Diagram 1. The Grant Writing Process

1. Identify needs and focus.
2. Find prospective grants.
3. Develop general proposal and budget.
5. Receive request for formal application.
6. Prepare specific proposal.
7. Submit proposal before deadline.
8. File reports with funding agencies.
9. Carry out project.
10. Accept or decline award(s).
11. Negotiate multiple awards.
12. Receive award letter(s).
13. Agency reviews proposal.

Dashed lines indicate possible additional steps.
BEFORE YOU APPLY

Have general topic/field in mind

Research funding sources

Check organization mission/guidelines/intention

Check eligibility requirements

Research past winners
A successful grant proposal must articulate all three of these goals.
LEGITIMACY

Identify scope of broad topic (the big questions to be answered or addressed)

Establish significance of the topic.

Is this research worth doing?

What is the gap in our knowledge?

Why should anyone care?
URGENCY

Why now?

Establish relevance to contemporary concerns.

(Another) Why should anyone care?
VIABILITY

Is the project feasible?

Can this project be done?

Can it be done within the timeframe?

Is this the best approach for the desired results?

Even if the research does not go as planned, is there value to the project?
THE HERO NARRATIVE

Why you are the one to take this on?

Establish your credentials.

Demonstrate your knowledge.

Review of literature / previous research by others.

Foreground your preparation to take this on.

Indicate colleagues and collaborators.

Indicate other sources of support.
FROM KELSKY, THE PROFESSOR IS IN
(ESPECIALLY FOR HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES)
PROPOSALS GENERALLY INCLUDE:

Title and Summary
Table of Contents
Goals/Objectives/Specific Aims
Significance
Background
Research Plan
Broader Impacts (NSF)
References

MAY also include:

Budget
Collaboration Letters
Facilities and Equipment
“My dissertation is about declining polar bear populations.”

“I am applying to the X Fellowship to support my dissertation, which is on declining polar bear populations.”

“Many Scientists in the field of environmental studies have been debating the causes of polar bear population decline.”

“Polar bear populations are plummeting due to recent changes in climate.”
THE RESEARCH PLAN

Specifics: What questions will be addressed?

What are your hypotheses?

Methodology (discipline dependent)

Review of literature/ previous research by others.

Review of your own preparation and any of your own preliminary results.
Do not assume inherent appeal, just because you and your advisor and your friends think you have a cool project, or because no one has studied this before.

You need to sell your project.

You need to establish intellectual merit and demonstrate potential for success.
GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

For biological research (NIH-funded), most often includes a list of specific aims and a hypothesis to be tested

FROM THE NIH:

State the hypothesis clearly. Make sure it is understandable, testable and adequately supported by citations in the Background and by data in the Preliminary Results Sections. Be sure to explain how the results to be obtained will be used to test the hypothesis.

http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

FROM THE NSF:

The Project Description should provide a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and must include: objectives for the period of the proposed work and expected significance; relation to longer-term goals of the PI's project; and relation to the present state of knowledge in the field, to work in progress by the PI under other support and to work in progress elsewhere.

http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/pappguide/nsf09_1/gpg_index.jsp
RESEARCH BENEFITS

What impact will this research have beyond your specific field? What are possible applications?

What educational benefits will this research have? Who will be trained?

What outreach efforts will accompany this research?

Will efforts be made to include students from underrepresented groups?
TIMELINE

As narrative or chart (check guidelines).

Address any problems you might encounter and suggest possible back-up plans.

Indicate support already secured:

Scholars/researchers with whom you have corresponded (in addition to your immediate advisor(s) or collaborators)

Access to archives or labs or equipment
BUDGET

Must be realistic and legitimate.

Must correspond to what you say you will do.

Should include any support (funding, access to labs, other) already secured.
THE OBVIOUS (OFTEN OVERLOOKED)

Read the terms to make sure both you and your project meet the specific requirements.

Follow the exact instructions for format, text or character length, number of pages.

Check carefully for typos.

Name drop when appropriate.

Do not pad, but include all relevant references.
Read your abstract (or first paragraph) OUT LOUD ... to yourself and to your friends and colleagues (or better yet a complete stranger). Ask them to tell you in one sentence what you are proposing to do. If they don’t get it, then you need to revise.

Do not assume that if your proposal is rejected, you need to move on to something completely different. Do not throw the baby out with the bathwater! Rethink, retool, try a different funding source and reapply.
A common technique is to stretch sentences and paragraphs to extreme lengths. Consider the following example, which won a Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the journal Philosophy and Literature:

“The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.” (Butler, 1997)

from “Why Academics Have a Hard Time Writing Good Grant Proposals” Texas A&M https://www.tamiu.edu/gradschool/grant/documents/WritingGoodGrantProposals.pdf
STRONG CONCLUSION:

Anticipate results

Return to the urgency of the project.
### ACADEMIC WRITING:
- Scholarly pursuit
- Individual Passion
- Past oriented
- Work that has been done
- Theme-centered
- Theory and thesis
- Expository rhetoric
- Explaining to reader
- Impersonal tone
- Objective, dispassionate
- Individualistic
- Primarily or solo activity
- Few length constraints
- Verbosity rewarded
- Specialized terminology
- Insider jargon

### GRANT WRITING:
- Sponsor goals
- Service attitude
- Future oriented
- Work that should be done
- Project-centered
- Objectives and activities
- Persuasive rhetoric
- "Selling" the reader
- Personal tone
- Conveys excitement
- Team-focused
- Feedback needed
- Strict length constraints
- Brevity rewarded
- Accessible language
- Easily understood

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From “Why Academics Have a Hard Time Writing Good Grant Proposals” Texas A&M [https://www.tamiu.edu/gradschool/grant/documents/WritingGoodGrantProposals.pdf](https://www.tamiu.edu/gradschool/grant/documents/WritingGoodGrantProposals.pdf)
THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

REJECTION is the Norm.
Funding rates vary from 10-20%,
which means 80-90% of proposals get rejected.

Resilience is important (for both scientists and humanists), at least as important as intelligence and motivation.

Luck plays a role, and this is something you cannot control, so focus on the things you can.
REASONS FOR REJECTION

Lack of clarity

Badly written proposal
(Content: make every word count)
(Presentation: typos, misspellings, formatting)

Boring
(you need to communicate your enthusiasm)

Lack of hypotheses

overly ambitious or overly optimistic

Too risky
(unless you can justify the risky parts)
WHY PUT YOURSELF THROUGH THIS:

Importance of having successful grants on your cv.

Perfect combination of both symbolic and actual capitol.

Demonstrates potential for future success.

Leads to actual successful future proposals.
TO BE SUCCESSFUL:

- Explain clearly what you plan to do.
  - Enough detail to be believable.
  - Not too much.
- Literature precedents wherever possible.
  - Make clear what is new and what is not.
- Explain collaborations.
  
- Acknowledge the hard steps and provide contingency plans.
RECENTLY FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Biophysical Studies of Amyloid Formation by Polypeptide Hormones
(Chemistry, NIH)

Coca in Colombia: The Roots of an Illegal Peasant Crop, 1950-1995 (History, Private Foundation)

Characterizing & Detecting Deception in Online Review Communities (CS, Ind.)

Phylogenetic Signal in Limb Bone Shaft Structure Among South Africans
(Anthropology, Private Foundation)

Conservation of Threatened Sharks on the Belize Barrier Reef (SoMAS, NGO)

Molecular Mechanism of miR-140 in Colon Cancer (Pathology, NIH)

Hybrid Graphene-Ferroelectric Devices (Physics, NSF)

Cerebral Correlates of Early Habitual Drinking (Psychology, NGO)
If the project has a 5% chance of working, it’s not worth doing. If it has a 95% chance of working, it’s also not worth doing.

-- Clayton Heathcock