

Facilitator Notes

# Writing Grant Proposals: Common Problems to Avoid

These notes accompany the PowerPoint presentation of the same title by Barbara Gastel.

This module normally would accompany other modules on preparing a grant proposal.

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| Module Title | Writing Grant Proposals: Common Problems to Avoid |
| Course title (or analogous information) | This module can serve as part of a workshop on preparing grant proposals. It also can serve as part of a workshop unit, course unit, or short course on the topic. It is one of nine modules on preparing grant proposals. Typically, most or all of the nine should be used, in the order (or approximately the order) in which they are numbered. |
| Unit Title | Preparing Grant Proposals |
| No. of Unit | Not applicable |
| Session Day/Time | Not applicable |
| Length of Session | This module typically would run about 30 to 60 minutes. The length would depend mainly on how much the facilitator elaborates on points in the slides, how much discussion there is, and how long is taken for the exercise, |
| Aim | This module is intended mainly to help participants (1) review some key advice from earlier modules, (2) recognize problems commonly contributing to rejection of proposals, and (3) know how to avoid these problems. |
| Learning Outcomes | By the end of this module, participants will be able to (1) list problems commonly contributing to rejection of proposals and (2) explain some ways to help avoid these problems. |
| Facilitator Profile | This module would ideally be facilitated by someone with experience in writing, editing, or reviewing grant proposals. A less experienced facilitator also can present the module, as the combination of PowerPoint slides and facilitator notes provides sufficient information to do so. |
| Participant Profile | This module is primarily for early-career researchers with little or no experience preparing grant proposals. However, it also may aid mid-career researchers who wish to improve their preparation of grant proposals or their mentoring of others in this regard. In addition, it may be helpful to some editors and writing instructors. Participants having experience with grant proposals may be able to enrich the workshop by sharing their experience. |
| Pre-workshop Activities | No pre-workshop activities are required. However, participants who have prepared proposals are encouraged to bring them to the session. |
| Room Layout | Ideally, this module will be presented in a room layout facilitating interaction—for example, with several small tables, with tables in a U configuration, or with a conference table. However, this module also can be presented in a traditional classroom or a lecture hall. |
| Number of Participants | For optimum discussion, the number of participants should be limited to about 10–15. However, the module also can reasonably delivered to about 25 participants. |
| Files and Materials | PowerPoint file: 07\_Common Problems |
| Visual Aids and Resources | Computer with PowerPoint; projector for PowerPoint presentation |
| Potential Embellishments of the PowerPoint | To keep the file small, the presentation consists almost solely of text. Images can be added to make it more visually appealing. For example, decorative images can be inserted between sections to signal a change of subtopic and provide visual relief. Also, relevant images can be added to selected slides if desired.  If desired, the facilitator can divide the material on a given slide into more than one slide or can format some slides for progressive disclosure, in which items on a slide are revealed one by one. |
| Learning methods and activities | The following notes may help facilitators to (1) elaborate on the content of some slides and (2) elicit group participation at suitable times. (Slide 1 is a title slide.)   * Slide 2 (“Overview”)   + Note the topics that the module will address.   + Note the module’s overall aim, which is stated earlier in this facilitator’s guide. (Feel free, of course, to frame it in the way that the group is likely to find most relevant.) * Slide 3 (“Note”)   + Note that the list that will be presented is based largely on content of reviewers’ remarks on grant proposals. * Slide 4 (“Common Problems to Avoid”)   + Re bullet 1: Reiterate the importance of following the instructions from the funding source.   + Re bullet 2: Reiterate the importance of a thorough literature review.   + Re bullet 3: Reiterate the point that the proposed work should address one or more well-justified hypotheses or research questions or have some other sound logical basis. Perhaps remind the group that the work should not just be a “fishing expedition.”   + Re bullet 4: Emphasize that normally the work being proposed should be novel, rather than just a slight variation of previous work.   + Re bullet 5: Emphasize that the proposal should show that the plans for the proposed work have been thoroughly thought through. Perhaps note, though, that a proposal should not contain excessive detail, such as minor details of laboratory protocols.   + As you discuss items in this list, both on this slide and on the next two slides, feel free to elaborate further, to the extent appropriate. For instance, perhaps include one or more relevant examples from your own experience or that of colleagues.   + Before proceeding to the next slide, perhaps ask participants for additions or questions. * Slide 5 (“Common Problems to Avoid (cont)”)   + Re bullet 1: Reiterate that it’s better to propose a project that is small enough to almost surely be doable than to propose one that is so extensive that it might well not be completed.   + Re bullets 2 and 3: Reiterate the importance of preparing a thorough, well-researched budget.   + Re bullet 4: Emphasize the importance of justifying budgetary items for which the need might not be obvious. For example, if some proposed research is to be on rats, the researcher probably wouldn’t need to explain why the budget includes the cost of the rats; however, if the budget also includes the cost of a trip to Hawaii, the researcher probably must explain the need to travel to Hawaii (for example, to present the research at a major conference there), lest it seem that the researcher just wants to vacation in Hawaii.   + Re bullet 5: Note that of course the research must be well designed. Also note that it can be useful to say what other methods will be used if the initially stated methods fail.   + Re bullet 6: Reiterate the value of indicating, for example through the content of CVs, that one or more participants have experience with the key methods or will obtain training in them.   + Re bullet 7: Reiterate that in some types of proposals, the researchers are expected to include preliminary data.   + As in presenting the previous slide, perhaps elaborate further on some points, and perhaps give participants a chance to add comments and ask questions. * Slide 6 (“Common Problems (cont)”)   + Re bullet 1: Note that for service projects, thorough evaluation plans often are expected.   + Re bullet 2: Note that inconsistencies, which may confuse reviewers and decrease the credibility of a proposal, may arise when those writing a proposal change one part (for example, the methods) but neglect to change another part (for example, the abstract) accordingly. Emphasize the need to check the proposal to make sure that everything is consistent.   + Re bullet 3: Note that extensive use of acronyms and other abbreviations may confuse and frustrate reviewers. Mention that in general, only acronyms/abbreviations already well known in the field should be used. Also mention that abbreviations generally should be used only for items that appear at least several times. Perhaps note again that sometimes a table of abbreviations can be helpful to include.   + As in presenting the previous slides, perhaps elaborate further on some points, and perhaps give participants a chance to add comments and ask questions.   + If you or colleagues have noticed other common problems in grant proposals, feel free to add bulleted items. Also, perhaps invite participants to add to the list.   + If some problems in grant proposals seem especially common in the institution, country, or region from which the participants come, perhaps try to emphasize them. * Slide 7 (“A Suggestion”)   + Present the suggestion noted in this slide.   + If participants have brought drafts of grant proposals, perhaps have them look at their drafts and consider the question asked in this slide.   + Perhaps mention that the AuthorAID resource library (<http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/>) includes materials, such as presentations, providing guidance on writing journal articles. * Slide 8 (“Brief Exercise”)   + Have participants do this exercise in groups of about three or four.   + Participant generally should first do these tasks individually and then discuss with the rest of their group what they came up with.   + During this exercise, it can be useful to circulate in the room and answer questions.   + At the end of the exercise, bring the full group together. Elicit some of the observations and suggestions that emerged during the exercise. Compliment the group regarding common problems that participants tended to avoid.   + Of course, feel free to adapt this exercise if doing so would help suit the needs and circumstances of the participants. * Slide 9 (In Conclusion”)   + Perhaps ask for any additional questions and request other points that participants would like to make.   + Wrap up the session, for example by expressing hope that this module has provided useful guidance, restating one or more key messages, and noting the subject of the next module. * Slide 10 (“Wishing you much success!”) and Slide 11 (Creative Commons information etc):   + (These are the standard closing slides for this series of presentations.) |