Tips for Writing a Successful Faculty Summer Research Grant

Oasis chat: July 19, 2012

1. Begin now

   No matter what stage you are in—idea inception, process, methodology, or drafting your proposal—give yourself time to step away from your writing and return with fresh thinking. Give yourself time to get useful feedback from a colleague.

2. Connect with a colleague

   You will benefit from connecting with someone from another department or discipline. You might agree to respond to each other's drafts.

   Feedback from someone in another department or discipline is critical; it helps you determine readability and understandability from a reader unfamiliar with your departmental or discipline-specific language/jargon.

3. Follow the guidelines carefully

   Committee members score and rank your proposal using the guidelines/rubric; it makes sense to double check every point and provide details. Think of it as a checklist. Ask your colleague reader to check for each point. If s/he cannot locate the points easily, it is likely committee members will not be able to either.

4. Persuade your readers that you are qualified to conduct this research or engage in this creative work and build confidence in your ability to succeed.

   If this is continuing research/creative work, connect to your CV. If this is a new line of research or creative work, make explicit how it connects to your established area of research/creative work and demonstrate the steps you will take (or have taken) to help ensure success.

   A new area of research/creative work may spring out of ongoing work, but the connection may not be obvious to others. Describe how that connection developed and how it will contribute to success with this grant proposal.

5. Pay attention to writing norms

   Check for things like sentence-level structure, paragraph-level structure, grammatical conventions, organization, persuasiveness, evidence, clarity. You are sensitive to these things in your students' work. Your colleagues are sensitive to these things in the proposal.

Feedback: *Please note, these are comments only and are purposefully not connected here to whether or not the proposal was funded. These comments are shared out to provide a stronger idea of what elements build a strong proposal and what elements (or their omission) lead to questions.*

Significance and Merit

- This project has the potential to benefit not only the field, but also our local area and/or EWU.
- Abstract – more readability, please. "Sell"/prove your significance
- It is unclear how this provides something new or extends knowledge.
- Unclear why discussions between teachers are so important – will this enhance communication?
- Abstract – OK – barely gets point across. Tell me more about project. Tell me about significance.
- An ambitious project. The interaction between process and product was clearly described. Seems important and you should finish it. However, I am not "sold" on why EWU should give a grant for you to do so. Help us understand the "why."
- Need help understanding how this relates to your area of scholarship.
- It's clear that you are well-qualified to carry out this work.
- Has this ever been done?
- Why doesn't EWU just pick up tab?
- Nothing innovative (see key grant Purpose, "to support faculty in establishing new and innovative strands of research and creative works.")
- An interesting undertaking – might be good to concentrate on only one product, though.
- It is unclear why EWU should spend another 10K on what appears to be the same study as (last year). Make clearer how this project extends last year's work, if it does.
- Make sure someone OUTSIDE your department can understand your abstract (and proposal).
- Summary is so hard to read that it is difficult to tell the significance.
- Interesting project! Could have been more clearly described – I read and re-read and...
- At times, you seem biased.
- Was this proposal written for this particular grant?
- Help us connect the significance to your resources.

Objective and/or Hypothesis | Goal

- Difficult to follow logic and new terms added cause confusion.
- It reads like you want to get organized. Is that a compelling objective or goal?
- To "extend a conference paper into an extended article." (Enough reason to support for 10K?)
- Applicant doesn't make clear why summer funding should be provided for what takes place through the academic year? Explain for committee.
- Fits into author's scholarly work to date.

Methodology / Process

- A thorough groundwork had already been laid. This should make for a successful project.
- Seems to be somewhat vague
- There is no power analysis included – a major weakness. Hypothesized effects are not considered.

- I enjoyed reading the detailed writing process. Much more convincing than grant proposals of other EWU faculty describing how they will spend time writing.
- No experience writing in this genre. Can you help us see how your current experience would help you be successful at writing a xxx?
- Interviews when/where? What kinds of questions?
- Sources? Colleagues – who are they?
- Methodology = interpretive ethnography process? Explain.
- Doesn't say what kind of data or data is already gathered – unclear
- Too technical for our review purposes.
- Methodology lacking – Problem seems good, but approach doesn't.
- The fact that the background research has been completed was a strength of this proposal, as well as the author's interest in thorough foundational work.
- Seems to be fishing, with no hypothesis
- Not clear—surveys, etc. What will be asked? How many students total in each category? Will results be generalizable to pre-service xxx teachers as a whole?
- Grants should be written for readers who are not specialists in the field. This one is not. Jargon, rhetoric, and a tone just short of a diatribe make this proposal very difficult to read and grasp. It seems important but it is difficult to get past the rhetoric and tone to be able to make a solid decision.
- Should you talk about your plans if you are commercially successful? Indicate awareness of EWU's Intellectual Property Policy.

Timeline

- This could have been more detailed.
- Expand – breakdown and clarify tasks
- More specific (dates & tasks)
- OK, but why not break down your "write, revise, research" tasks?
- 2 weeks?!! All in 2 weeks?
- Could have been more detailed – process and timeline didn't seem related.
- Yes, and it's possible to complete in time allotted.
- Seemed to stretch over many months – might be good to concentrate on one aspect?
- The timeline indicates academic year work. Why?
- "During summer" is not a timeline

Potential for Scholarly Product / Potential for Product

- Benefits faculty/students in two disciplines: xxx and xxx.
- This was left for us to assume.
- High chance of success
- Unclear what you hope to accomplish
- I could not find examples of a target publication
- Clear goals, publishers lined up.
- I am concerned that the last grant received in xxxx has yet to be accepted for publication and the applicant has not broadened his study in the last xx years.
- Already has commitment from elementary teacher – great!
- The goal is to "increase student writing performance" with no measures specified
- Number of products good

- Would like more evidence/assurance of product.

Comments

- Long term questions of will you need more funding & what happens if we can't fund?
- External grants? Other sources of funding?
- Seems well under way – good chance of getting it done
- I was most impressed by xxx's budget plan.
- Generalizeable?
- What is the value of a xxx [genre]? – Not explained well (Why xxx as chosen genre.)
- Importance of preserving/organizing valuable historical [documents] not made clear by author
- Are we funding scholarship or a personal interest?
- Good partnerships
- Already done conference and book. Now article? Seems out of order. Help us understand.
- A very interesting topic (one that interests me). Is he qualified?
- Crammed into small print.
- Why doesn't the university pay for this? An explanation would help (if there is one).
- Funding for summer, but work during year?
- Is this the right funding source?
- If you argue to impact student performance – must measure
- Not generated specifically for this grant.
- Overview of external funding would be helpful
- Is this work in her field?
- References imply he's going overboard
- Data already collected. Needs grant to analyze? If so, explain more clearly why.
- Talk about what's new since last work? Innovation?
- Applied last year and rejected, topic has been updated. Demonstrates continued investment by researcher. A plus.
- 2nd time through. Seems really important to the applicant, but s/he apparently just shelved it for this year.
- Weak on potential scholarly product – buried in timeline?
- Weak on dissemination (stakeholders – yes, but who else?)
- Seems to have bias already
- Too much jargon—hard to understand
- Was this shoehorned into this grant?
- Looks like a generic grant converted for us
- Already has data. Should explain what s/he will do with it
- Reference to example [type of artwork] in this or elsewhere would help. Website for any examples/photos/video clips would help
- Should have used spell and grammar check.