Grants Writing

To be used for educational purposes only
All rights reserved – India Alliance
Planning a grant application

• What agency/foundation/etc.? Research it.
• Is this against a specific call (RFA) or an open grant scheme?
• Who is likely to review my grant?
• What is the key question I will address?
• Do I have a hypothesis?
• Do I have the necessary expertise / experience for this work?
• Should I include collaborators?
• Personnel and Budget?
Elements of a grant application

- **Title** – choose carefully; should convey in one line what you wish to do.
- **Summary** – should convey in one paragraph what you wish to do. And how you plan to do it.
- **Background** – what has already been done.
- **Hypothesis**
- **Key Questions(s)**
- **Work Plan** – strategy, preliminary data, methods, possible outcomes, potential problems, alternate strategies
- **Budget**
What happens to your grant at the funding agency?

- Administrative screening
- Peer Review
- Collation of Reviews/Scores
- Shortlisting
- Funding Committee Meeting
How to influence reviewers and win grants

• The reviewers of your grant are more likely to be people who have a general awareness but are not necessarily experts in your area of research.

• Explain in **clear** terms and **simple** language
  – What you want to do?
  – why you want to do it?
  – how will you do it?
  – why are you the best person to do it?
  – how much will it cost?
How to influence reviewers and win grants

• Limit your CV to the most essential elements needed to convince the reviewer that you are a good bet.
  – Cut out unnecessary parts like the debating prize you got in High School or editorship of your college magazine.

• Reviewers like to see preliminary data.

• How do I generate preliminary data when this is my first grant?
  – Start with related data from your PhD/postdoc to demonstrate your technical proficiency
  – Choose good collaborators who complement your expertise
Common problems in grants

Most proposals have the same flaws

• Research protocol shows insufficient planning
• Work plan too ambitious
• Language is too technical for non-specialist reviewers
• Text fails to convey the novelty and urgency of the research

All applications benefit from editing

• Vocabulary and grammatical errors have negative effects
• Scientists are not trained writers; benefit from feedback
• The important point of research is buried in the proposal
• “Everyone knows that” syndrome – being too close to your own work you lose objectivity
• Don’t plagiarize

Nature 6 Nov 2014, p 153-154
It takes time and a team to win grants

Allow enough time
- Finish your draft well in advance of submission date
- Time is required to get useful inputs and polish drafts
- Plan protocols for hypotheses, goals, controls, methodologies, analyses
- Write, edit, proof-read, copy edit, charts, graphs, past work, preliminary data
- Is all this possible on your own? Research Office?

Pay attention to detail
- Poorly planned and explained research is a common problem
- “Shooting for the moon” does not always work. Justify, justify, justify
- “Letter of Intent” usually a good idea
- Use sub-heads as navigation tools
Highlight your grant application

Illustrate well

• Use photos, charts, graphs to highlight importance of work
• Use for information, not decoration
• Photos, charts, graphs will be seen before text is read; use captions to underscore significance

Explain future ramifications

• What are the potential outcomes?
• Will your research change the status quo?
• Be reasonable

Keep engaged

With funding agency even after your funding is over
Bottom line

• Plan your grant well – protocols, controls, etc
• Be clear and highlight importance of the work
• Allow sufficient time to seek advice and correct errors
• It’s a competitive world out there!!