

# PREPARING YOUR PROPOSAL

## 1. Develop your Project

What is the problem or research question you hope to solve? Who is your audience or target population? What outcomes do you hope to achieve? How long will the project take? When will you start (keep in mind that the grant proposal and decision process may take many months)? How much will it cost? Most of all, why should a grantor care about your project?

## 2. Contact the Office of University Advancement and Marketing & Communications

Discuss your project with the Office of University Advancement or the Office of Academic Resources (for federal grants). University faculty and staff seeking external funding *must* complete the **STU Proposal Concept Approval (Précis)** *before submitting a grant proposal*. Why? Most agencies will accept only one proposal per institution. Therefore, you need to know if another faculty member is applying to the same funder. Also, the Office of Administrative Affairs and the Dean of your school will want to know whether your project involves the commitment of university resources and that your proposal is in line with the university's Strategic Plan and the individual department's goals. Even if your project does not directly require university funds, indirect costs may still apply. Many funding agencies will also send grant awards through the university rather than the principal investigator, so we need to know what projects may be funded and who is applying to which agency.

## 3. Guidelines & Deadlines

Before you start writing, make sure you have the most up-to-date application information, including the deadlines and the application requirements. Check to see if the deadlines are “postmarked by,” “received by,” or ongoing. For applications accepted on an ongoing basis, consider the average time for application review and plan your proposal submission date accordingly. Call the program director when in doubt. Next, make sure your project truly fits the funder's guidelines. Do they give in your geographic area? What types of activities do they support? What is the first line of approach (e.g., letter of inquiry, full proposal, email to the program officer)? The Office of University Advancement uses the grant database of the Foundation Center which provides information on foundation and corporate funders. These listings provide funding priorities, and limitations. This is one of the services we provide to STU faculty and staff members.

## 4. Start Writing

The length of the narrative and the tone of grant proposals will vary according to the agency and the foundation, but two tips apply universally: **follow the guidelines** and **write clearly**. Follow directions meticulously and remember that grant reviewers may face stacks of worthy proposals. Do not assume that reviewers will have the time to decipher your meaning or look up trendy phrases exclusive to your field. Program officers will usually assist you with the process if you have any questions. As a starting point, consider basic elements of many (but certainly not all) proposals:

- Summary/abstract
- Introduction/background—introduce your project goals and establish your credibility

- Need/problem statement—why does this project/research need to be done? Why should you do it? Why should the grantor care?
- Project objectives—be as specific as possible about what you hope to achieve
- Project method or design—e.g., key staff, activities, and research methods
- Evaluation—how will you measure the success of your project? Make sure you will have measurable data.
- Future funding/sustainability—will you be seeking future funds or additional, concurrent funding?
- Budget—some reviewers read this section first, and it is certainly one of the most important parts of your application. (Make sure your budget fits the project you outline in your proposal.)
- Attachments

The Office of University Advancement will assist in editing your proposal. Also, refer to our STU Facts link for STU-specific information.

### **5. Submitting Your Proposal & Waiting**

Before mailing your proposal, check the guidelines one more time. Do you need a signature from an institutional representative (your Dean or the president)? Have you made enough copies and attached the correct forms? A post office tracking slip or express mailing will let you know that your proposal has actually reached its destination. Don't forget to get signatures for the STU Final Approval Form. Waiting for decisions can be difficult, but try to resist calling the program officer to ask about the status of your proposal. Most agencies have guidelines telling you when you can expect a decision; if not, program officers can give you general guidelines. While you wait, keep searching for other sources to fund either your entire project or portions of it.

### **6. Award & Post-Award Management**

*Congratulations!* If you received an award, your project will be underway. However, your responsibilities to the grantor are not yet complete. Send a thank-you letter upon receipt of your funding, and carefully manage this money according to the funding agency's guidelines. Keep meticulous records of how you spent the funds and be prepared to send any required follow-up reports. Even if reporting is not required by the foundation, it is always a good idea to send an update on the status/success of your project. If you did not get this grant, do not despair. Some agencies will provide reviewer comments that will help for future grant proposals. You can also modify your project and/or your proposal and approach another funding agency.