and inflexible application cycles. Some foundation boards meet annually, some constantly. Quarterly is most common. It is not unusual for the board of a foundation that awards grants in March to meet the previous December to select from proposals that were due in September to allow staff enough time to pre-screen them.

Unfortunately, when researching sponsors sometimes the submission date has passed for the current review cycle of the sponsor most likely to fund the project. When this happens, flag your calendar for the next cycle and go to the next best opportunity.

A sponsor's grant application guidelines must drive every aspect of proposal form, content and style. Study the guidelines closely and follow them without exception, paying special attention to page limits, font size and margins.

Guidelines and forms (if required by the sponsor) are commonly available on the appropriate web site, but with some foundations they sometimes come only by regular mail once requested. A large number of foundations and trusts require contact for an invitation to apply before providing an application or guidelines.

All federal funding opportunities are now advertised through Grants.gov (www.grants.gov). When researching federal sources, it is advantageous to spend time on the grants.gov website. Please note that to view any documents you will be required to download a free software program, PureEdge Viewer. The vast majority of all federal grant applications must now be electronically submitted through the grants.gov website. Only the Grants Office has permission to submit these applications.

The *Foundation Directory Online* is the nation's leading online resource for funding research. All UWSP faculty and staff have access to the *Foundation Directory Online* through the University Library; Foundation Collection Librarian, Nerissa Nelson, x4204, nnelson@uwsp.edu, is available to assist in a foundation funding search.

Step 5: Develop the Proposal Narrative

There is no secret formula guaranteed to produce a perfect proposal. A more effective document can be prepared, however, if certain general principles are kept in mind.

First, the proposal document is the primary basis for evaluating the project and for determining whether financial support is justified. The proposal must represent the need for action and include all the information necessary to accurately evaluate the proposed activity and the principle investigator/project manager's ability to complete the project.

Second, the document will be read by people facing time constraints. Reviewers often read large numbers of similar proposals in a relatively short meeting. The proposal must be well-organized and concise in order to stand out from the crowd.

Third, think of who will be reviewing the proposal. Federal funding agencies like the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health use proposal reviewers who are themselves researchers. When dealing with most foundations, however, the technical terms, jargon and even the tone common to many fields in the sciences and humanities can confuse and even intimidate lay reviewers, threatening chances for an award. If at all possible, use "shirt-sleeve English" for most proposals.

When developing a proposal, keep these ideas in mind:

- If selection criteria are stated, include each heading/statement in your narrative and then answer each completely.
- State the objectives, methods and activities clearly.
- Design objectives to conform to the interests and guidelines of the sponsoring agency.
- Demonstrate a convincing need for the proposed activity, either by showing that it fills an important gap in existing knowledge or that it serves the needs of a specific clientele of concern to the funding source.
- Indicate project management skills by including devices such as time lines, organization charts, or task charts.
- Clearly describe the research or program design.
- Demonstrate the project manager's competence as an investigator by having an updated curriculum vitae and good capsule biographies of professional staff. (Keep in mind that most agencies limit vitae to two pages.)

Step 6: Get Thorough Reviews

When the proposal draft is sufficiently mature in development, distribute it to a few knowledgeable colleagues for technical reviews, plus style, grammar and uniformity reviews. Plan to be receptive to suggestions or comments. If someone in your department has trouble understanding your proposal, chances are so will the reader. Remember, the goal is a funded proposal. If requested, the Grants Office will review the proposal.

Step 7: Get Administrative Approval

Now is the time to get the signatures on the UWSP Extramural Transmittal Approval Form. The principal investigator/project manager will deliver the approval form and one copy of the proposal to the department chair for approval and forward to the Dean 10 days prior to the deadline specified by the sponsor. The approval form and the approved proposal will then be forwarded through the appropriate channels (department chair, dean of the college, Business Affairs, Grants Office and Associate Vice Chancellor).

Step 8: Finalize and Submit

During the final days and hours of a proposal effort there will inevitably be snags, revisions, and omissions that will require us to work closely together. To alleviate some of these problems, all documentation must be forwarded through the appropriate channels to reach the Grants Office five (5) days before the deadline of the funding agency.

If requested, the Grants Office will copy and mail the proposal. If electronic submission is required, the Grants Office will be responsible for completing the submission process.