Top 10 Things You Can Do To Write an Effective Grant Application—Humanities and Arts

1. Contact the funding agency in advance of submission; develop a relationship with an administrator to seek specific advice about your project and application.

2. Investigate the mission and goals of the funding agency, learn about the types of projects it has funded in the past, start to make a case about how your project advances the agency’s goals.

3. Review successful applications to look for effective ways proposal writers have conveyed their ideas; adapt these strategies to fit the purpose and direction of your project. Carefully read them and the funding agency’s requests for applications to get a sense of the language used. Model your work on the writing and reasoning in successful proposals.

4. Develop relationships with collaborators and mentors who can advise you and serve as consultants on your project.

5. Write clearly. Use logical subheadings and/or a numbering system to organize the application. Use a consistent paragraph structure that puts a topic sentence at the start of each paragraph. Be sure that each individual sentence conveys a single main idea. Format sentences so that the new or more important information appears in the second half of the sentence, which is the natural position of emphasis.

6. Write for the intelligent non-expert, or the “learned scholar but not necessarily an expert in that field” (Emory URC). Do not exclude reviewers with the use of jargon.

7. Use figures, images, and other graphical elements to show examples of your work and also the overall design of the project and specifics about the plan. In figure legends, include statements that emphasize the benefits or significance of the figure to your proposal.

8. Make it visually appealing: use line spaces between paragraphs; set reasonable margins. Keep paragraphs manageable—four or more paragraphs per page is ideal. Provide ample “white space” and avoid dense blocks of text and awkward text wrapping. Follow all application instructions.

9. Employ the feature–benefit model: “sell” the idea by stressing the benefits of each feature of your proposal. Include a “significance” paragraph at the end of each major section. Stress how the project addresses the mission of the funding agency.

10. Get feedback early and often in the process. Have both experts and intelligent non-experts review the proposal to provide edits and suggestions about how to improve the both the science and the clarity of the message.

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