

# **“Show Me the Money”: Grant Writing Tips for Graduate Students**

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Grant writing is an integral part of graduate training, especially for students planning to pursue a career in academia. However, psychology graduate students are too often unprepared for this task, as the majority of doctoral programs in psychology do not offer instruction on grant writing (Eissenberg, 2003). Here are some grant-writing tips based on our experience in successfully obtaining funding. Between us, we have received 6 grants (from internal and external sources) totaling over \$8,000.

## **Before You Start Writing**

The first task in the grant writing process is to identify the organization that is most appropriate for your proposal. Often, students can find grants within their own university, as there tends to be less competition there than in external agencies. University research offices are a good source of information about funding opportunities. External grants are available through organizations at the local, state, national, and international levels. For example, our grants have been funded by organizations including the American Psychological Association, Ohio Psychological Association, the Graduate Student Senate of Ohio University, and the Council on Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity.

It is best to set a timeline, including the initial pre-writing tasks, when applying for a grant. This is particularly important if you need recommendation letters from faculty or prior Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Early in the preparations, consider collaboration with other graduate students, which can be advantageous for not only the pooling of ideas but also for appealing to organizations to fund multiple students' efforts.

Reviewing successful grant applications from colleagues in your field is often beneficial. Some organizations also make previously funded grant applications available to interested applicants, which can be very helpful in creating a timeline and materials. To determine the availability of previously funded grant applications for review, correspond with the contact person for grant inquiries.

## **The Grant Writing & Preparation Process**

When writing your proposal, it is critical that you convey your expertise in the area of your proposed project. If possible, cite yourself, even if it is within the context of a poster presentation. This will establish your dedication to and experience in your area of research. When preparing the literature review for your proposal, it is also critical that you demonstrate a need for the proposed study and delineate potential implications. For example, our research grants have involved interpersonal violence. In order to demonstrate a need for our research, we document the high rates and negative consequences of interpersonal violence, as well as the specific areas where there has been little research conducted,

which we then tie directly to the aims of our proposed study. To demonstrate the potential implications of our work, we often delineate how the findings of our study could be useful in the creation and implementation of intervention and prevention efforts.

We have also found it worthwhile to include a plan to seek additional funding for further research, especially if applying for an internal grant. It is important to include a plan that provides a clear and realistic timeline for the study (including data processing, analysis, and a plan for dissemination of results), especially as some funding sources require a report of the study's results or that the funds are used within the specified timeframe. Finally, remember that many applications for graduate student grants are read by people who are not experts in the area. Thus, it is important that you refrain from using terms that your audience will not understand and that you choose your terminology wisely.

The budget is another critical component of a grant application and can often be a tricky part of the process. If your department has a grants manager, get him or her to help you. In addition to providing a breakdown of expenses, most grant applications require a budget justification, which includes a cost breakdown and all study expenditures. It is important that you make a good case for every penny requested for the grant. For example, if you are budgeting for a copyrighted measure, use previous literature to justify the necessity of including this measure in the study. The bottom line is to try to estimate your budget as accurately as possible. If you over-budget, it will not rest favorably with the reviewers and could hurt your chances of getting the grant. Conversely, if you do not request enough, it will make it difficult to complete the project.

### **Last Minute Preparations**

Before submitting your grant, proofread multiple times and verify that you followed all of the guidelines. This can avert potential disqualification for something trivial. Also, seek your advisor's assistance during this final stage of editing and ask other professors and graduate students to read it as well. Sometimes it helps to have professors or graduate students in other disciplines read your proposal, especially if the grant will be reviewed by individuals outside of your area.

### **Waiting for the Decision**

The waiting period after submitting a grant often elicits a variety of emotions. Usually there is a contact person with whom you can check on the status of your proposal, but it is important not to bombard this individual with too many status inquiries. If you learn that your grant was not funded, do not get discouraged! In fact virtually all grant writers have multiple proposals rejected during their academic careers. Given that you already have a "template," you can easily modify your grant application and submit it to another funding source. Generally, reviewers send along comments with rejected proposals that can be used to improve it for resubmission.

### **Get Involved**

In addition to the actual grant writing, there are other ways that you can learn more about the process. For example, we have found it beneficial to work with our advisor on her grant applications. Most professors are happy to have the help, and this is a great way to learn about the process. Another way to learn more about this process is to become a student grant reviewer (see the link below for information

about APS's student reviewer program). In addition, topical readings can be helpful (also see below), and grant workshops are offered at annual meetings of professional psychology organizations, including the APS Annual Convention.

## **Conclusions**

Grant writing can be both particularly challenging and worthwhile for students. This process includes pre-writing preparations; the actual writing process; last minute revisions and preparations; deciding what to do if the grant is not funded; and getting involved in experiences that will enhance your skills as a grant writer, researcher, and academician. Although we all hope to ultimately have projects funded, the process itself provides valuable skills and experiences that will benefit you throughout your career. And remember, the old saying that "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again," is particularly relevant to the grant writing process!

## **Related Websites**

### **APS:**

[www.psychologicalscience.org/apssc/awards/](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/apssc/awards/)

[www.psychologicalscience.org/apssc/awards/reviewer.cfm](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/apssc/awards/reviewer.cfm)

### **APA:**

[www.apa.org/students/funding.html](http://www.apa.org/students/funding.html)

<http://gradpsych.apags.org/sep06/funding.html>

[www.apa.org/science/apassc-funding.html#resources](http://www.apa.org/science/apassc-funding.html#resources)

### **Miscellaneous:**

[www.hfsp.org/how/ArtOfGrants.htm](http://www.hfsp.org/how/ArtOfGrants.htm)

[www.nigms.nih.gov/Research/Application/Tips.htm](http://www.nigms.nih.gov/Research/Application/Tips.htm)

## **References & Recommended Readings**

Borkowski, J. G. & Howard, K. S. (2005). Applying for research grants. In F. Leong & J. Austin (Eds.), *The psychology research handbook: A guide for graduate students and research assistants* (pp. 433-442). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Eissenberg, T. (2003). Teaching successful grant writing to psychology graduate students. *Teaching of Psychology*, 30, 328-330.

Oetting, E. R. (1986). Ten fatal mistakes in grant writing. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 17, 570-573.