Grant Preparation "Boot Camp"

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Overview of Application Preparation

- Three Preliminary Steps:
  - Planning your application
  - Preparing your application
  - Submitting your application
- Exact procedures vary by funding mechanism/ funding agency.
- As Principle Investigator (PI), you will need to be able to manage both *science* and *logistics.*
- Your Department Administrator (DA), mentor, and R^2 are here to help with all aspects of grant preparation.

Planning your Application

- Consider what you want to do:
  - Draft a one-page written or bulleted list of your ideas to identify search terms
  - Consider research vs. service vs. training project to identify what funding sources might be appropriate.
- How to find funding opportunities:
  - Grants.gov keyword search.
  - Comprehensive list for major funding sources can be found on the R2 website: http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/faculty-staff/research-resources-r2-office/funding-resources.
  - R2 can help you to search for appropriate funding opportunities (email her2109@columbia.edu).
- How to evaluate funding opportunities for feasibility/ appropriateness:
  - Identify and review funding opportunity (RFA/ PA/ FOA: see description guide)
  - Read and review Institute/ Department/ Foundation/Agency's mission and goals on their website
  - Determine fit of mechanism (e.g., R01, R21, R03, K01) to project scope, preliminary studies, timing, feasibility, stage in career..
  - Work with your department's grants manager, your mentor, and/or R2 to evaluate the appropriateness of funding opportunities.
  - Determine whether the funding opportunity offers full Indirect Cost Recovery. If it does not, discuss options with your department administrator/ grants manager. If you need help determining whether a funding opportunity offers full indirect cost recovery, you can contact R2.

Planning your Application

- Once you have decided on a funding opportunity (*Logistics)*:
  - Review all required components of the grant application. Consult funding agency application guides (e.g., SF424 R&R Application guide for PHS funding agencies), Mailman School Office of Research Administration Sponsored Projects Application Resources page, the R2 office, and/or your departmental grants officer.
  - Review the Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA) Mailman School Pre-award Application Checklist and Pre-submission Checklists: http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/faculty-staff/office-research-administration/sponsored-projects-application-resources.
  - Create proposal timeline and checklist, including internal deadlines:
  - Note: Application draft is due to the Mailman School research administration office 10 business days before agency application deadlines, and applications must be ready for submission 5 business days before the application deadlines, as per University policies.

Planning your Application

- Once you have decided on a funding opportunity (*Logistics),* continued:
  - Inform department of intent to submit as soon as you have made the decision, to ensure that you are in the department's application queue.
  - With department administrator/ grants manager, review proposal timeline and discuss how presubmission steps will be divided (steps include: preparing budget, collecting biosketches, formatting application components, completed RASCAL proposal tracking form, completing funding agency's electronic forms).
  - If this is a limited competition opportunity (meaning that only one application per institution is allowed by the funding agency), discuss with R2 or your grants management office (a preliminary internal competition/review may be necessary).
  - Make sure that you are registered at eRA Commons, if applicable to your application (discuss with your Department administrator/ grants manager or R2).
  - Set up files to organize yourself well. R2 is available to discuss organizational techniques for grant preparation.

Planning your Application

- Once you have decided on a funding opportunity *(Science):*
  - If you are submitting your application to the NIH, search the NIH RePorter to see projects that have been funded on the topic or by your institute/center of interest in the past.
  - Outline specific aims or a one page "pitch sheet"/ project description (please see R^2 office to request a template).
  - Clarify your role in the proposed project.
  - Start a contacts list of individuals who you will contact as collaborators, partner organizations and consultants (who will offer you letters of support to include with your application) and peer-reviewers of your application.
  - Begin thinking about what costs you will incur throughout the course of this research project; request information about preparing a budget from your department administrator/ grants manager.

Planning your Application

- **Soliciting Input:**
  - Discuss your proposed project with your mentor(s), Department Chair, colleagues, etc.
  - Call the program officer/ funding agency contact (if applicable) for input on your project idea.
  - Circulate your draft specific aims or "pitch sheet" and funding opportunity to potential collaborators and trusted consultants to solicit feedback and get finalize answers about who will be involved with the project.
  - Obtain written commitment from co-investigators, consultants, advisory board members, partner organizations, etc. Start early!

Planning your Application

- **Laying the Groundwork:**
  - Consult R^2 to see if model funded grants for your mechanism are available.
  - Refine draft specific aims (if applicable).
  - Outline research introduction/ background, methods/ research strategy, and descriptions of project's significance and innovation (for NIH applications).
  - Determine which parts of the application will be your collaborators' responsibilities and ensure that all members of the grantwriting team are clear about the distribution of writing.
  - Keep track of your references (if you are using Endnote software, consider attending a free class at the CUMC library: http://library.cumc.columbia.edu/get-training-assistance)

Preparing your Application

- **Developing your *specific aims*:**
  - Consider the specific aims to be the most critical part of your grant.
  - Contact the R^2 Office if you would like to review specific aims samples.
  - You should start drafting your specific aims early and refine them repeatedly through the grantwriting process.
  - Ask collaborators, mentors, and colleagues to review your specific aims. Revise accordingly.
  - Make sure that your aims are clear and realistic (i.e., do not promise that you will accomplish more than is possible during your grant period).
  - For NIH grants, you have one page for specific aims, and the aims are *not* included in the page limit for your Research Strategy.

Preparing your Application

- **Drafting your *budget*:**
  - Early on in the process, you should determine whether the funding mechanism offers full indirect cost recovery (money that goes to the School to support facilities and administrative-related costs). If it does not, you may need to include items such as costs for space in your budget's direct costs.
  - Be clear about whether the total allowable budget amount listed in the announcement includes total *direct costs* or both *direct and indirect* costs. If the total allowable budget amount listed includes both, there will be less money for direct costs.
  - Speak with your department administrator or grants manager about what your role in developing the budget will be.
  - If you will be drafting the budget, request a template budget spreadsheet from your department administrator or grants manager.
  - If they will be preparing the budget on your behalf, accurately estimate total project costs, including: percent effort for all collaborators (DAs/ grants manager will be able to access accurate salary information for you and all collaborators), associated fringe benefits, and project costs.

Preparing your Application

- **Drafting your *budget*:**
  - Early on in the process, you should determine whether the funding mechanism offers full indirect cost recovery. If it does not, you may need to include items such as costs for space in your budget's direct costs.
  - Be clear about whether the total allowable budget amount listed in the announcement includes total *direct costs* or both *direct and indirect* costs.
  - Speak with your department administrator or grants manager about what your role in developing the budget will be.
  - If you will be drafting the budget, request a template budget spreadsheet from your department administrator or grants manager.
  - If they will be preparing the budget on your behalf, accurately estimate total project costs, including: percent effort for all collaborators (DAs/ grants manager will be able to access accurate salary information for you and all collaborators), associated fringe benefits, and project costs.
  - If your application will include a sub-contract, contact R^2 and/or your department administrator/ grants manager to discuss what you will need to prepare.

Preparing your Application

- **Soliciting/ obtaining *letters of support*:**
  - Generally, if you name any organization or individual as a collaborator by name, you are required to include a letter of support from that entity.
  - You should have received written or verbal commitment from all collaborating organizations and consultants early in the grant planning process.
  - Be polite and professional in all your grant-related correspondence.
  - Offer to draft letters of support on behalf of your collaborating partners.
  - Draft letters that emphasize the strengths of your application and which detail the letter writer's role (co-investigator, consultant, advisory board member, collaborating organization leader), what she/he will be doing on the grant, and payment (if applicable).
  - Clearly state the date when you require the letter in initial contacts.
  - Follow up after making the initial request in order to ensure that you receive all letters by submission deadline.
  - Track status of requested letters on a spreadsheet or checklist.

Preparing your Application

- **Developing *grant narrative*:**
  - Once you have a solid draft of your specific aims, direction for your grant narrative/ project description should be clear.
  - For NIH grants, keep specific Institute's priorities (which you have studied early in the grant planning process) in mine while you write.
  - Start early! A well-developed and well-written grant will require *many* revisions.
  - Always label and date each version to ensure that you are working on the most recent draft.
  - Obtain all portions of the text that have been prepared by collaborators and integrate them into a comprehensive narrative; edit for style and formatting consistency.
  - Circulate text drafts to collaborators, making sure that you keep track of which draft has been edited.
  - Circulate "completed" draft to mentors and colleagues not involved with grantwriting for review.
  - Consider leaving yourself time to set the draft aside for several days and review with a fresh mind prior to finalizing.

Preparing your Application

- **Preparing *additional grant components:***
  - You should have clarified all required components of the grant application early in the grant planning process. Maintain a checklist to ensure that you prepare each required aspect of the proposal.
  - Discuss with R^2 any component of the grant application that you do not understand. R^2 can provide templates and samples for components of many common grant mechanisms (e.g., biosketches, facilities and resources information, human subjects protection, cover letters).
  - Remember that every part of the grant should contribute to "selling" your proposal. Don't skimp because you think these pieces aren't important!
  - Leave yourself enough time to complete all portions of the grant application; don't assume that you supporting components can be prepared quickly.

Submitting your Application

- **Preparing *additional grant components:***
  - Make sure that you have clearly established with your grants manager who will be responsible for which elements to ensure a timely submission.
  - Leave yourself enough time to complete all portions of the grant application; don't assume that you supporting components can be prepared quickly.
  - Remember that every part of the grant should contribute to "selling" your proposal. Don't skimp because you think these pieces aren't important!
  - For a cover letter to NIH, you should specify an appropriate review committee (R^2 can help).
  - Determine the file format (.doc, PDF) in which your department expects to receive your application.
  - Once your department has reviewed your application, they will forward it to SPA, who will review for correctness (e.g., budget is done correctly, all page limitations are followed) and completeness (all necessary application components are included).
  - Make sure that you abide by all internal deadlines. These are vital to ensure that your department and SPA has enough time to review your application.
  - You may receive error or warning messages after submission (e.g., for NIH submissions). Discuss these with your department and address *immediately*.

R^2 Contact Information

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R^2 Website

http://www.mailman.hs.columbia.edu/faculty-staff/research-resources-r2-office