Proposal Development (pre-award) Grants Handbook

Office of Grant Development and Management

San Bernardino Valley College

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Welcome! You're probably reading this handbook because you're interested in applying for a grant. Well, we're here to help.

We, as a college, can accomplish our objectives, discover new paths, and build our capacity through grants. If you've come up with ideas to improve something or create something new that will change students' lives, then grants are one way of achieving that vision. Grants rarely fund the status quo. They fund something new. So be inventive, be innovative, and be creative as you develop your grant proposal.

There are a few important concepts to keep in mind as you embark on your project journey. So keep reading!

ROLE OF THE GRANTS OFFICE

The Office of Grant Development and Management supports all phases of grant projects from project planning through project completion. The office provides assistance with achieving the college's and district's missions and strategic plans by seeking funding from public and private organizations. For the purpose of this guide, we will address the pre-award process. A separate post-award handbook is available for project directors.

The Grants Office provides advice and support for faculty and staff who are in search of grant funding opportunities to meet their goals and realize their vision for advancing college programs and services. The office helps to identify promising funding sources and screens all potential grant opportunities to determine if they are a good fit for our institution. Periodically, grant workshops are held which are open to anyone interested in attending.

The office tracks the federal allocation of grant funding and works to anticipate which grants will be released at specific times during the grants season. The office

also serves as a liaison with federal, state, and local program officers to monitor funding opportunities and discuss project priorities and interests.

One of the most important roles the office has in the pre-award process is facilitating project development. The office coordinates meetings with administrators, faculty, and staff to discuss guidelines, ideas, design options, and project scope.

During the pre-award process of developing a grant proposal, the office provides advice on project planning, proposal content, conformance with federal or state regulations, and the selection of project partners. The office assists with the preparation of the grant proposal. This includes budget preparation, such as budget narratives and budget justifications, as well as evaluation plans.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

The preparation of a grant application is a time consuming and intense process. It should not be embarked upon by the faint of heart. Many applications are up to 50 pages long or longer. They cannot be prepared spur of the moment. Therefore, the process for applying for a grant must begin at least one month if not more before the application is due.

Grant applications that are planned in advance have a much higher success rate than those that are written at the last minute. In fact, the most successful grant writers often refuse to work on eleventh-hour grant projects because they know that the chances of winning an award are slim. It is a better use of the Grants Office time and resources to plan ahead and strike with precision and preparation.

If you come across a grant solicitation that seems promising consult with the Grants Office to make sure there is enough time to prepare an application and submit it through the proper channels. The submission process alone take two (2) days. The Grants Office needs at least one week prior to the submission deadline to review the proposal, including the budget, and procure internal approvals. The

college president and vice presidents must be briefed on any pending grants. In addition, a grant concept approval form, outlining the college and district commitments on any project, must be signed by the Vice Chancellor of Fiscal Services at the district before submission.

A Grant Decision Matrix is included in the Appendix to assist you with determining whether a funding source is a good fit.

The Grants Office has three main considerations that we take into account before taking on a grant proposal:

1) Fit –Is the college eligible? Will this project help us reach the college's and district's strategic goals? What are our chances of winning this grant? Will this grant be a drain on faculty and staff resources or will it bolster them?

2) Timing – Because the span of time between grant announcement and submission deadline is often a month or less, there either has to be a very rapid proposal development process, or steps in the process need to have been completed in advance in anticipation of the announcement. This was easier in past years when many programs were announced annually. Planning ahead helps, if one has an idea of the likelihood of a particular opportunity being announced.

3) Willingness and readiness of staff and faculty to participate in proposal development and eventual project management if the award is received.

Planning Ahead

With grants that are released on an annual basis, the planning process can and should start several months early so those involved have time to develop and contribute their ideas. For instance, although there is not likely to be a new Title V grant competition in 2012, we will probably start a new discussion process in Fall 2012 for a potential 2013 submission.

It is helpful to work up ideas and priorities for funding even if a funding source has yet to be identified. These ideas and priorities can then be used in the proposal development when the opportunity comes along. Having advanced planning helps

because so many grant application periods are tight (30 days or so), and don't really allow much time to call meetings and reach agreement as well as develop the proposal. Certain foundation grants, such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities grant for which we applied and were funded last year, have even shorter turnaround times (that one was about 3 weeks).

In situations like that, any preparatory work can be customized to the proposal. For some of the major grants that we have won, we used the priorities that had been developed through five (5) open campus meetings between January and May of 2010. Initially, the intent had been to use the information for a new Title V submission. But that program was unexpectedly cancelled. However, we were able to take the framework that we had developed and apply it to two other grant proposals, both of which we won.

Questions for initial project design:

- What is unique about our organization? <u>Where</u> will the grant project take place?

- Why do we need this? (Cite sources)

- What will set this project apart from all others?

- How do we know this will work? (Cite sources)

- What will happen if we don't do this?

- How does this project idea relate to trends in the field – how will it benefit others BEYOND our immediate area?
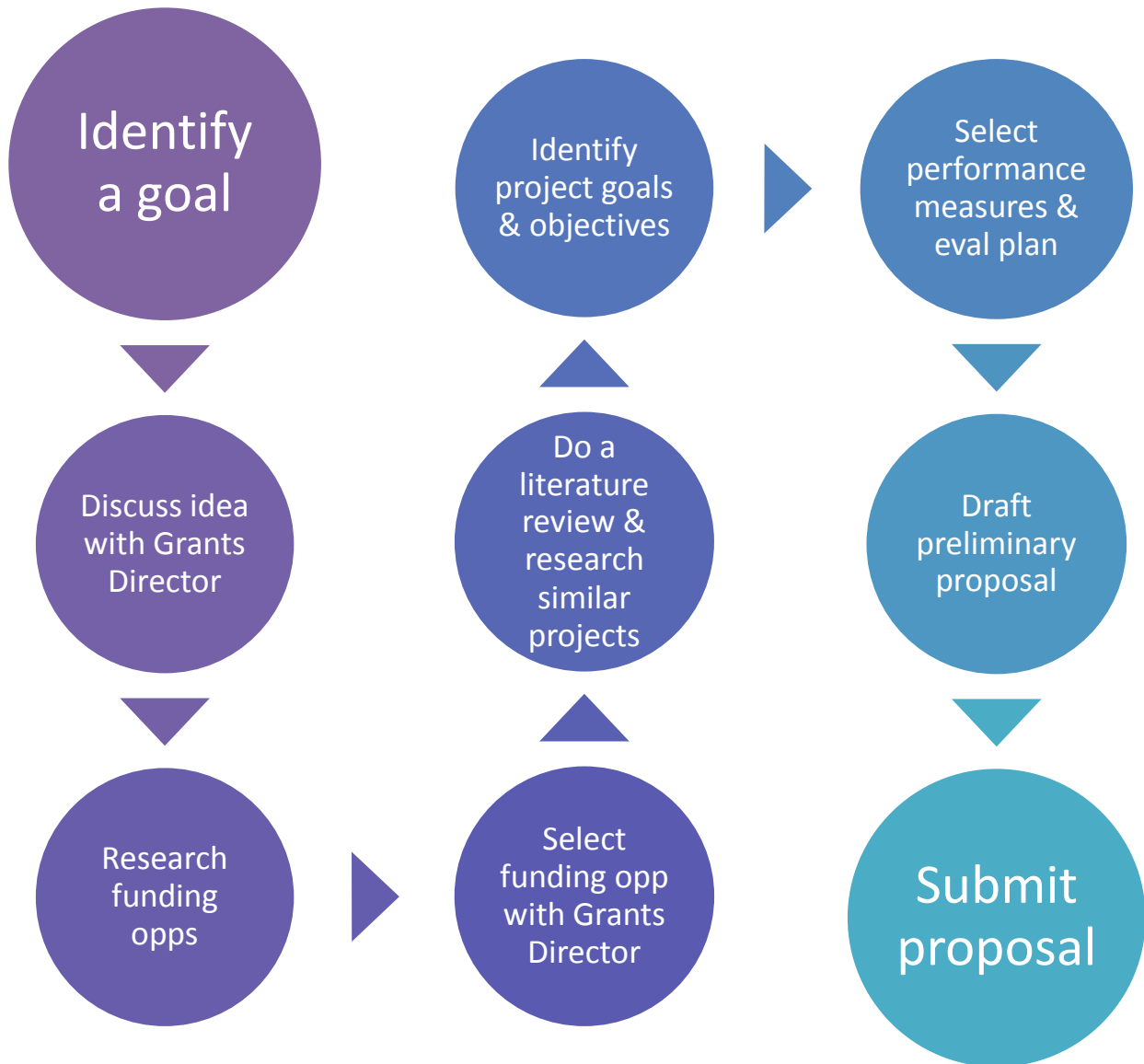
In addition, grant applications have substantial bureaucratic hurdles that need to be addressed before you can submit your application. As we like to say, you need to know at the beginning what you'll need at the end.

Internal	External
• Any organizational rules regarding approvals for grant projects – who reviews the	• Any agency requirements for submitting the grant (are you registered for Grants.gov and

budget? Who signs and submits the proposal? • Resumes and biographical sketches for principle investigators/project directors • Research data • Indirect cost agreement • Budget support • Clerical support • Mailroom support (if you need to mail hard copies)	Fastlane?) Pay attention to submission requirements including whether they want hard copies • If there is an eligibility process, have you completed it? • IRB approval (if agency requests) • Certifications (who signs?) • Letters/Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) • Resumes from Key Personnel, including evaluator/consultant

Pre-award Process

Identify a goal

↓

Discuss idea with Grants Director

↓

Research funding opps

▶

Select funding opp with Grants Director

↑

Do a literature review & research similar projects

↑

Identify project goals & objectives

▶

Select performance measures & eval plan

↓

Draft preliminary proposal

↓

Submit proposal

BASIC PROPOSAL FORMAT

The first step in developing your proposal is to carefully read the Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Application (RFA) instructions. Once you've done that, read them again. The first read will help you determine if the grant is a good fit and whether your institution is eligible. The second read will help you identify what hoops you'll need to jump through to put together a competitive proposal.

RFP's and RFA's are long documents. Sometimes they can be over 100 pages long. They contain obscure directions and regulations, and it's important that you understand them before embarking on designing a project.

If your proposal violates even the smallest rule, such as font size, it will automatically be rejected by reviewers. It would be a tragedy to spend a hundred hours or more on designing a project and writing the application only to have it be discarded for a small oversight. Yet, this is common, and agencies use the cumbersome and sometimes excessive use of rules as a strategy to help cull the number of proposals they receive. So be vigilant, be nitpicky, and by all means be thorough. Because if you are, then your painstaking work will likely pay off.

A typical proposal is usually 10+ pages and consists of:

- Title/Cover Page,
- Table of Contents
- Abstract/Executive Summary
- Project Narrative
- Budget Summary
- Budget Narrative
- Appendices, usually including resumes and support letters
- References Cited

The **Project Narrative** is the most important section of the grant proposal. It should include a description of the problem/need and how it will be addressed,

objectives, project activities, and measurable outcomes. The Project Narrative usually contains the following sections:

- Background/Organization Profile,
- Objectives, Project Activities and Timeline,
- Project Management including Key Personnel,
- Evaluation Plan,
- And Dissemination Plan.

In the Project Narrative, it is important to demonstrate the college's capacity to carry out the proposed activities as well as a sustainability plan to show that the activities will continue once funding ends. Don't forget to include the name of the college, project title, and amount requested in the first paragraph of the narrative.

More questions to address in the **Project Narrative**:

- What is the "as is" model? What are you doing now?

- What is the "new form" model? What do you want to do?

- What resources are required for the activities?

- What are the project deliverables?

- What activities are required for the deliverables?

- What are the start and end dates for each activity?

- Who are our potential principal investigators/project director(s)? What qualities do these people bring? What roles will each person fulfill?

- Who are potential subject matter experts?

- Who are our potential partners/what are their roles?

- Who do we need or want as a consultant (for technical assistance, evaluation, etc.)?

You will also need to decide who this project will serve and you must provide student demographics and data to back this up. Most funding agencies want to see where we are now, and you must show in your evaluation plan, where you intend to go/what you expect to improve.

The **Evaluation Plan** should contain not only the performance measures that will be used to determine how effective and successful the project is, but also how those performance measures will be assessed through quantitative and qualitative methods. This section must show how you intend to determine whether the project objectives are being met. It likely will be necessary to consult with the Office of Research in designing the Evaluation Plan.

Baseline data is important for designing your evaluation plan:

- What will increase or decrease as a result of this project?

- What are the quantitative evaluation elements? (What can be measured?)

- What are the qualitative evaluation elements?

- What will we seek to know? Identify likely themes and types of survey responses about progress.

The **Dissemination Plan** addresses how you will share and distribute information about your project. Dissemination techniques include developing a website, presenting at conferences, and hosting stakeholder meetings.

Write your **abstract** last after all the other sections of the proposal have been prepared. Make it riveting, as this may be all that's read by the reviewers before they decide what pile it goes into. Include the dollar amount requested, key objectives, and any information required by the funding agency.

WRITING TIPS

A grants handbook by Columbia State College outlines some useful writing tips, which are presented here with some modification.

Start Early: It is important to have an idea developed before a solicitation is released. An appication is usually due 4-6 weeks after it is announced. **This is very little time to write a proposal and obtain all the internal approvals needed in order to submit.** If you are applying for a program that occurs annually, review the previous year's announcement. Guidelines typically change very little year to year.

Follow the Instructions: Read the RFP/RFA carefully and adhere to all guidelines. The No. 1 reason grants are not funded is the failure to follow instructions.

Be Mindful of Your Audience: Grant proposals are long documents, and reviewers have to slog through lots of them. Write for clarity. Avoid jargon and overly academic language. Think visually. Make it easy to read. Break up the text. If information can be presented more clearly in a chart, graph, or diagram, then do so. Don't make reviewers hunt for information. Use introductory and transitional sentences to orient your reader.

Communicate Clearly: In simple, straightforward language describe what you plan to do and why, how you will do it and what is the best approach, who will be involved and why they are qualified, what the institution needs to accomplish the tasks, what the timetable will be, and how you will know the goals have been met.

Pay Attention to the Budget: Do not introduce elements in the budget that have not been discussed in the proposal narratives. Make sure the budget is clear and that all costs are justified. Follow the RFP/RFA, and only include allowable costs. Finally, make sure the budget adds up!

> **Plan Ahead:** Start early. Preparing a proposal is a lengthy process. You will need to get a number of internal approvals, such as from the President's office, before you can submit the proposal. Release time, reassigned time, and cost matching must be approved ahead of time. Letters of Support take time and leg work to collect. The Grants Office must receive a proposal one week before the grant deadline. If your proposal is late, the funding agency will not consider it.

BUDGET PREPARATION

The financial component of a proposal usually consists of a **Budget Summary** and a **Budget Narrative/Justification**. All budget items must be carefully explained and shown to be reasonable and necessary.

Grant guidelines will usually dictate maximum and average award amounts.

Questions to ask yourself are:

- What needs to be accomplished and what will each aspect cost?

- What is needed to accomplish the objectives?

The **Budget Narrative** should account for how costs were derived. If the project includes cost sharing or cost matching, this should be discussed in the narrative and included in the budget summary.

In preparing your budget, you will need to consider the project duration (number of years funding is offered), the type of funding agnecy, cost sharing, matching funds, and the personnel involved (fringe benefits, salaries, and wages).

Common budget categories when writing your **Budget Summary** are personnel, travel, direct costs (such as web development, services, equipment, supplies and materials), consultants/contract personnel, and indirect costs. Be careful about food, equipment, & travel – most agencies scrutinize the expenditures for these

Indirect costs cover the college's expenses with overseeing the project. The Grants Office, Office of Research, and Business Office all dedicate time and resources toward the successful functioning of a project.

SUBMISSION

For submission, note the organization and distribution of the required elements matches the guidelines, and:

1) If points are allotted by section, make sure number of pages dedicated to each section at least roughly corresponds to the point value);

2) Content area material reviewed by relevant faculty and/or staff;

3) Partners review their part if we are the lead (reverse if they are the lead);

4) Institutional commitments, including integration of positions and program elements, approved by administration (Grant Concept Approval Form);

5) Agency forms and attachments complete and compliant with directions;

6) Submit according to guidelines, usually electronically, with all appropriate codes, institutional information, etc.;

7) Submit any follow-up documentation, such as a signature page to be faxed or mailed following the electronic submission; and

8) Note turnaround time on award announcement (if noted in the instructions)

Check back in on the grant in the likely time period for award. For federal grants, the waiting period is 90-180 days for federal grants. It is earlier for state grants.

Checklist to assist with proposal preparation:			
• Allow enough time! • Ask someone with smarts and a good pair of eyes to read what you've written and suggest changes • Create internal deadlines 1 week before submission deadline • Know which forms you need • Know where they should be uploaded or mailed • Follow directions for all budgets and attachments • Translate all this into normal working language for yourself well before the due date so you understand what's required and where it goes!	• • Do partners need to review & approve? • Make sure to complete the certifications and all basic information as soon as possible.		

FUNDING SOURCES AND RESOURCES

In addition to federal grants, you can look for state agency sources as well as funding through independent philanthropic/private foundations. Large corporations and companies sometimes offer grants to benefit local communities. Examples include Lowe's, State Farm, and Target.

Free Databases:
Grants.gov
Ford Foundation Grants Database

Subscription Databases:
eCivis
Grants Forward
Spin

Other Federal Grant Websites:

National Institutes of Health www.nih.gov	Department of Health and Human Services www.dhhs.gov
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration www.samsha.gov	Health Resources and Service Administration www.hhs.gov/grantsnet
Office of Homeland Security www.whitehouse.gov/homeland	National Science Foundation www.nsf.gov
US Department of Agriculture www.usda.gov	National Endowment for the Arts http://www.nea.gov/
US Department of Education www.ed.go	National Endowment for the Humanities http://www.neh.gov/
US Department of Justice www.justice.gov/index.html	US Department of Housing and Urban Development www.hud.gov

REFERENCES CITED

Grants/Contracts Management Handbook, Amarillo College

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CFMQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.actx.edu%2Fiea%2Ffilecabinet%2F84&ei=SsmfUfjGGMPBigKWqoGoCA&usg=AFQjCNF2Me9ziuyaoVEeS28yG1QUshFD8Q&sig2=lOcB9m44nP0TAo16pyO9pw&bvm=bv.47008514,d.cGE

Grants Handbook, Columbia State Community College

http://www.columbiastate.edu/grants-handbook

Project Director Compliance Guide, Appendix A, Riverside City College

http://www.rccd.edu/administration/grants/Documents/AppendixA-Rev.Apr_2010_000.pdf

Project Director Resource Guide, California State Water Resources Control Board

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/grant_info/docs/pd_resource_guide_oct2012.pdf

Research Foundation Major Responsibilities, State University of New York - Cortland

http://www2.cortland.edu/offices/research-foundation/
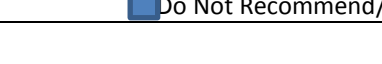
Role of the Project Director/Principle Investigator, King's College

http://www.kings.edu/non_cms/pdf/RoleOfTheProjectDirector.pdf

San Bernardino Valley College Grant Decision Matrix: Go/No Go

Project Director/ PI Name:	Project Title:			Funding Source (Agency):		Date:
	Rating: 0 = None; 1 = Weak; 2= Good capacity or benefit; 3= Better			4 = Fully capable or beneficial		
Factor	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Rating for Item**
Aligns with SBVC strategic priorities	Not aligned with mission and plan				Helps fulfill college mission and plan	
College expertise in project area – fit with agency requirements	No college alignment, low priority and low potential impact				High college alignment, major priority/impact	
Proposed PI/PD knowledge/experience	PD/PI not experienced, weak credentials in area				PD/PI qualified, extensive credentials	
Supporting research and data prepared	Only anecdotal qualitative data available				Strong qualitative + quantitative data	
Time commitments for PI/PD, other personnel	PI has no time to commit or support for reassigned time				PI has time to commit and support for reassign	
Team: internal and external partners	No known partners				Strong potential partners	
Fiscal benefit – return on investment v. cost	Poor short- and long-term benefits				Excellent in short and long term	
Other benefits – new programs + students	Doesn't benefit college/students				Long-term benefits for college/students	
Faculty/staff benefits (prof. development)	Does not develop faculty and/or staff				Development for many faculty & staff	
Competition (odds)	Odds of success less than 10%				Odds of success exceed 50%	
Capacity to respond and develop fully	Not enough staff time/resources				Adequate staff time/resources	
Resources required (space, funds, staff)	Requires significant college commitment				Requires minimal college investment	
Rapport or experience with agency	SBVC unknown to funder				SBVC has strong relationship	
						Total
Recommend			Do Not Recommend/Not Ready Yet			