

Some Tips for Writing a Competitive NSF Grant Proposal

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Read the RFP!

- *Read* the RFP: It is probably the only common referent for the program officers, reviewers, and you
- Read and use the references cited in RFP
- Try to address all aspects *explicated* and *implied* in the RFP
- Stay within the parameters of the RFP

Quality of writing

- A grant proposal as a “good” piece of writing
 - One long targeted argument
 - Apply generic requirements of quality writing
 - Ensure clarity and logical flow: Edit and re-edit
 - Use visuals to enhance readability, but avoid gimmicks (e.g., fancy graphics, pop-up boxes)
 - Use other sets of “eyes” and ask for feedback

Striking the balance

- Write with the review panel constituency in mind
- Write for both experts and generalists:
 - Need to show mastery of relevant content/areas
 - Need to avoid overloading readers with jargon and technicalities
- Have both experts and generalists read your proposal (*Hint*: think Beth and Lizanne!)

You and your collaborators

- Try to produce a unified proposal: The need to go beyond any one person's specific agenda (for most major NSF grants)
- Avoid the checkerboard approach to:
 - Conceptualization: Build on current projects but avoid mosaics
 - Writing: Solicit contributions but stick with a primary writer

Leadership team

- Avoid name-throwing: It usually backfires
- Ensure that leadership is consistent with commitments (e.g., time, moneys)
- Be strategic about choosing your leadership team (PI, Co-PIs, Senior Personnel):
 - Are major collaborating institutions, units, etc. represented?
 - Are major areas of necessary expertise covered?

Be mindful of what you write

- . . . after all, you might get the grant 😊
- Make sure it is realistic
- Ensure that you write in what you need to make it happen
- Ensure that collaborators are committed to grant
- When revising budget, do not comprise on what *you* and *others* need to make it happen

Do not give up!

- According to NSF, one out of every four *competitive* grants you write will be funded
- Decision not to fund, does not necessarily reflect on the quality of your grant proposal
- It is a lot of work, but the rewards are worth it!