Writing a Successful Proposal for a University-Community Collaborations Grant

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Tollgate Education Center
Novi, Michigan
Step 1

Recognize a funding opportunity
A funding opportunity exists when our research topic is seen as an issue and aligns with the funding themes articulated by the funding source
Small Group Exercise

In this small group exercise you will examine the relationships among community issues, MSUE mission and work focus areas, and MSU internal grant criteria.

Exercise Instructions:
1. Fill out the following chart, as a group, for each participant in the small group.
2. Present your chart to fellow participants to obtain feedback.
3. Re-work the chart based on the feedback.
### Small Group Exercise Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue statement</th>
<th>How do you know it’s an issue?</th>
<th>The issue aligns with what MSUE work area?</th>
<th>Check the grant funding you will pursue</th>
<th>Why does this issue fit the grant funding choice you have made?</th>
<th>How do you know that the issue is narrow or specific enough for the RFP funding period?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FACT</td>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>UOE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step 1: Recognize a funding opportunity**
Answering Important Questions

To answer the following questions, look for key words, phrases, and descriptions in the Request For Proposals document and compare them to your issue statement and local data.

1. How do you know it will be seen as an issue?
2. Does it align with an MSUE work area?
3. Does it fit the funder you have chosen?
4. Is it narrow or specific enough for the RFP funding period?
Nearly $480,000 in grants will be awarded to MSU faculty for 2004-05 as part of an annual competitive grant program focusing on collaborative research on children, youth, family, and community issues.

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► Community Vitality Program (CVP)
► University Outreach & Engagement (UOE)

The 2004-05 program, called Innovations in University-Community Collaborations, will award FACT grants of up to $50,000 for research on children, youth, and family issues; CVP grants of up to $50,000 for research on community issues; and a one year UOE-Extension grant of up to $50,000 for a research project on community vitality.

The purpose of this Request for Proposals is to increase our competitive stance for federal research funding and grants through foundations that address cutting-edge issues related to the health and well being of children, youth, families, and community vitality. FACT, CVP and UOE seek to support multidisciplinary and collaborative research that links MSU with Michigan communities.

FACT, CVP and UOE will host open forums about these RFPs on:

► Thursday, Nov. 18, 2004, 1 - 3 p.m., Kellogg Center Garden Level Room 61
► Friday, Nov. 19, 2004, 9 - 11 a.m., Kellogg Center Garden Level Room 61

The purpose of these forums is to bring together potential partners for projects from both on and off campus, to provide further details about the RFPs, and to address questions about the application process. Additional information, including the RFP application and a searchable database of potential partners, is available on the FACT web site at www.fact.msu.edu and www.outreach.msu.edu
FACT Topics

FACT proposals, for a grant period of 12 to 24 months, must focus on topics that fall within three areas of distinction for the upcoming year:

1. **Family and Community Vitality**
   Healthy, vital communities with an active citizenry are better able to address the myriad challenges facing children and families. In this area, FACT seeks to support research and outreach that furthers scholarship on community empowerment, leadership development and capacity building to meet child and family needs, particularly among vulnerable populations and communities.

2. **Families, Communities and Schools**
   FACT seeks projects that build community capacity to support children and youth, and link families, schools and communities. Topics may include: literacy, school reform, out-of-school time, youth assets, technology in education, youth-at-risk, youth leadership development, youth sports, recreation, and family involvement in schools.

3. **Family and Community Health**
   FACT invests in research that supports healthy lifestyles for children, youth and families. Topics may include healthy eating, nutrition and health education, parenting and food, breastfeeding, eating disorders, obesity, and food safety.
The CVP priority funding areas are:

1. **Environmental health and well being**

   Communities exist in human-influenced environments and the health of those environments influences the health of the people who live in them. Where the natural environment is substantially degraded, human illnesses may result. But the community also produces a social environment. Social conditions can produce regional concentrations of crime or stress-related illnesses. The design of buildings and the physical layout of a community may affect health and environmental outcomes.

   Theme Objectives:
   - Develop better understanding of interdependencies between environmental conditions, broadly defined, and community well-being.
   - Help policy makers formulate policies to mitigate negative environmental influences.
CVP Program Themes (continued)

2. Economic development
Globalization and outsourcing are creating tremendous opportunities, risks and changes for the economic base of Michigan communities. Michigan's traditional economic strength, manufacturing, is shrinking as the service sector grows and as low-skill jobs move to places where labor is cheaper. Economies of scale and improvements in transportation and communication networks have restructured almost every sector in Michigan. Understanding the fiscal and economic impacts of job creation tools, workforce development, and infrastructure development are critical to maintaining a competitive Michigan economy.

Theme Objectives:
– To better understand the forces driving structural change in Michigan's economy.
– To develop cost-effective ways of stimulating sustained local economic development.
3. Poverty, Inequality and Social Justice
Michigan is a wealthy state in a wealthy country, yet in some communities the poverty rate is 42 percent. Michigan's poor live in areas that are either very urban or very rural; a few older suburbs also are beginning to decline into poverty. In some Michigan communities, poverty is multi-generational; in other areas, recent immigrants strive to attain the American dream. Poor communities do not enjoy the same level of services or infrastructure as richer communities, putting children at a disadvantage in their mental and physical development. Poor communities often may have to overcome the additional disadvantages of high levels of pollution, fear or crime. A better understanding of how to create the appropriate mix of government, market and non-profit mechanisms to alleviate poverty is needed.

Theme Objectives:
– To better understand the causes and consequences of poverty, inequality and social injustice in Michigan communities.
– To help inform federal, state and community actions aimed at reducing poverty, inequality and social injustice.
4. Community and Neighborhood Involvement
Community interaction in Michigan has undergone a dramatic shift. People no longer stay in the same community for generations. The Internet, cell phones and more media choices have added versatility and enriched lives in many ways, but also have contributed to a decline in the sense of connectedness to place. Community leaders struggle with low levels of trust, involving others in determining future directions for the community, and filling vital paid and volunteer public service roles. Trust and engagement are always important, but especially so in times of insecurity and in responding to disasters.

Theme Objectives:
- To increase our knowledge of the forces driving change in community and neighborhood involvement.
- To learn how to sustain and enhance community and neighborhood involvement.
1. **Community and Economic Development, including Responsible Use of Natural Resources and Land**

   We know that healthy, vital communities with an active citizenry are better able to address the myriad challenges that face citizens both at the local and regional levels. Projects in this topic area will support research and outreach that furthers scholarship on how communities can build, promote, and sustain economic development efforts; how communities can make the most effective use of land and the natural resources that are available to the local and regional area; improvements to community planning and policy development; building awareness of the ecology of natural systems and the capacity to make positive changes; and identifying, promoting, and assessing best practices for responsible land and water systems.

2. **Positive Outcomes for Children, Youth, and Families, including Helping Youth to Succeed**

   Asset-based approaches to changing the lives of children, youth, and families are critical if society is to achieve transformation away from poverty, disease, low educational attainment, delinquency, substance abuse, family dysfunction, family instability, and similar personal and social disadvantages. Especially important in contemporary society are programs that provide means for youth to succeed across the domains of social, educational, personal, and community development; to reduce vulnerabilities; to enhance leadership and skill development of volunteers; and to provide community generated and community based positive youth development experiences. Projects in this topic area must reflect at least a three-year commitment to actively work with community partners to effect change that is sustainable.
3. **Family and Community Security, including Helping to Build Healthy Families and Strong Communities**

Homeland security has generated great concern across the country and across a wide range of disciplines and infrastructure support businesses. Proposals in this domain should focus on people and community aspects of homeland security, collaborations with community partners to enhance family support systems, promotion of healthy life styles, family resource management, parenting and caregiver skills, reduction of food safety hazards, and strengthening families and communities to deal with change and transition. Other issues of concern include: building capacity for rural and urban community development and revitalization; building community capacity for creating an environment where people of different cultures, backgrounds, and life circumstances can reach their full potential; assisting elected and community decision-makers to develop leadership, facilitator, and public affairs skills; promoting entrepreneurial development and business expansion; and encouraging communities to develop dialogue, collaboration, and emergency response capability.

4. **Enhancing Sustainable and Profitable Agriculture**

Society is continually challenged to find ways to assist its farmers and their supportive agribusinesses to sustain profitability. Proposals in this area should focus on issues related to balancing inputs to agricultural systems to increase profitability and efficiency, management of outputs in agricultural systems to increase profitability and efficiency, support for entrepreneurial and consumer-centered product agriculture, identification and response to threats and emerging problems for the food and agricultural industry, and identification of agricultural systems that are socially and environmentally balanced within communities.
5. **Technology and Human Development**

How does technology advance the quality of life at the individual, family, and community levels? Proposals in this domain must focus on the human consequences of technology, in contrast to a focus on the technology itself. Examples may include studies of the academic achievement benefits of various computer programs, the impact of violence in computer games on children’s emotional development, the use of the Internet (digital divide), or the usability or accessibility of Web pages.
Step 2

Establish a team to respond to an identified funding opportunity
Small Group Exercise

In this small group exercise you will examine the following questions:

1. Based on RFP criteria and general proposal information, who should be the members of your proposal team?
   
   Note: This is the actual team that you will recruit to submit and implement your proposal.

2. What role will they play in the proposal writing and implementation?

3. What skill and expertise do they bring to the table?

Exercise Instructions:

1. Fill out the following chart, as a group, for each participant in your group.

2. Discuss with the entire workshop:
   
   – What were the challenges of filling out this chart?
## Small Group Exercise Chart

**Step 2:** Establish a team to respond to an identified funding opportunity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Partner(s)</th>
<th>Partner Name(s)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Skill and Expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSUE staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community member(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MSU faculty</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FACT Criteria

We will prioritize projects that:

1. Are multidisciplinary and integrative, representing diverse and meaningful relationships across departments and disciplines
2. Link MSU faculty with Michigan communities and build partnerships
3. Are useful to the community
4. Have specific plans for seeking future extramural funding, including a detailed description of potential funding sources to sustain the project
5. Demonstrate use of accepted methods of research
6. Propose a clear action plan, including research, application, and dissemination
7. Demonstrate potential to be successful, through vitae, letters of support, etc.
8. Include a 10% match from department or organization (may be in-kind support)
9. Are led by a primary investigator who has not received FACT funding for a project in the previous year
10. Represent new partnerships across MSU departments
11. Encourage involvement of assistant professors
12. Represent new lines of work for senior faculty
Proposal Format

Proposals must include:

1. No more than 10 pages of double spaced text (references, citations, budget, vitae, and other supporting documents not included in page count)
2. Font size smaller than 12 not accepted
3. Cover Page (download at www.fact.msu.edu)
   Indicate on cover page which grant program: FACT, CVP or UOE-Extension
4. 250 word Abstract sent on floppy disk in Microsoft Word or in Rich Text Format (.rtf)
5. Foundation of knowledge on which the project will be based
6. Statement of project’s importance and relevance to the community
7. Objectives and research methods
8. Work plan, timeline, and dissemination plan
9. Plan for collaboration
10. Plan for sustainability and seeking future external funding
11. Budget and budget justification (download at www.fact.msu.edu)
12. Vitae, resumes, or professional biographies of all project leaders. Include documentation of previously funded and non-funded projects
13. Support of department chair, Extension county director, and/or community affiliate
14. Two (2) letters of support; include one from each of the following: 1) college dean or department chair 2) community partner or Extension county director
Budget

Download and complete the Budget Justification worksheet from www.fact.msu.edu

1. Money will not be available for capital items or indirect costs
2. Funds must be administered through an MSU department
3. No transmittal form is necessary
4. Money for faculty salary is only available for summer for those on an academic appointment (No more than 20%)
5. The 10% match may be in-kind
Michigan State University
Innovations in University-Community Collaborations
2004-2005 Request for Proposals

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Step 3

Prepare for the Proposal

What do you currently know/have, and what do you need to know/obtain?
Group Exercise

In this exercise, you will:

1. Discern from the RFP the items that must be addressed
2. Assess whether you or your partners have the knowledge or skill/expertise to write each section of the proposal
3. Develop a plan if you need to recruit an additional team member who has the knowledge, skill or expertise

Exercise Instructions:

1. Fill out the following two charts, as a group, for each participant in your group
2. Discuss with the entire workshop:
   - What were the challenges of filling out this chart?
## Assessing Our Proposal Knowledge, Skill and Expertise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Criteria Item</th>
<th>Check the Appropriate Column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have the knowledge and skill/expertise to write up this portion of the proposal</td>
<td>My community partner(s) has/have the knowledge and skill/expertise to write up this portion of the proposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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[Step 3: Prepare for the Proposal]
## Assessing Our Proposal Knowledge, Skill and Expertise

For every proposal criteria item where you checked the recruitment column in the chart above, fill out the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Criteria Item</th>
<th>What knowledge, skill, and expertise is needed to write up this portion of the proposal?</th>
<th>Recruitment action steps (outline the steps you will take to find and recruit the new team member(s))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
Step 4

Understand the Foundation of Knowledge on which the Proposal Project will be Based
Theory of Change

The Theory of Change web site (http://www.theoryofchange.org/index.html) is a joint venture between ActKnowledge and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. They define a theory of change as follows:

As we define it, a Theory of Change defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks--interchangeably referred to as outcomes, results, accomplishments, or preconditions—is depicted on a map known as a pathway of change/change framework, which is a graphic representation of the change process.

Built around the pathway of change, a Theory of Change describes the types of interventions (a single program or a comprehensive community initiative) that bring about the outcomes depicted in the pathway of a change map. Each outcome in the pathway of change is tied to an intervention, revealing the often complex web of activity that is required to bring about change.

A Theory of Change would not be complete without an articulation of the assumptions that stakeholders use to explain the change process represented by the change framework. Assumptions explain both the connections between early, intermediate and long term outcomes and the expectations about how and why proposed interventions will bring them about. Often, assumptions are supported by research, strengthening the case to be made about the plausibility of theory and the likelihood that stated goals will be accomplished.

Stakeholders value theories of change as part of program planning and evaluation because they create a commonly understood vision of the long-term goals, how they will be reached, and what will be used to measure progress along the way.
Group Exercise

In this exercise, you will:

1. Articulate your theory of change through logic modeling or theory of change modeling.
2. Ground your theory of change in existing bodies of knowledge.

Exercise Instructions:

1. Jointly develop a theory of change model or a logic model for each participant in your group.
2. Identify existing research that informs the construction of each theory of change model or logic model.
Logic Modeling

Outcomes = Benefits to People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New knowledge or understanding</th>
<th>Initial outcomes (or intention outcomes)</th>
<th>“What they have inside”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changed beliefs, attitudes or values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Modified behavior or practice</td>
<td>Intermediate outcomes (or behavior outcomes)</td>
<td>“What they do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved condition</td>
<td>Long-term outcomes (or status outcomes)</td>
<td>“How they are”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altered status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Logic Modeling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Initial Outcomes</th>
<th>Intermediate Outcomes</th>
<th>Long-Term Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>• Skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, understanding, emotions, self-expression, spiritual awareness</td>
<td>• Individual practice and behavior</td>
<td>• Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Spiritual practice</td>
<td>• Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group or family</td>
<td>• Shared group/family: culture, norms, values, beliefs, morals, ethics, worldviews</td>
<td>• Group/family relationships</td>
<td>• Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual understanding</td>
<td>• Group/family practices</td>
<td>• Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual agreement</td>
<td>• Group/family interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>• Shared agency culture, norms, values, beliefs, morals, ethics, worldviews</td>
<td>• Interdepartmental relationships</td>
<td>• Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual understanding</td>
<td>• Agency management practices</td>
<td>• Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual agreement</td>
<td>• Service delivery practices</td>
<td>• Agency structures/ system and its governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery system or neighborhood</td>
<td>• Shared system culture, norms, values, beliefs, morals, ethics, worldviews</td>
<td>• System member relationships</td>
<td>• Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual understanding</td>
<td>• System member interaction</td>
<td>• Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual agreement</td>
<td>• System practices</td>
<td>• Delivery system structure and its governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>• Shared community social norms, culture, values, beliefs, morals, ethics, worldviews</td>
<td>• Relationships among groups, neighborhoods</td>
<td>• Status and condition: social, economic, environmental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community interests</td>
<td>• Civic action</td>
<td>• Community structures/ infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual understanding</td>
<td>• Community dialogue</td>
<td>• Community governance structure, laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual agreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References**

Logic Modeling

Understanding the Relationship Between Outcomes and Impact

**Program Activities**

These are the interventions that we do with our consumers to get to the outcomes

**Initial Outcomes**

These are the beliefs, understandings, and skills that are needed to enact the practice

- Young person believes that it is important to resolve conflict non-violently
- Young person understands the concepts of non-violent conflict resolution
- Young person learns non-violent conflict resolution techniques and strategies

**Intermediate Outcomes**

These are the practices or behavior that help consumers realize the building blocks

- Young person uses non-violent conflict resolution strategies when confronted with conflict

**Long-Term Outcomes**

These statuses and conditions are the building blocks that consumers need to achieve the desired impact. (What evidence would suggest we’ve identified appropriate building blocks?)

- Search Institute 40 Developmental Assets
  - *Young person who seeks to resolve conflict non-violently

**Impact**

The ultimate status or condition that we are seeking with our consumers

- Youth who are mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially healthy
Multi-Level Logic Model: Example 1

**Activities**

- PR & Outreach
- Intake & Assessment
- Case Coordination Plans mutually enacted

**Initial Outcomes**

- Individuals & families are aware of Case Coordination Agencies
- Individuals/families & staff mutually understand and agree upon case coordination plans

**Intermediate Outcomes**

- Individuals & families access Case Coordination Agencies
- Individuals and families:
  - Obtain income at 220%-349% of OMB poverty level
  - Obtain associate’s degree or equivalent
  - Obtain full-time employment
  - Rents unsubsidized housing
  - Meets food & nutrition needs
  - Can pay for a limited choice of child care
  - Obtain some private health insurance
  - Have access to public/private transportation that generally meets needs
  - Consistently pays utility bills although home energy inefficient
  - Has access to family & community support
  - Has positive & stable family interactions
  - Is 2 or more years removed from any substance abuse

**Long-Term Outcomes**

- Individuals & families who are socio-economically vulnerable or in crisis
- Individuals & families who are self-sufficient

**Public & Private Service Providers**

- Developed & implemented:
  - Agreed upon procedures & linkages
  - Common forms & data bases
  - Common mechanisms for assessment & feedback
  - Common mechanisms for sharing resources including funding
- Developing & implementing:
  - Agreed upon case coordination procedures & linkages to navigate the self-sufficiency community system of care
  - Common case coordination forms & data bases
  - Common case coordination mechanisms for assessment & feedback
  - Common case coordination mechanisms for sharing resources including funding

**Self-Sufficiency Community System of Care**

- Public & private service providers who organize into a comprehensive & interconnected network in order to accomplish better socio-economic outcomes for vulnerable or in crisis individuals & families
Step 4: Understand the Foundation of Knowledge on which the Proposal Project will be Based

Multi-Level Logic Model: Example 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Initial Outcomes</th>
<th>Intermediate Outcomes</th>
<th>Long-Term Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Youth feel safe at the Center.</td>
<td>Youth actively participates in Center programming.</td>
<td>Neighbors create a caring neighborhood.</td>
<td>Youth build positive developmental assets (Search Institute assets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth think that Center programming is cool &amp; fun.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neighbors participate in process to identify available community resources &amp; agree on which are needed for the neighborhood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neighbors view the Center as part of the neighborhood &amp; trust the staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neighbors advocate to obtain community resources.</td>
<td>Young people experiences caring neighbors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neighbors believe they can make a difference.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Neighbors agree on sets of community resources needed in the neighborhood that help build assets in youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Activities that help youth feel safe.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Center maintains good relationships with neighbors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities that help neighbors believe in themselves &amp; build assets.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Center maintains good relationships with community resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities that build relationships &amp; create understanding.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Center negotiates with community organizations to obtain community resources &amp; programming.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activities that maintain the Center.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Community organizations deliver programming in Center (asset building programs).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporting of Outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Community provides core funding for the Center.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Center (Agency)</td>
<td>Community organizations agree to provide programming at the Center.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community believes Center is important to maintain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service Delivery System</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Step 5

Develop Your Proposal Work Plan
Group Exercise

In this exercise, you will develop a proposal work plan to monitor and manage the writing and submission of your proposal.

Exercise Instructions:
1. Each participant fills out the following chart for their own proposal.
2. Each participant shares their proposal project management chart with others in their small group to get feedback.
3. Based on the feedback, each participant modifies their proposal project management chart.
## Proposal Project Management Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Criteria and Submission Items</th>
<th>Initial Draft</th>
<th>Review Draft: Corrections, Additions, Deletions</th>
<th>Finalizing Proposal Item</th>
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<td>Who is Responsible</td>
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*Step 5: Develop Your Proposal Work Plan*
Part 1

Increase the Rigor of Your Community Based Research Project

A Conversation with Hiram E. Fitzgerald
Assistant Provost for University Outreach & Engagement and University Distinguished Professor of Psychology
Writing the Proposal

What Reviewers Want to Know

Proposal Components

1. Principal aims
2. Supportive literature
3. Prior work
   – Method proposed
   – Detail description of sample
   – Procedures
     • Description of instruments
     • Research plan
     • Data analysis
4. Human subjects
5. Sustainability
6. Abstract of proposal
7. Description of investigator roles
8. Budget
Principal Aims

Problem Statement

(Need, Issue, Gap in Knowledge Base)

1. Proposal reviewers will want to understand the community identified problem your proposal is addressing and how it fits into the grant’s preferred areas for support.

2. You will need to articulate the broad aspects of the problem as well as the local aspects. For example, a proposal that focuses on homelessness reduction will describe both the local problem and the national problem, and how the local problem is posited within the national problem.

Adapted from:
University of Arizona, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
http://sbsri.web.arizona.edu/docs/2Articulatingbasiccomponents.ppt
Principal Aims

Tips for Writing the Problem Statement

1. Describe the problem clearly and illustrate the importance of it (not every reviewer will see the urgency of the matter your proposal is concerned with).

2. Provide statistics or other support to document and show the significance of the problem.


4. Describe the target population – who is affected by the problem (describe location, numbers, demographics).

5. Provide baseline data results, if available, if you plan on showing a reduction in the broad problem.

6. Contrast the national with the local incidence of the problem, if relevant.

Adapted from:
University of Arizona, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
http://sbsri.web.arizona.edu/docs/2Articulatingbasiccomponents.ppt
Principal Aims
Specific Aims

Purpose
To describe concisely and realistically what your proposal is intended to accomplish.

Content
Specific aims should cover:
1. Broad, long-term goals
2. What the specific research is intended to accomplish, e.g., test a stated hypothesis, create a novel design, solve a specific problem, develop a new intervention or technology
3. Specific time-phased research objectives

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, Quick Guide for Grant Applications
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Long-Term Goal and Intent (or Research Hypothesis):

Aim # 1
   – Research Objective 1
   – Research Objective 2

Aim # 2
   – Research Objective 3
   – Research Objective 4
   – Research Objective 5

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, *Quick Guide for Grant Applications*
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Principal Aims

Tips for Writing Specific Aims

1. This section should begin with a brief narrative describing the long-term goals and the proposal intent, followed by a numbered list of the aims (research objectives).

2. Make sure the intent or hypothesis is stated clearly. Make sure it is understandable and testable.

3. Show that the research objectives are attainable within the stated time frame.

4. Be as brief and specific as possible.

5. Be certain all the aims are related.

6. Focus on aims where you have good supporting data and scientific expertise.

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, Quick Guide for Grant Applications
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Supportive Literature

Purpose
To outline the current state of knowledge relevant to the proposal and the potential contribution of this research to the problem addressed.

Writing Tips
1. Establish familiarity with recent research findings. Avoid outdated research. Use citations.
2. Make sure the citations are specifically related to the proposed research.
3. Highlight why your potential research findings are important beyond the confines of a specific project, i.e., how the results can be applied to further research in this field or related areas.
4. Stress any innovations in research methods used, interventions proposed.

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, *Quick Guide for Grant Applications*
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Prior Work

Purpose
To describe prior work by the investigators that is relevant to the proposal. This helps to establish the experience and capabilities of the investigators as they relate to the proposal goals, intent, and research design.

Writing Tips
1. Clearly link the investigators’ previous work to the research design and community aspects of the proposal.
2. Show that the investigators have the experience and training to carry out the proposed work.

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, *Quick Guide for Grant Applications*
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Method Proposed

Purpose
To describe how the research will be carried out, i.e., the research plan.

Content
The methods proposed section or research plan should include the following:
1. An overview of the design—experimental, quasi-experimental, single case studies, etc.
2. A detailed description of sample if one is proposed
3. A detailed description of specific methods to be employed to accomplish the specific aims
4. A detailed description of the instruments to be used
5. A detailed discussion of the way in which the results will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted
6. A projected sequence or timetable (work plan)
7. A description of any new methodology used and why it represents an improvement over the existing ones
8. A discussion of potential difficulties and limitations and how these will be overcome or mitigated
9. Expected results, and alternative approaches that will be used if unexpected results are found

Adapted from: National Cancer Institute, Quick Guide for Grant Applications
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Method Proposed

Writing Tips

1. Give sufficient detail. Do not assume that the reviewers will know how you intend to proceed.

2. Avoid excessive experimental detail by referring to publications that describe the methods to be employed. Publications cited should be by the applicants, if at all possible. Citing someone else’s publication establishes that you know what method to use, but citing your own (or that of a collaborator) establishes that the applicant personnel are experienced with the necessary techniques.

3. If relevant, explain why one approach or method will be used in preference to others. This establishes that the alternatives were not simply overlooked. Give not only the “how” but the “why.”

4. If employing a complex technology for the first time, take extra care to demonstrate familiarity with the experimental details and potential pitfalls. Add a co-investigator or consultant experienced with the technology, if necessary.

5. Document proposed collaborations and offers of materials or reagents of restricted availability with letters from the individuals involved.

6. Number the sections in this part of the application to correspond to the numbers of the Specific Aims.

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, Quick Guide for Grant Applications
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Human Subjects

Purpose
Describing the involvement of human subjects ensures the protection of the rights and welfare of people who participate in research projects.

Content
Provide a complete description of the proposed involvement of human subjects as it relates to the work outlined in the Research Plan section.

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, *Quick Guide for Grant Applications*
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Sustainability

Purpose
To describe, if applicable, how the project will be sustained after MSU support ends.

Content
Provide a complete description of resource development plans for future sustainability, including potential funding sources and likelihood of support.
Abstract

Purpose
To describe succinctly every major aspect of the proposed project except the budget.

Content
The abstract should include:
1. a brief background of the project
2. specific aims or hypotheses
3. the unique features of the project
4. the methodology (action steps) to be used
5. expected results
6. evaluation methods
7. a description of how your results will affect other research areas
8. the significance of the proposed research

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, Quick Guide for Grant Applications
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Abstract

Writing Tips

1. Be complete, but brief.
2. Use all the space allotted.
3. View the abstract as your one-page advertisement.
4. Write the abstract last so that it reflects the entire proposal. Spend time reviewing it.
5. Remember that the abstract will have a longer shelf life than the rest of the proposal and may be used for purposes other than the review, such as to provide a brief description of the grant in annual reports, presentations, etc.

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, *Quick Guide for Grant Applications*
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Budget

Purpose
The budget and justification present and justify all expenses required to achieve project aims and objectives.

Content
The budget and justification should cover the following:
1. personnel
2. consultants
3. equipment
4. supplies
5. travel
6. other expenses

Adapted from:
National Cancer Institute, Quick Guide for Grant Applications
http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/extra/extdocs/gntapp.htm
Why Proposals are not Funded

From a former NHI Division of Research Chief

1. The proposal is too vague, general, and lacks detail.
2. The investigator does not have adequate experience for this research.
3. The overall design is unsound, or techniques are unrealistic.
4. The investigator’s knowledge and judgment of literature is poor.
5. The application is poorly prepared.
6. The results, even if obtained, would be meaningless.
7. The problem is not dealt with adequately.
8. The methods are unsuited for the objectives.
9. The experimental purpose or hypothesis is too vague.
10. The problem is of insufficient importance.
11. The approach lacks imagination.
12. The design is too imaginative, or inappropriate.
13. Investigators fail to respond appropriately to issues related to human subjects, not just in the informed consent letter, but also inclusion/exclusion of women, children, and minorities.

Adapted from: How To Write Winning Grant Proposals by Phillip J. Reed
Part 2

Finalize Your Proposal Development Work
Finalizing Our Proposal Development Work

Based on the conversation with Hiram E. Fitzgerald, participants in their small groups:

1. For each proposal, as a group, complete any work left undone from the first day
2. For each proposal, as a group, make any modifications to that work based on the conversation with Hi Fitzgerald
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