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Unraveling the Mystique in Grant Applications

External funding is often available to support program development efforts. Getting external funding is not usually easy, but some procedures and techniques (i.e., rules of the game) can help you to prepare a competitive proposal. Persons trained in proposal writing, institutions of higher education personnel, local school systems' research and grant offices, and employees of consulting firms that specialize in proposal development and "set-asides" get the majority of external funds. Nevertheless, some guidelines, ideas, and tips from experienced proposal writers can help newcomers and part-time proposal writers develop competitive proposals. This book presents a summary of ideas about proposal development, specific information to help the novice proposal writer, examples from successful proposals, and tips to help a person become more successful in proposal writing. The major emphasis in this book and the examples are for programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), National Science Foundation (NSF), and National Institute of Health (NIH), but the generic concepts and techniques can help in writing proposals for other agencies. The book provides strategies, vocabulary, examples, sources of ideas, and general information to aid both the novice and the experienced proposal writer in improving their proposals for funding support.

Grant Tip

Getting external funding is not usually easy, but there are procedures and techniques that will help you prepare a competitive proposal.

PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Proposal development is hard work, but the result can be rewarding. Contrary to some cynics, obtaining funding support is not entirely the result of politics or chance. Even if a winning proposal is a fortuitous blend of ambiguous ingredients, careful attention to ideas and strategies that have been successful can improve the odds. Although good

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style and technique can help, the most important ingredient is a good idea that connects with the particular interests of some funding source. Planned approaches, study, and attention to detail can dramatically increase your chances of success.

Besides a good idea, a writing ability, and a general knowledge of proposal processes, a writer also needs access to information and to “tools of the trade.” In developing a proposal for the federal government, you will need access to some primary sources including the *Federal Register* (FR), the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA), and when necessary, the *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR). These are covered in detail in Chapter 3, “Using the *Federal Register* (FR) and the *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR),” and in Chapter 4, “Using the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA).” Other primary sources are the program guidelines or application packet and some federal management circulars (FMCs). Secondary sources include articles and reference books about grants, newsletters from professional associations, and professional reading that helps explain various programs and grant processes. Another essential source is the Internet, which can provide access to numerous funding resources and which can be used to explore and submit grant applications like the Web site <http://www.grants.gov>. The various facets of the Internet will be further explored in Chapter 5, “Using the Internet to Access Funding Resources,” and in Chapter 6, “The Hub of Federal Grants: Grants.gov.”

WHAT IS A PROPOSAL?

A formal proposal for funding, as the term is used here, is a written document developed in accordance with specific rules or guidelines. The document, in the required format, connects your (a person’s or institution’s) ideas and interests with the ideas,

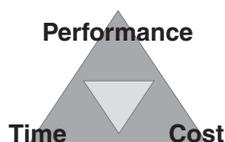
Grant Tip

The formal proposal, in the required form and format, connects your ideas and interests with the ideas, interests, and programs of a funding source.

interests, and programs of a funding source. The proposal may be the only direct contact with the funding agency during the competition period. Except for earmarks and set-asides, competition is initiated by a funding source inviting institutions or agencies to submit proposals. Deadlines are established, and responders send proposals to the funding source. The proposals are reviewed and rated. Certain ones are selected as eligible to receive funds. Therefore, your proposal should be *clear, cogent, and concise* and should *clearly convey* your ideas and the

relationship of your project to the funding agency’s goals. Any project that does not explicitly advance the purposes of the program or agency to which it is submitted will not be considered for funding. The competition process is explained in detail in Chapter 13, “Understanding How Grants Are Awarded.”

In its simplest form, a proposal expresses a relationship among three important variables: *performance, time, and cost*. The proposer offers to perform something in a specified amount of time for a related cost. These three variables—performance, time, and cost—are carefully integrated and interrelated in the proposal.



The overall relationship among these variables as expressed in the proposal should remain constant. Therefore, during budget negotiations for a grant that has been accepted (see Chapter 13), if the grants or contracts officer disallows a specific

expenditure, the proposer must realign the time and performance variables to maintain the integrity of the relationships among the three variables. For example, assume that the original budget was for \$496,318 and the negotiator allows only \$422,526. The proposer should adjust performance and time variables to correlate with the new cost. Failure to align these variables may suggest that the original idea was poorly planned or the budget was inflated. Having clearly established relationships among these three variables is an important basis for a strong proposal and project.¹ A good proposal is a rational expression of relationships among performance, time, and cost as expressed in a formal document to a funding agency.

In spite of the seeming complexity of many proposals, the proposal can generally convey the relationship among these variables by relying on guiding questions of successful media reporters: what, why, how, who, when, where, and how much? In form and structure, a proposal often moves from the general *why and what* to the very specific *when and how much*. A budget, although only an estimate of proposed expenditures, must relate specific costs for particular activities and staff. Figure 1.1 identifies the general flow of the proposal from general to specific.

Grant Tip

A proposal is a rational expression of relationships among performance, time, and cost as expressed in a formal document to a funding agency.

GRANTS AND OTHER FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

There are many ways to consider and to categorize types and sources of external support. The focus in this book is primarily on a source of support known as a grant and specifically a grant from the federal government. Most examples are from grants available through the USDE.

Broadly speaking, the federal government has three categories of instruments for supporting funding. These three categories are the *grant*, the *contract*, and the *cooperative agreement*. There are many differences between and among these categories. The basic differences are easy to understand.

Grant	Contract	Cooperative Agreement
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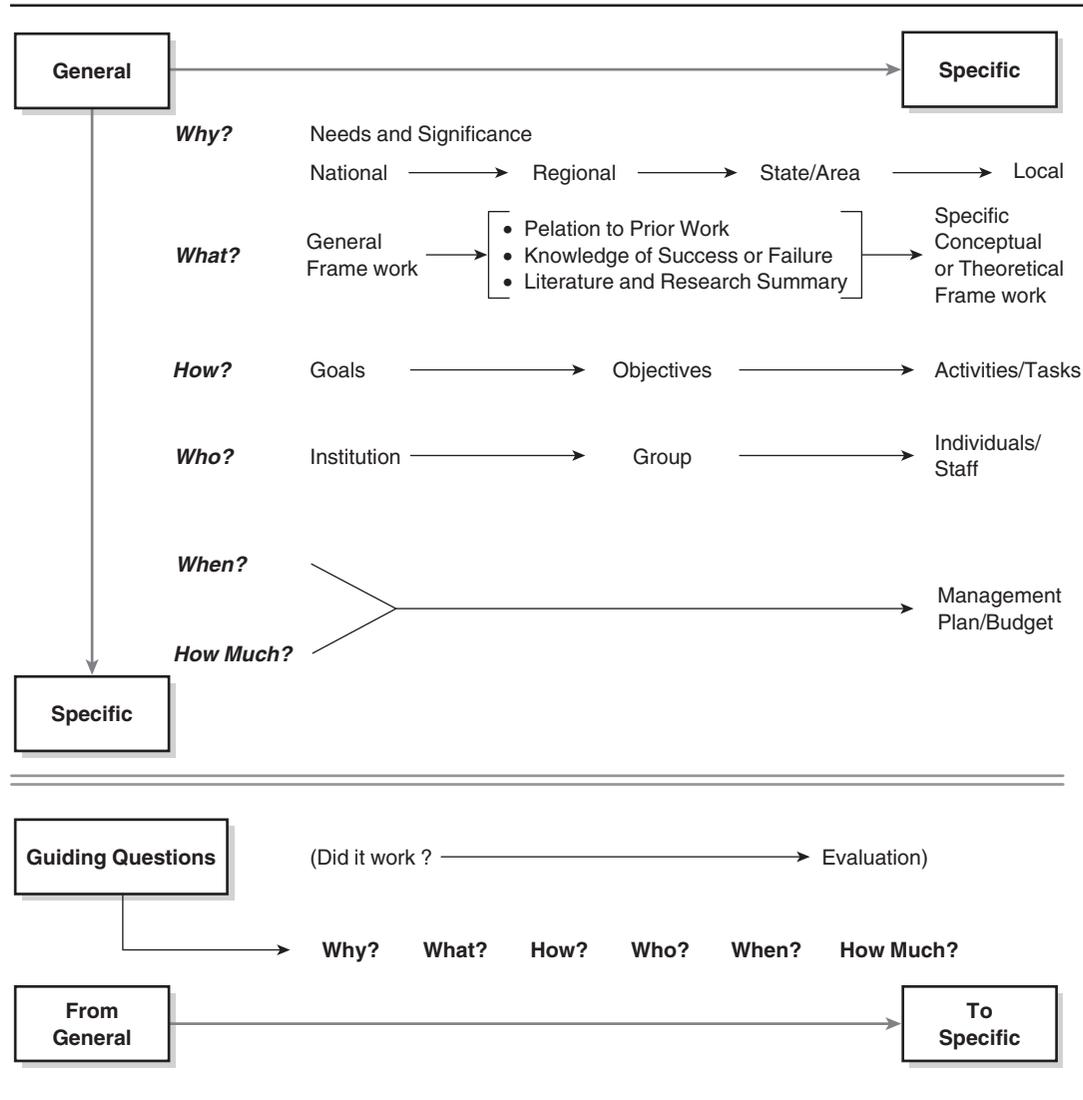
A grant is an award made to advance the purposes of a specific federal program, such as Education of the Handicapped, Title I, Upward Bound, and Reading or Teacher Quality Initiatives. Chapter 11, "Reviewing a Funded Proposal," presents a Talent Search proposal, which is a grant. The federal program personnel specify fairly broad and general guidelines describing the program's purpose and announce a competition inviting people to design projects to carry forth the purposes of the program. The government announces the grant competition in the FR. The proposal writer obtains a

¹Terminology

A grant is awarded based upon an *application* developed in response to a Request for Applications (RFA). A *contract* is awarded based upon a *proposal* developed in response to a Request for Proposal (RFP). In reality, proposal writers speak of writing grants (rather than applications) in response to RFPs. A *program* is the agency's large-scale initiative. The application or proposal is to operate a *project* to meet and carry forth the purposes of the agency's *program*.

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Figure 1.1 Proposal Guiding Questions: General to Specific



copy of the grant application package, which contains guidelines to help in preparing the grant proposal. The proposer has some latitude and flexibility in determining what to do within the purposes and general guidelines of the program. There are several successful grant proposals, depending on the amount of funds available to support the program.

Grant Tip

A grant is made to advance the purposes of a specific federal program. You have considerable latitude and flexibility within the guidelines of the program.

A contract is the government’s way of soliciting for work that has been clearly specified. A contract competition assumes that government personnel know what needs to be done, have developed a set of specifications, and seek a qualified entity to conduct the work. Typically, there is only one or, at best, a few successful bidders to conduct the specified work. Solicitation for a contract is made public through RFPs.

Government personnel announce many RFPs in the Federal Business Opportunity (FedBizOpps). (Increasingly, competition for funding has been circumscribed by set-asides and earmarks inserted in funding bills.)

A cooperative agreement falls between a contract and a grant. In a cooperative agreement, funding agency personnel specify in general what needs to be done and, although the funds are awarded to allow discretion in their eventual use, government personnel work very closely with the recipient agency in defining, clarifying, and conducting the work requested in the cooperative agreement. Cooperative agreements are often used for large-scale projects such as federal research and development (R&D) centers or regional laboratories. Cooperative agreement competitions are announced through the FR, which is published every working day. The FR, one of the necessary tools of the trade for a grantwriter, is explained in detail in Chapter 3, "Using the *Federal Register* (FR) and the *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR)." A cooperative agreement competition usually has a very limited number of successful competitors. Once they have been awarded a cooperative agreement, the grantees will coordinate with government personnel to achieve the cooperative agreement's goals. Figure 1.2 is a summary of some key differences among grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements. (This is a modification of a handout that was gathered from a workshop [source is unknown].)

Figure 1.2 Summary of Differences Among Three Federal Funding Instruments

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Federal Agency</i>	<i>Relationship</i>
Grant	Patron	The grantee is responsible for performance with little or no agency involvement during performance. The agency supports the grantee's well-defined and well-written ideas.
Cooperative Agreement	Partner	The agency is involved during the performance and shares responsibility for performance. The agency and grantee plan together and maintain a cooperative working arrangement.
Contract	Purchaser	The agency is procuring for direct or third party use. The successful bidder will conform to predetermined activities.

THE GRANT APPLICATION PACKAGE

The grant application package that contains the program guidelines is a packet of material prepared by personnel at the funding agency. This packet explains the purposes of a particular program and the specific processes for developing a proposal to seek funding from that agency. The guidelines usually contain a copy of the federal regulations that govern the program, the forms required in the proposal, and supporting or helpful information about the program. As soon as program personnel announce a grant competition in the FR, the proposal writer must contact the funding

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source and obtain the application packet or guidelines or download the application from the appropriate Web site. The guidelines include a closing date for proposals in the competition. The proposer is responsible for seeing that the proposal is submitted electronically, mailed, or delivered on or before the closing date. The proposal deadline is an extremely important factor in determining whether you should even attempt to prepare a proposal. You need enough time to prepare a quality proposal, and the deadline is a fixed target. There is no such thing as a late proposal.

Grant Tip

There is no such thing as a late proposal. Proposals that do not meet the deadline may be returned unopened.

Proposals that do not meet the deadline date established in the application guidelines may be returned unopened.

CATEGORIES OF GRANTS AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

There are many sources of support for projects built upon sound ideas. Although the focus of this book is federal funding in the USDE, a proposal writer needs to understand the variety of support sources available in order to organize and plan a grant-seeking strategy. For purposes of this categorization, consider that two sectors provide funds: the *public sector* (i.e., the government) and the *private sector*.

Public Sector • Private Sector

Within the public sector, support may be available through city, county, or other levels of government, but primarily, public sector grant support comes from the federal and state levels of government. Some federal money for particular programs “flows through” to state government, which, in turn, distributes the funds in accordance with federal guidelines, often imposing some additional state restrictions as well. These funds, once they flow through to the state level, are thought of as state funds, and state personnel administer grants awarded from that funding source. To manage these funds, the federal government typically requires the state government to prepare a *state plan* or contract that spells out how the state will administer the funds in accordance with federal program guidelines.

Within the private sector, the primary sources of funding are philanthropic foundations established by major companies or by families wishing to designate gifts to support humanitarian purposes. Some examples of funding foundations include the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Foundation, and the Ford Foundation to name a few. Some large local businesses and industries contribute significantly to local improvement. These funds may be used to your benefit.

A third category of support, community foundations, is emerging, although in some cases entities such as community foundations would be categorized under either a public or private sector. A community foundation is set up to support specific purposes or community activities. With passage of legislation that limits public funding, community foundations have emerged to support activities of public schools. Quasi-public corporations are generally established for administering community foundation funds. Community foundations typically have boards of directors who represent the community at large.

Essentially, two types of grants are available: *competitive* and *noncompetitive*. A noncompetitive grant is typically awarded based on a formula and it is sometimes called an *entitlement*. The proposer agrees to conduct activities within a restricted range of options to achieve specific purposes of an established program. An entitlement or formula grant can be more like a contract than a grant. Funds are available to the requesting agency if that agency develops a proposal in accordance with fairly definitive guidelines. Funding is based upon a formula, such as the number of youths who come from families with a particular income level.

Grant Tip

A noncompetitive grant is sometimes called an entitlement and is more like a contract than a grant.

Competitive	Noncompetitive
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Competitive grants are of considerable interest to the grant seeker. Support under the competitive category is generally open, although certain programs may be limited to applicants in broad ranges of categories such as public schools, private schools, higher education, and state education agencies (SEAs). These programs are advertised in the case of the federal government, in the FR, and the proposer must take the initiative in seeking the funds. Unlike entitlements where a designated amount of money may be available for a specific purpose usually administered by a designated agency, in the competitive grants arena, the proposer must specify what will be done in a particular time frame and what the costs (within reason) should be (the performance, time, and cost balance).

Some people categorize the type of funds according to the focus of the funds. Some funds have a very narrow or special purpose called *categorical funding*. Categorical funding is popular with politicians because it targets special interest groups, thus pleasing lobbyists and special interest groups and giving politicians content for speeches to constituencies. Additionally, if aid is targeted to a particular category, accountability seems easier and evaluations can show changes relative to the status of that category.

Categorical	General
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General aid is for general purposes. The logic behind general aid is that those closest to the problems should identify the problems and establish procedures to remediate or at least ameliorate the problems at the local level. Because the federal government or funding source cannot know the problems as well as local personnel, the responsibility for designating recipient groups should rest with the grant application developers.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Judging the importance of information and using it correctly are valuable skills. For instance, a proposal developer needs to know the total amount of funding available in a given year for a program, but sometimes finding out the details of available funds requires both mathematical ability and political savvy. It is not enough to know that the legislature has appropriated a particular sum for a program. The proposer must

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learn how much of that appropriation is available for new projects. This information may be in an application packet. If not, you should contact the funding agency to determine the amount available for new projects, the agency's estimate of the number of projects to be funded, and the general funding range for the projects. One confusing aspect in determining a funding level is that some programs allow multiple-year projects wherein the proposal writer develops a project for two, three, or more years. The agency may approve the project for a multiple-year time frame. In this case, a portion of the agency's budget each year is obligated to support the continuing project's activities, assuming successful operations up to that time. The cumulative total of funding for continuing projects will not be available for new projects.

A continuing project becomes a *noncompeting continuation*. Near the end of each project year, project personnel must show that they have successfully achieved objectives for that year. If the project has been successful and funds continue to be available, the project becomes a noncompeting continuation, and project personnel do not need to develop a full, new competitive proposal. They prepare a much shorter continuation document. Generally, a noncompeting continuation proposal reviews activities from the preceding year and expresses a scope of work—including objectives, major activities, and a proposed budget—for the coming year.

Grant Tip

Funded proposals are in the public domain. You can go to government offices and review successful proposals.

Some programs reserve portions of their annual appropriations for administration and evaluation or for other costs. *Earmarked funds* reduce funding available for new projects. Obtain some indication of funds available for new projects and use that information as a guideline in developing the scope of a new project. Next, apply some good

common sense. If an agency has only \$3,000,000 and hopes to fund fifteen or thirty projects, do not develop a proposal requesting \$750,000.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

A productive source of information about successful grants is the federal government. Successful, funded proposals are in the *public domain*—they are public information. Under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), you can go to government offices and review successful proposals. (Some proposal sections such as budget, salaries, or personnel may be excluded from public review.) President Lyndon Johnson was so uneasy about the FOIA legislation that, when he signed the act into law July 4, 1966, he refused to hold a public ceremony that would draw attention to it. With this in mind, grant

seekers should notify the agency in advance of a visit and identify exactly what they wish to review since there is a sense of reluctance to honor requests. (See Chapter 13 for more details regarding the FOIA.)

Besides access to and knowing how to use the information available, you need access to tools of the trade. Tools of the trade are those documents, books, newsletters, Internet sites, outlines, and other elements that help the proposal writer develop successful proposals. (This book could qualify as a tool of the trade.) A tool might be a network that provides support and information. Special information ses-

sions and grantwriting seminars are part of the communication network that is arguably one of the most important tools of the trade. This book addresses some major tools of the trade in subsequent chapters.

Grant Tip

Deadlines for ongoing grant competitions come around each year, usually at about the same time. Occasionally there are new initiatives for opportunities for competitions.

PLANNING TO BE COMPETITIVE

Deadlines for ongoing grant competitions come around each year, usually at about the same time. Occasionally, there are new initiatives for competitions. A small measure of planning and organizing will facilitate the orderly approach to entering the competitions.

- Keep an up-to-date general summary of your organization written in clear, jargon-free prose. This synopsis will introduce a proposal reader to your organization. Be positive. This should sound almost as though the Chamber of Commerce wrote it.
- Have copies of your organization's essential policies and procedures and a basic flowchart of the organization's structure highlighting your place within the organization.
- Have a brief explanation of your organization's capacity to operate a project. Comment on special features (e.g., computers or cooperative working agreements that can help—a college, university, major business, or industry). List any special recognitions or awards. Do you have access to libraries or special databases?
- Demographic information should be easily accessible. Figure 1.3 is a suggested list of the types of information that will help. At the beginning of each year, update a file containing the descriptive items. Keep files for at least three years because some projects require data from previous years (e.g., local tax rate and per pupil expenditure). Also, data from past years can be used to show changes over time, such as changes in test scores, which may be helpful in evaluation and showing project success. Keep the data organized in the manner used by your system and state. Keep information in a file system with headings such as "System Information" or "Student Information."
- Keep a handy list of charts and forms for use in the proposal. These may relate to planning, time lines, showing personnel responsibilities. In the "forms file," keep extra, blank copies of standard forms and "boilerplate" or minimal forms.

For the serious proposal writer, yet another planning step is important. Write to each grant competition of interest and request the grant application package. Whether or not you prepare an application, after reviewing the application, make a note on a master list of (a) the date of the competition, (b) ideas you have for the competition, (c) priority of this grant for your organization, and (d) the address (name and phone of contact) of the office to contact next year's application packet. Next, circulate a general description of the competition, along with a statement of interest, and solicit from colleagues their interest, ideas, or commitment in developing a project for the next competition. Follow up on this solicitation and get plans started six to ten months in advance of *the usual* application deadline. Know that the regulations, guidelines, and approximate due date for proposals seldom change much from year to year. Nevertheless, *check the dates each year and carefully read all new application packets.*

Develop a list of interesting programs, a file of applications, a list of past and approximate future due dates, names of people interested in a project, and some good ideas as the basis of planning and preparing a project for the next year. If there is substantial interest, initiate some planning, brainstorming, and writing sessions. Keep records or minutes of dates, attendees, and so forth. Contact the federal office to get

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Figure 1.3 Demographic Data to Help in Proposal Writing in a Public School System

System Information

1. Map(s) showing location of system in state and location of schools in system
2. Written description of school system: proximity to major cities, airline service, census data such as population of area, major businesses and industries, education level of adults, organizational structure of school system square miles in city or county, and per capita income (1–2 pages)
3. Federal Identification Number (Federal Employer ID Number)
4. Number of schools in system and grades included in each school
5. Advisory boards
6. Demographic data on pupils and employees: systemwide and by building units
7. Pupil-teacher ratios (PTR)

Student Information (Use Numbers And Percents)

1. Total enrollment K–12 and by elementary/secondary, such as K, 1–8, 9–12, Preschool, and Adult
2. Enrollment for each grade by school (monthly attendance report for system) and totals for each
3. Number and percent of all minorities, by building and, if possible, by programs
4. Retention rate (failures), absentee rate, and dropout rate
5. Reading and math standardized test scores by school, by grade, and averages for each
6. Number served by special education, vocational programs, and enrollment

Teacher And Personnel Information

1. Total number of teachers, total administrative and professional staff
2. Number of teachers by grade/subject, by school, and totals for each
3. Level of training: bachelor's, master's, master's + 45, specialist, doctorate (include administration)
4. Number of Black, White, other minority and percentage (number of male and female).
5. Turnover rate
6. Average years of experience
7. Pertinent personnel policies

Financial Information

1. All salary schedules
2. Fringe benefits rates—social security, hospital, retirement (teacher and nonteacher), life insurance—and how each is computed
3. Local tax rate
4. Per pupil expenditure
5. Percentage of local supplement—percentage of local versus state funds versus federal funds
6. Pertinent fiscal/financial policies

Private School Information

1. List of private schools in system—administrators' names, addresses, and phone numbers. Have the private schools been approved by state education agency as eligible for federal and state funds?
2. Number of students in private schools in system by grade.

Other

1. Forms file: blank standard forms, blank "boilerplate" forms.
 2. Copies of timelines, management charts, and organizational chart.
 3. Public announcements for newspapers.
 4. Copies of any assurance forms for civil rights, Title IX, handicapped.
 5. Any information on court orders or important court cases influencing your district.
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names and locations of funded projects. Get into the *mainstream* of project ideas. These steps, completed nearly a year in advance of your formal application, will prepare you for the competition.

If you are unsuccessful when submitting a proposal the first time, don't despair. Get the reviewers' comments. Review and study your proposal. Don't slavishly follow all reviewer comments. There will be new reviewers next year. Visit a successful project. Find and save good ideas. Speak with program personnel so they will know about your continuing interest. Plan to succeed the next time. Stalk each grant carefully. Recall the prior section on categorizing grants (summarized here) as you plan.

Grant Tip

If you are unsuccessful the first time, don't despair. Don't slavishly follow all reviewer comments. There will be new reviewers next year.

SUMMARY OF GRANT TYPES

The noncompetitive grant is typically a response to an entitlement established by some formula (e.g., Title I entitlement). The grant seekers (e.g., local education agency [LEA] personnel) complete forms developed by the funding source (for Title I this would be the federal agency and SEA personnel in the particular state). These forms provide some minimum standards and uniformity to help SEA personnel monitor the project to ensure that it meets federal and state regulations.

These noncompetitive grants require little creativity and not much project development; the proposer completes forms and assurances much like a contract. Most projects will be very similar as they are developed and administered under the SEA master plan (state plan) that governs how the SEA will handle that particular program.

A competitive grant, however, is not awarded until the proposal writer develops a proposal that can compete successfully on established criteria with other proposals submitted in the same competition. The money is available to support projects to carry forth the purposes of the program, but

Grant Tip

Every 20 seconds of each working day, the U.S. government awards a contract worth an average of \$465,000. That totals over \$800 billion per year.

At latest count, there are 22 million small businesses in the United States, yet only about 1% of them participate in government contracts.

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it is *not* earmarked for a particular organization (e.g., LEA) or held as an entitlement based upon a preset formula. Applications for competitive grants extend and test the proposal writer's skills and creativity. Within the broad guidelines of a program's purposes, the competitive grant will support a project developed to serve the needs of a client group. Each project may be quite different as the funding agency only provides general guidelines and criteria.

Figure 1.4 provides a brief overview of two major types of grants, competitive and noncompetitive, and some classification of noncompetitive grants (i.e., some of the terminology for these grants). The purposes of and approaches to competitive and noncompetitive grants are quite different. In developing a competitive proposal, the writer undertakes a large writing and development task; in a noncompetitive grant, the writer needs to complete only the minimal, boilerplate forms and program descriptions for the available funds.

Figure 1.4 An Outline Summary of Types of Grants

Grant: *Award of money or direct assistance to perform an activity or project whose outcome is seen as less certain than that from a contract, with expected results described in general terms. Application can be submitted without having been solicited, an unsolicited proposal, or through a program announcement (Request for Application [RFA]). Most federal grants fall into the following categories:*

- **Competitive Grants:** awarded for specific types of research, demonstration, training, or service to program participants. (These are the grants dealt with in detail in this book.)
 - **Entitlement or Noncompetitive Grants:** awarded automatically or based on a minimum "proposal" on the basis of legally defined formula to all agencies or institutions that qualify (state or medical schools). These are sometimes called formula grants when given to governmental agencies for distribution and monitoring under a state plan or state grant process.
 - **Formula Grants:** awarded by federal agencies on the basis of a set formula such as so many dollars for population, per capita income, or enrollment. Chief recipients are state governments.
 - **Block Grants:** sometimes called "bloc" grants; refers to grants in which the federal government merely stipulates in broad terms how the state and local government should spend federal aid. The tactical decision on where the money should be spent is left to the discretion of state and local officials. One purpose of block grants is to decentralize federal decision-making powers and let those closest to the problem define how to allocate the available funds. These are not "categorical" in the traditional sense.
 - **Categorical Grants:** a restrictive version of the block grants are designated to serve only a specific group or category specified in the enabling legislation. Examples are funds for handicapped, bilingual education, or Title I. Grants may be competitive or noncompetitive.
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Eligible recipients for competitive grants are LEAs; SEAs; institutions of higher education (IHEs); public, private profit, and nonprofit agencies; and individuals. Eligible recipients for noncompetitive grants are governmental units or occasionally other nonprofit agencies. Figure 1.5 summarizes some of the differences between competitive and noncompetitive grants.

Figure 1.5 Two Types of Grants: Competitive and Noncompetitive

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Competitive Grant</i>	<i>Noncompetitive Grant</i>
Purpose	Typically supports the cost of special and/or exemplary project, demonstration and/or research project, and so forth.	Typically provides support for conducting—such as block grant—Title I or Chapter 2. This may include salaries, equipment, or supplies.
Structure of Document	Development of a narrative document in accordance with general guidelines.	Completion of specific forms.
Eligible Recipients	IHEs, SEAs, community agencies, and/ or individuals. Must check proposal guidelines that you are interested in.	Typically LEAs, SEAs, and some other government agencies.
Creativity	High degree of creativity required.	Little creativity is required.
Length of Document	Long and detailed; perhaps between 20–80 pages or more.	Several pages.
Amount of Work Required	Requires extensive planning and development of written materials that respond to funding agency established criteria.	Typically involves filling in the blanks (boilerplate forms) and providing support explanations.
Preparation Dates	Notice dates are published in the Federal Register (FR). Grant periods are from 1–5 years.	Typically prepared on an annual basis.
Selection Criteria	Criteria established by the Secretary of Education and agency seeking to support innovative projects.	Must meet established guidelines, often a plan developed by another level of government.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Although the primary focus of this book is grants, this section provides a quick look at the contract as a funding instrument. It is no secret that the U.S. government is the largest purchaser of products and services in the world. Requirements for doing

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business with the government are published daily in the FedBizOpps. The FBO is available through subscription. Copies are available at depository libraries or via the Internet. See Chapter 5, "Using the Internet to Access Funding Resources," for the Internet address.

Because the U.S. government is the world's largest purchaser of goods and services, it is necessary for the government to contract with private businesses to provide the needed services. "Every seventeen seconds of each working day, the United States government awards a contract with an average value of \$465,000" (*Resources Offers Commerce Business Daily*).

A vast amount of information about contracts is available. Some of this information is good and some of it is insufficient. You be the judge. A proposal writer should accumulate contract information for a personal reference library. For instance, if you are interested in contracts offered through the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), then, by all means, obtain a copy of the *Acquisition Guide: A DOE Guide to the Award and Administration of Contracts* that is available free, or download it from the Internet. The NIH, the NSF, and the USDE provide similar information, as do other federal agencies. Generally, these informative guides are free.

If you or your agency has a product or service to sell to the government, it may be worth time and effort to learn more about the U.S. General Service Administration (GSA). Simply stated, the GSA is the government's purchasing agent and business manager. One GSA hallmark is its strong support of small businesses, women-owned businesses, and minority-owned businesses. One of the best ways to find out more about GSA's services is to contact a local Small Business Center.

There are many similarities between grants and contracts, and notable differences. Follow your institution's policies and procedures before submitting contracts through your institution.

RESEARCH GRANTS

Some components characterize research grants and make them significantly different from nonresearch grants such as the sample proposal presented in Chapter 11. For all grants and contracts that are awarded, institutions must comply with many different rules, regulations, laws, and policies. However, research grants generally pose a number of additional areas of compliance including human subjects, care, and use of laboratory animals, biosafety, radiation safety, drugs and controlled substances, and misconduct in scientific research. Institutions vary on how these compliances are monitored, but frequently, monitoring is through an Institutional Research Office or Review Board, typically known as IRBs. Institutions also vary in how they process and review research grants. For instance, you may consider your proposal as a research grant. However, your institution may classify it as exempt from the more elaborate review process and may grant your proposal expedited review classification. Visit your institution's research office and get to know the individuals responsible for making decisions regarding research proposals. If you are associated with an institution or agency that has a research office, get a copy of the organization's latest policies and procedures. Read and review them carefully. If you are mainly dealing with research grants, set up files to keep all needed forms handy, along with the dates of review board meeting.

Most institutions have in place rigid policies and procedures for employees to follow when submitting research grants. For instance, when submitting a research grant to work with Head Start children, expect to complete detailed forms outlining how the human subjects you propose to study will be protected. You may need to appear before a Human Subjects Compliance Panel to address questions or concerns before receiving final approval for your proposal. Given the time constraints in grantwriting, it is imperative that you begin your institutional compliance early.

Depending on the type of research proposal, you may need to complete numerous additional forms prior to submitting the proposal. For example, you may have to complete a Human Subjects Compliance form, a Hazardous Agents Compliance form, or an Application for Controlled Substance Compliance form. Most research application guidelines require that you provide the institution's compliance forms when you submit the proposal.

SOME TIPS AND SOBERING THOUGHTS ABOUT GRANTS

Be familiar with the legislation, regulations, agency, and program. Understand what has been funded; know what has worked and what has not. You don't need to be sophisticated, but do your homework.

An idea doesn't need to be brand-new, but it should be new to the area or have some distinctive twist. Relate the idea to current and important theories in your field or in some field of human behavior. Rely on accepted theories (e.g., motivation, communication, and change) to support what you propose.

Although you will express project need in terms of *your* particular population, the funding agency is *primarily* interested in how a project such as yours has fairly wide and general application. By relating your project to appropriate theories, you help the agency understand how project ideas can be useful in other sites and with other people. A brief and focused literature review can express a conceptual framework to show how your idea fits with current research and thinking.

Although you may explain that your evaluation is related to your objectives, the *real test* of project success is a reduction of the need that precipitated the project. Successful projects should put themselves out of business in a few years—or be so successful that hordes flock to your doors. Establish and maintain good baseline data. At some point three to five years later, a comparison of the original baseline data with new baseline data will show the true measure of your project's success.

The "peer review" process is designed to give everyone a fair chance in competitions. On the other hand, some competitions award "performance points" for current projects, so those projects start with a five to fifteen point advantage.

If a proposal meets an agency's "fundable" criterion, there is still room for considerations other than a project's absolute value as rated by reviewers. Considerations could include past performance, geographic distribution requirements, prior submissions, small or minority business set-asides, and some political influence. Don't panic or be naive. The funding process is generally protected by the peer review process—but not absolutely. A good proposal with influence probably will beat a good proposal with little or no influence.

Grant Tip

Proposal development is probably best approached with a businesslike effort buoyed by a sense of competition and play.

18 EXPLORING IN THE GRANTS WORLD

SUMMARY

Much skill and knowledge are involved in successful proposal writing, along with some luck and serendipity. Proposal development is best approached with a businesslike effort buoyed by a sense of competition and play. The Ancient Mariner “stoppeth one in three” and everyone loves a .333 hitter in baseball. Why should you extend the odds? Seek 100 percent, but know that your grant application “hit rate” will begin to average out. That holds true from the beginning. If you lose the first or second try, you will begin to win as you gain experience. It is not mystique; it is experience, skill, perseverance, and savvy. It is a serious game.

You can't win if you don't get in the game and play. You can't win with just an idea. You must put “pencil to paper” and express a good idea clearly.

Don't quit after one loss. Winners persevere.

GRANT TIPS

- The most important element is a good idea that connects with the particular interests of some funding source.
- If your state has several electoral votes, is politically conservative, has legislators in key positions on key committees, and is located on a coast or near interesting places to visit, you may have an advantage in the proposal chase.
- Getting external funding is not usually easy, but there are procedures and techniques that will help you prepare a competitive proposal.
- The formal proposal, in the required form and format, connects your ideas and interest with the ideas, interests, and programs of a funding source.
- A proposal is a rational expression of relationships among performance, time, and cost as expressed in a formal document to a funding agency.
- A grant is made to advance the purposes of a specific federal program. You have considerable latitude and flexibility within the guidelines of the program.
- There is no such thing as a late proposal. Proposals that do not meet the deadline may be returned unopened.
- A noncompetitive grant is sometimes called an entitlement and is more like a contract than a grant.
- Funded proposals are in the public domain. You can go to government offices and review successful proposals.
- Deadlines for ongoing grant competitions come around each year, usually at about the same time.
- Occasionally there are new initiatives or opportunities for competitions.
- If you are unsuccessful the first time, don't despair. Don't slavishly follow all reviewer comments. There will be new reviewers next year.
- Every seventeen seconds of each working day, the United States government awards a contract worth an average of \$465,000. That totals over \$800 billion per year.
- At latest count, there are twenty-two million small businesses in the United States, yet only about 1 percent of them participate in government contracts.
- Proposal development is probably best approached with a businesslike effort buoyed by a sense of competition and play.