

# **In Search of Funding**

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It goes without saying that graduate school is a busy time for students. Research, training, and manuscript writing occupy many hours due to the emphasis that many programs place on producing original research. One activity that many graduate students tend to overlook, however, is grant seeking: the process of finding and applying for funding to defray the expenses of research and training. Although some graduate students are aware of funding opportunities, many do not take the time to investigate them in-depth because they rely on their faculty advisor or department to secure funding. Given the competitiveness of the job market in psychological science — especially in academia — graduate students should strive to develop grant seeking skills in order to demonstrate initiative and independence, traits highly prized by employers. The following essay outlines the three basic steps of finding appropriate grants to apply for: locating funding sources, determining which type of grant to apply for, and reviewing grant requirements and regulations.

## **Locating Funding Sources**

The first step in the grant seeking process is to identify organizations with grant programs supporting psychological research. These organizations are diverse, ranging from government agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health, to professional and honorary societies like Psi Chi, to nonprofit organizations such as the William T. Grant Foundation and the International Dyslexia Association. You can use resources such as the APSSC's Online Funding Database and the U.S. Government's [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) to locate organizations with grant programs that support research related to your interests. Another valuable resource is your university's institutional research officer, who can use his or her extensive knowledge of the field to help you locate potential funding sources.

When considering which organizations to target when seeking funding opportunities, keep in mind that your proposal will encounter less competition at lesser-known sources (Steinberg, 2004). Do not forget to explore funding opportunities sponsored by your university, state, any honorary or professional societies in which you hold membership, and other organizations related to your line of research. It is important to note that, unlike government-sponsored grants, grants from nonprofit organizations are available to international students. Government-sponsored grant programs, although more competitive than other grant programs, tend to have a less specific research focus and a higher monetary value than other types of grants, so you should consider applying for them if grant programs sponsored by other organizations are inappropriate to your interests or if you are seeking a higher level of support than is available from other grant programs.

## **Which Type of Grant Should I Apply For?**

Once you have located some potential funding sources, the next step in the grant seeking process is to

decide which type of grant is most conducive to your needs. Grants available to graduate students come in many shapes and sizes, ranging from small awards of up to \$1,000 for equipment and travel expenses to large fellowships providing a stipend of \$20,000-\$40,000 per year for up to three years. Many of these grants are designated for use during a specific period, covering the span of graduate training from the beginning years through the dissertation. Some grants may only be used within a specific field or line of research, but others are available to all psychology graduate students.

To determine which type of grant is right for you, consider your reasons for applying for a grant. Are you seeking funding to support a research project that you wish to conduct? Are you in need of travel assistance to defray the expense of attending a conference? Or are you looking for general financial support that will allow you to concentrate your efforts on research while in graduate school? Your motivation for seeking funding will help to focus your search, enabling you to locate grants appropriate for your needs. To maximize your chances of obtaining funding, it is best to apply for several grants sponsored by different organizations. The greater the number of grant applications submitted, the greater the chance that at least one will receive funding (Sternberg, 2004).

### **Requirements and Regulations**

The final step in determining which grants to apply for is to carefully review the requirements and regulations of the grants you are considering. In addition to basic identification and educational information, many applications require supplementary documentation, such as transcripts and recommendations. All grant applications include a written component, which ranges from a brief 500-word description of one's research objectives to an extensive 5-10 page research project proposal. It is imperative that your written responses conform to the length limits stipulated on the grant applications for both ethical and practical reasons. In addition to the written component, a budget proposal must be included as part of many grant applications. If you are required to prepare a budget proposal, you may wish to consult with your advisor or institutional research officer to allocate funding properly for the project or event supported by the grant. Once you have familiarized yourself with the regulations and requirements of the grants that you are considering, you can decide which grants to apply for, set to work compiling the materials, and finally, submit the completed grant application.

### **Conclusions**

Grant seeking is one of the most important and marketable skills that young researchers must master in order to achieve success in the realm of psychological science. Given the shelter provided by faculty funding and assistantship opportunities and the competitiveness of the job market, graduate school is an optimal time to hone your grant seeking skills. As for any other skill, time, effort, and motivation are necessary to succeed in finding and applying for grants, but the rewards are tangible and valuable. Happy grant hunting!

### **Additional Resources**

Association for Psychological Science Student Caucus, Online Funding Database Committee. (n.d.).

*Funding sources for students in psychology*. Retrieved from

<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/apscc/ofd.cfm>.

*Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*. (2008). Retrieved August 12, 2008, from <http://www.cfda.gov>.

*Grants.gov*. (2008). Retrieved August 11, 2008, from <http://www.grants.gov>

National Association of Fellowships Advisors. (2002). *Scholarships*. Retrieved August 12, 2008, from <http://www.nafadvisors.org/scholarships.htm>

Orlich, D. C. (1996). *Designing successful grant proposals*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

University of California, Santa Cruz Division of Graduate Studies. (n.d.). *Fellowships & grants*. Retrieved October 12, 2008, from [http://graddiv.ucsc.edu/student\\_affairs/fellowships.php](http://graddiv.ucsc.edu/student_affairs/fellowships.php)

References

### **References and Further Reading:**

Steinberg, J. (2004). Obtaining a research grant: The granting agency's view. In J. M. Darley, M. P. Zanna, & H. L. Roediger III (Eds.), *The compleat academic: a career guide* (2nd ed., pp. 153-168). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Sternberg, R. J. (2004). Obtaining a research grant: The applicant's view. In J. M. Darley, M. P. Zanna, & H. L. Roediger III (Eds.), *The compleat academic: a career guide* (2nd ed., pp. 169-184). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.