

Writing Successful Grants

Exercises in Grant Writing

A. Starting Point: The following questions are a necessary starting point. You need a brief convincing answer to each of them as a way of testing your readiness to start writing a grant. Answer each of the following in 25 words or less:

1. In terms of research, about what are you most passionate? _____

2. What is the problem or need that you plan to address? Why is it important? _____

2a. What sources or kinds of data can you use to validate the importance of your proposed project? _____

3. How is existing knowledge or practice inadequate? _____

4. Why is your idea better? _____

5. How is it new, unique, or different? _____

6. What will it contribute and who will benefit from it? _____

B. The Pitch: What key themes can you stress in building “the pitch” for your proposal? _____

C. Goals and Objectives: Write a goal statement for your proposal: _____

Construct a specific, measurable objective for your proposal? _____

D. Keep it simple: Jargon, passive vs. Active Voice:

1. Reduce the following sentence to a simpler form with fewer words that conveys the same meaning:

It is the objective of the research team to obtain data that can be used in conjunction with a comprehensive chemical kinetics modeling study to generate a detailed understanding of the fundamental chemical processes that lead to engine knock.

2. Rewrite the following as a single sentence with active voice (current form: 83 words, 3 sentences):

Today it was determined that a recent ruling by the Illinois Supreme Court would be allowed to stand. The case involved whether the court should or should not grant custody of a baby boy to his biological father, even though that father has never seen his son. The original Illinois ruling which granted custody to the father was appealed to the State Supreme Court, and today, in an order written by Justice John Paul Stevens, the State Supreme Court refused to delay the Illinois ruling.

3. Substitute a single word for each of the following phrases:

at this point in time _____

at that point in time _____

has the ability to _____

has the potential to _____

in light of the fact that _____

in the event that _____

in the vicinity of _____

owing to the fact that _____

the question as to whether _____

there is no doubt that _____

with the exception of _____

in the near future _____

in addition to _____

in the course _____

in the majority of cases _____

it would appear that _____

E. Goals and Objectives: The application instructions for the NIH call for a Research Plan that includes a section labeled “Specific Aims.” This section should include:

- a) a statement of the long term goals of the proposed line of research
- b) a specific, testable hypothesis for the proposed project
- c) two to four specific aims, each stated concisely in a single sentence

The specific aims (research objectives) are to be cohesive, logically consistent, and capable of testing the stated hypothesis.

Exercise: Given these guidelines, evaluate the effectiveness of the following excerpt from a proposal submitted to NIH. What are the strengths and weaknesses? Would you fund this proposal?

Proposal Excerpt: “Histopathology and Clinical Assessments of Visual Systems in Alzheimer’s Patients”

Research Plan

Section A. Specific Aims

Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is a dementing disorder of unknown etiology. The diagnosis of “presumed” or “probable” AD is made through clinical diagnosis, in recognition that AD can only be definitively diagnosed histopathologically. Characteristically, memory is initially impaired, followed by viso-spatial deficits, and finally involvement of all cognitive functions.

We hope to address a number of Specific Aims by the completion of this project:

1. Is there a selective involvement of a particular component or class of cells in the visual system of AD patients? If so, can this be related to the pathophysiology in the rest of the brain? If there is predilection for loss of a class of ganglion cells in AD, this may yield insight to the reasons for predominant degeneration of large neurons in other areas of the brain (Terry et al., 1981).
2. Can visual testing be used, in conjunction with present neurological and psychometric evaluations, as a screening procedure to identify AD?
3. Can visual testing or histopathological assessments of the visual system be used to identify subtypes of AD? If so, this might provide insights leading to possible management and treatment strategies for AD.
4. We will gain insights into both anatomical and functional AD subgroups through correlative histopathological and clinical assessments of the visual system in the age-matched controls (normals) used in this study.
5. Significant new data relevant to the effect of age on the visual system will be gathered.

Notes: _____

F. Visualization Exercise:

Read the Proposal Summary of the “HOPE Program Expansion Proposal.” Draw a picture of the project’s basic concept.

HOPE Program Expansion Proposal

Summary

For over a decade, The HOPE Program has intervened in the lives of homeless and unemployed men and women who indicate that they can achieve self-sufficiency of given appropriate training and support. Founded in 1984 at a time when most homeless programs provided only emergency assistance, HOPE began to address the underlying causes of homelessness with a comprehensive strategy of support and education to promote economic independence and participation in mainstream society.

At the heart of HOPE’s program is an intensive 14-week *Job-Readiness Training* program which offers on-going counseling and work internships, with educational and computer instruction at our new Literacy Center., and follow-up activities for graduates to help them succeed in the work world. The HOPE method yields remarkable results: 67% of our students secure employment or enroll in continuing education programs within six months of their graduation; and 68% of our graduates are still employed after two years.

We are now seeking a \$20,000 grant from the Frances L. & Edwin L. Cummings Memorial Fund to support our efforts to replicate our program in underserved communities in New York City. Specifically, given HOPE’s growing reputation for providing an exceptionally effective and innovative model of intervention for the homeless and unemployed, we are now receiving a large number of replication inquiries from social services both within and outside of New York City. One replication project was launched successfully just last year at Genesis Homes in East New York. Funding would support the New York efforts of our recently established Replication and Technical Assistance Team (R&TA), which is devoted to training other agencies in our methods, as we continue to evaluate and improve our own program model.

HOPE Program Expansion Model

Graphic Illustration

