

Facilitator Notes

# Preparing to Write a Proposal

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 | Preparing to Write a Proposal |
| 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) realize the importance of careful preparation when writing a proposal, (2) recognize the need to start early when writing a proposal, and (3) understand common components of writing a proposal. |
| Learning Outcomes | By the end of this module, participants will be able to (1) say why it is important to start early when preparing a proposal, (2) list common components of preparing to write a proposal and state basic advice for each, (3) prepare a basic timeline for preparing a proposal and a basic timeline to include in a proposal. |
| 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 are encouraged to identify beforehand a research project or other project for which they would like to seek grant funding. Also, if feasible, participants should be encouraged to bring examples of instructions for grant proposals and examples of successful grant proposals. |
| 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: 04\_Preparing to Write a Proposal |
| Visual Aids and Resources | Computer with PowerPoint; projector for PowerPoint presentation  If feasible, internet access  If feasible, some examples of grant-proposal instructions and successful grant proposals.  For the timeline-drafting exercise, participants should either bring laptop computers or the equivalent, use a computer lab, or have paper to write on. |
| 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.  Facilitators may localize the PowerPoint to suit the institution, country, or region from which the participants come. For instance, immediately after Slide 4, one or more slides could be inserted that regard (1) instructions for grant opportunities of particular local relevance or (2) examples of successful grant proposals from local researchers. |
| 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 (“Starting Early”)   + Emphasize the importance of starting to prepare a grant proposal well ahead of time, especially as parts of the preparation, writing, and submission processes can take longer than expected.   + If feasible, include one or more examples in this regard from your own experience, elicit examples from the group, or both. * Slide 4 (“Analyzing Instructions, Examples, etc”)   + Emphasize the importance of becoming familiar with the instructions early, as many funders consider only proposals that comply fully with their instructions.   + Note that program officers may be able to answer questions about the instructions. Also note that fellow researchers who have successfully submitted proposals might be able to do so.   + If feasible, show (either electronically or in hard copy) some examples of instructions for proposals. If participants have brought examples of instructions, provide opportunity to show and comment on them. If desired, include an exercise in which small groups look at some instructions and identify important points to remember from them.   + Note that looking at examples of accepted proposals can help clarify what is expected.   + Perhaps show some examples of successful proposals or have participants share examples that they have brought. Examples of successful proposals for biomedical research appear at <http://www.authoraid.info/en/resources/details/587/> and <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/sample-applications>. These sample proposals have various characteristics that also characterize successful proposals in other fields. * Slide 5 (“Doing the Groundwork”)   + Emphasize the importance of a thorough literature review. If you have presented Module 3 (“The Literature Review: A Foundation for a Proposal”), refer to it, and perhaps note key points from it or ask the group to do so. If you have not presented Module 3, perhaps present it after this module or encourage participants to view it on their own.   + Regarding the second bulleted item, note the following: Although the value of the proposed work might be obvious to the authors of a proposal, it might not be obvious to the recipients of the proposal. Therefore it can be important to develop a clear, well-reasoned explanation of why the proposed work would be of value.   + Regarding the third bulleted item, note the following:     - Funding sources generally want to fund research that is hypothesis-driven, or at least that addresses well-focused research questions. They generally do not want to fund “fishing expeditions” in which researchers explore broadly in hopes of finding something interesting.     - Beginning researchers often propose projects that are unrealistically ambitious. In preparing a proposal, researchers should remember that work often takes longer than expected. They also should remember that funding sources often prefer to fund a project that clearly seems doable than to take a chance on a project that would be difficult to complete in the proposed time. * Slide 6 (“Assembling Collaborators”)   + Note that funded projects generally involve collaboration. Note that involving the team members in preparing a proposal can result in a stronger proposal.   + Note that proposals often must include must include materials, such as curricula vitae (CVs), from collaborators. Emphasize the value of obtaining such items early, especially as some collaborators might not be available to provide such items shortly before the proposal is due.   + Mention the value of including a writer or editor on the grant-preparation team to help ensure from the beginning that the proposal is well organized and well worded and follows the instructions. * Slide 7 (“Establishing Timelines”)   + Note that when preparing a proposal, it can be helpful to have a schedule or timeline. Ask the group to identify tasks to consider including in the timeline, or mention some such tasks yourself; if desired, list some such tasks in a slide immediately after this one. Some examples of tasks to consider listing are the following:     - Review literature (or update literature review).     - Formulate one or more hypotheses or research questions.     - Recruit team members and perhaps outside consultants.     - Obtain CVs (and other items, if needed) from team members and any consultants.     - Outline research plan.     - Draft proposal.     - Draft budget.     - Obtain review of drafts.     - Finalize proposal and budget.     - Obtain approvals from administrators.   Submit proposal.   * + Also note the value of preparing a timeline for the proposed project itself. Doing so can aid in planning the project and in helping to ensure that it would be feasible in the available time. Also, including the timeline in the proposal can help show reviewers that the project is well thought out and capable of being completed on time.   + If feasible, show examples of timelines for proposal preparation or for funded projects. Searching online (for example, using Google) yields some examples. Facilitators might also have examples from their own experience of that of colleagues.   + Note: Information on Gantt charts and examples of such charts appear at <http://www.gantt.com/>. Other materials about Gantt charts also can also be identified through web searching. * Slide 8 (“Gathering Budgetary Information”)   + Note the importance of having a thorough, accurate budget.   + Note that determining expected costs can be time-consuming and that those preparing proposals should plan accordingly.   + If relevant, perhaps (1) mention that some institutions have staff members who can help prepare budgets and (2) say to contact such staff members early so they have enough time.   + Note that some funding sources want, or require, the grant applicant’s institution to contribute some resources to the project. Sometimes the institution’s contribution can or must consist of funds, and sometimes at least part of the institution’s contribution can consist of other items (for example, space or personnel). * Slide 9 (“Doing Other Items”)   + Note that for some types of research proposals, researchers are expected to include results of preliminary studies.   + If applicable, note the following: Some proposals, such as those for some types of service projects, should include discussion of sustainability (the ability for the activities to continue after the funding period ends). Preparing to write a proposal may include considering this aspect.   + Note that sometimes grant proposal submission is a two-stage process entailing first a brief preliminary proposal and then a full proposal. In one version of this two-stage process, only those who submitted the best preliminary proposals can submit full proposals. In another version, all those who submitted preliminary proposals can submit full proposals if desired; in that version, the preliminary proposals serve largely to inform the funding source, for example so it can begin recruiting suitable numbers and types of peer reviewers for the proposals.   + If you think of other items to do before writing a proposal, mention them. Also encourage participants to mention such items. * Slide 10 (“Small-Group Exercise: Drafting Timelines”)   + (This slide is just a “divider slide” providing transition to the exercise.) * Slide 11 (“Drafting Your Timelines”)   + This exercise is intended to be done in groups of about 3 to 5 members. Typically, it is likely to take about 15 or 20 minutes. However, depending on how the exercise is done (see next bullet), it may take more or less time.   + If some participants are not preparing proposals, they may do the exercise with a hypothetical proposal in mind or may be paired with participants who are preparing proposals.   + This exercise (and thus this slide) may be modified, if desired, for example to suit the amount of time available and the participants. For example:     - Participants may be asked to do the items in both of the first two bullets, only the first bullet, only the second bullet, or their choice of bullets.     - Participants may be asked to do the items in the first two bullets individually, paired with another participant, or their choice.     - If desired, after the small-group discussion, one or both of the following may be done: (1) Participants may visit other groups and comment on timelines by members. (2) There can be a large-group discussion in which, for example, some participants show their timelines, participants ask questions relating to timelines, and participants discuss what they gained from the exercise. * Slide 12 (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 13 (“Wishing you much success!”) and Slide 14 (Creative Commons information etc):   + (These are the standard closing slides for this series of presentations.) |