

How to Develop Your Idea into a Successful Grant Proposal

I. Find a funder who is interested in your project.

A. Recognize that sources of funding have different motivations for giving. Finding a funder means finding a match between your mission and the funder's mission.

1. Foundations (corporate, family and large public foundations) must distribute a certain amount of their assets each year, in line with particular goals of the foundation.
2. Federal and state and government agencies have a legislated mandate to distribute funds fairly, so they usually require detailed proposals and matching funds.
3. Other sources—professional associations, corporations, individuals—all have highly individualized aims.

B. Foundation contacts start with a consultation with the development officer assigned to foundation relations. We want to ensure that your proposal will not compete with another proposal from Goshen College. Only the vice president for advancement may authorize a contact with Lilly Endowment, Inc. or Elkhart County Community Foundation.

1. Internet research sources: The development office has access to several resources that can search for foundations and RFPs.
2. Check state and federal granting organizations.
3. Individual foundation web sites are accessible with any search engine.
4. Several key URLs:

www.or.nd.edu	Notre Dame Office of Research
www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/grants/	Calvin College faculty grant resources
www.indianacampuscompact.org	Campus Compact (service-learning)
www.fdncenter.org/	The Foundation Center
www.nsf.gov/funding/	National Science Foundation
www.indianahumanities.org/resources/	Indiana Humanities Council
www.in.gov/arts/grants&programguidelines.htm	Indiana Arts Commission
www.neh.gov/grants/	National Endowment for the Humanities
www.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm	National Institutes of Health
www.hhs.gov/grants	Dept. of Health and Human Services
www.ed.gov/fund/landing.jhtml	US Dept. of Education
www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/grants/default	Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion

C. Call a program officer at the funding agency to test your ideas. Program officers at both private foundations and government agencies welcome this kind of conversation because they want to receive proposals that they can approve, and they like working with organizations that they know and trust.

The initial contact with a program officer can be crucial. Use the "Project Description Worksheet" to develop a one-page summary of your project idea. You may want to email it to the program officer ahead of time. Be prepared to answer questions about timeline and potential obstacles and how you will overcome them.

Contact with an agency should be a two-way conversation. Listen carefully to what program officers say and incorporate any programmatic input they offer into the proposal. Program officers will rarely discourage applications; but a telling question to ask is: "Will my project be competitive?" A direct answer should be very enlightening.

- D. Write a letter of intent or pre-proposal. Some funding agencies may require a letter of intent or preliminary proposal. Typically, the letter of intent is a one- or two-page document that describes the project, the qualifications of the project director—or principal investigator (PI)—and the estimated budget. A preliminary proposal is similar but usually requires greater detail. Agencies will then respond by inviting a full proposal if they are interested in the project.

Although college approval usually is not needed for pre-proposals, the advancement office should be notified and a copy provided when submitted. If the pre-proposal obligates the college in any way (such as providing matching funds), then it must be approved in the regular approval system described in the "Grant Proposal Review & Approval Process" document.

II. **Start with the budget, the most important part of a proposal.**

- A. Begin with the budget, then write the project description. The budget is a detailed, itemized cost estimate for the project and is accompanied by a budget narrative justifying the proposed costs. Reviewers often will look closely at the budget justification and will disallow any costs that are not adequately explained. The Goshen College controller in charge of grant funds can help to edit and format your budget. See the "Project Description Worksheet" for typical budget categories.
- B. Concentrate on building capacity in current programs rather than starting new ones. Include dollars for training, consultants, conference attendance, resources to purchase, etc. Include generous release time for the project director.
- C. Any proposal that includes salary portions must be checked with the human resources director to make sure that salary level matches the job description and that benefit figures are accurate. The human resources director will help you estimate the level of administrative salary that is required in your proposal. However, the complete employee classification process will occur only after a grant is received. Adjustments to actual salary levels will likely need to be made at that point. Be sure to include salary and/or benefit raises each year.
- D. Salary to cover a course release should represent the amount that it would cost Goshen College for a regular faculty member to teach the course, not the amount that it would cost for an adjunct faculty member to teach it. If an adjunct professor is found, the surplus salary and benefits can be re-directed later to consulting or other personnel expenses.
- E. Be thorough in documenting "in kind" contributions toward the project. This category may include space for office and other uses, equipment, furnishings, materials, portions of salaries and fringe benefits, etc.
- F. Include funds for equipment whenever justifiable and possible. ITS can give you current costs for computers and other electronic equipment.

- G. Add indirect costs of 30 percent whenever allowed. This category covers offices, services and facilities of the college that indirectly support the grant activity. The business office can provide information regarding indirect institutional costs.
- H. Include a budget justification chart or narrative, explaining each figure that appears in the budget. (Examples: .25 salary for one year at a base rate of \$XX,XXX plus benefits of 44 per cent, Computer use fee of \$350 per year (use this rather than a purchase price), Student assistant at 10 hours/week for 30 weeks at \$7.50 per hour. Professional development costs estimated at \$1800 per event for transportation, registration and lodging. Etc.) Keep even more detailed budget justification on hand for use by the project director if the proposal is funded.

III. Develop a compelling proposal narrative or project description.

- A. Follow any instructions given by funding agencies, using their vocabulary and organizational scheme. Read instructions often during the planning/writing process.
- B. Devote significant time to the summary/abstract at the beginning and the end of the writing process. Some upper-level reviewers at some agencies will read only this part.
- C. Use Goshen College promotional print pieces, website and the annual Fact Book from the Institutional Research office to find facts and statistics that would be especially compelling to the funder you are soliciting.
- D. Write in clear English. Write succinctly. Avoid jargon. Your audience will typically include both experts and non-experts. Grammar and spelling must be error-free. Have the application proofread by others. Do academic peers and non-experts understand what you are trying to accomplish in the proposal?
- E. If your project involves research on human subjects, you must follow federal rules (Title 45, Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations). Consult with the Director of Institutional Research if you have questions about these rules.
- F. Typical sections in a proposal narrative:

Summary/Abstract	One page, engaging, convincing. First sentence: "Goshen College requests \$XX from [funder] for [project title]."
Introduction	History, review of literature and their relation to current project.
Problem/opportunity	Why the project is needed and why you are uniquely positioned to administer it.
Goal/objectives	Who will be changed? <u>or</u> the anticipated product.
Method/activities	How will you accomplish the goal?
Evaluation/dissemination	Who will measure what, when? How will findings be shared?
Personnel	Key people who will be involved: job descriptions, vitae.
Timeline	Estimated timetable for grant activities.
Results/sustainability	What impact will this have on GC and the wider world? What will happen after the grant funds end?
Budget	In Excel spreadsheet. See above.
Budget narrative	Explains items in each budget category. May be in table form.
Appendices (if allowed)	Related data, articles, brochures, curriculum vita, etc.

IV. Manage the grant well if it is received.

- A. Include plenty of person time to direct the grant if it is received. Be generous in your time estimates, because it will always take more time than you think it will.
- B. Notify the advancement office, communications and marketing, president's office and the vice president for finance if you receive funding for your project. Submit a one-page summary to the vice president for advancement for sharing with the President's Council.
- C. Copies of the proposal, the acceptance letter and contract should be submitted to the advancement office for permanent filing and for dissemination to president and vice president for finance.
- D. Meet with the controller to obtain an account number and set up accounting spreadsheets. S/he can help with regular fiscal reports.
- E. Use an advisory group and/or the supervising vice president to help the project director make important decisions.
- F. Submit reports on schedule, following the format given by the funder. The grants coordinator or development office can assist with annual program reports. Copies of all reports to the grantor should be given to the supervising vice president and should also be filed in the advancement office.
- G. Request permission from your program director to re-direct funds if unanticipated changes occur.
- H. Request an extension (without additional budget) if more time is needed to complete a project than was anticipated.
- I. Collect evaluation data and use it to submit a follow-up proposal, if desired.

V. Learn from refusals.

If your proposal is refused, consider it a learning experience. Ask for reviewer's comments, if available. What you learn can help you revise and re-submit this proposal to the same or a different funder. Common reasons for refusal:

- Proposal doesn't follow guidelines
- Sloppiness, errors
- Mismatch of project with funder's priorities
- Lack of new or original ideas
- Lack of knowledge of published relevant work
- Lack of experience
- Uncertainty about future directions after the grant ends
- Absence of compelling rationale
- Unrealistically large amount of work
- Lack of sufficient detail
- Padded budget

Important numbers and tax exempt information

DUNS 96-730-8867

OPEID (Office of Postsecondary Education) 001799

Tax exempt # 709-149-04

Federal Employee ID (FEI or TIN) 35-2158366

1/29/2014

State taxpayer # 0113870922-001

The assistant to the vice president for finance can provide a copy of the tax exempt letter for Goshen College, required for many proposals.
