



PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN RESEARCH WRITING

A Webinar Presented by Hanover Research

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TODAY'S PRESENTER



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GRANTS CONSULTANT



TOTAL WINS

\$175+
MILLION

Total grant funding for clients since 2003 from nearly every Federal funder and many major foundations.

MAJOR AWARDS

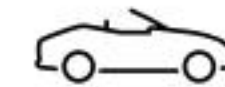


- MA in English with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition
- Former business and technical writing instructor
- Worked at Hanover 2011-2015 (and now 2022-present)

On a personal note ...



Born and raised in North Carolina



Interested in classic and modern cars



Hiking, biking, swimming, and reading



TODAY'S AGENDA

- ✓ Preparing to write your narrative
- ✓ Designing your narrative
- ✓ Writing your narrative
- ✓ Q&A

An aerial photograph of a city street grid, viewed from a high angle. The streets are dark, and the buildings are light. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark layer. In the center, the text "PREPARING TO WRITE YOUR NARRATIVE" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The text is centered horizontally and vertically. The background shows a grid of streets with various markings, including arrows and numbers like "222" and "09".

PREPARING TO WRITE YOUR NARRATIVE

WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY GOAL?

Your job, in each part of the proposal, is to **raise reviewer confidence** that you have thought through every aspect of your project design.

To convince reviewers that you have a project that is...

- ✓ Urgently needed
- ✓ Ambitious
- ✓ Feasible
- ✓ Aligned with the competition's intent

FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

PROPOSE THE RIGHT THING TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE



KNOW YOUR
FIELD



KNOW YOUR
FUNDER



KNOW YOUR
FRAMING

BUT FIRST, SEMANTICS

“Narrative” most often refers to the:

- Project Narrative → term used by the USDA and most other Federal research agencies
- Project Description → used by NSF, e.g., CAREER
- Research Strategy → used by NIH
- Research Plan, Work Plan, or Statement of Work (SOW) → also terms found in contracts
- The proposal idea, proposal concept, or project vision
- The heart of your grant application
- The story of what you want to do during the proposed project

When you are ready to begin the formal application process, prepare thoroughly by:

- Reading all competition materials (solicitation, grants manual [e.g., NSF PAPPG], etc.).
- Making a checklist of all required application elements.
- Noting required steps and deadlines (e.g., any required LOIs, pre-applications, etc.).
- Creating a proposal development plan incorporating a timeline.
- Creating a narrative outline (also called a “template”).
- Gathering required information.

After reviewing all grantmaker guidance, assess and revise your project design.

- What are the funder's aims?
- How does your project accomplish these aims?
- Assess and adjust your goals, objectives, and project concept, as necessary

Note:

- Key elements to emphasize
- Buzzwords / key language to use

The elements of a grant proposal vary widely across funders.

A typical application package includes:

- Standard informational forms
- Abstract or Summary
- Narrative description of proposed project
- Budget and narrative description of budget elements
- Documents describing applicant qualifications and resources
- Documents describing collaboration plans and agreements
- Attachments or appendices supporting project narrative

While the narrative project description is the heart of the proposal, note that other documents may also require significant time and energy.

CHECKLIST FOR ED SSS (FY 2020)

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Use This Checklist While Preparing Your Application Package: All items listed on this checklist are required.

- Part I- Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
- Part I- Department of Education Supplemental Information for SF-424
- Part II- Department of Education Budget Summary Information–Non-Construction Programs (ED Form 524)–Sections A&B
- Part III- *Project Narrative*–The total recommended page limit for the project narrative portion of the application for the FY 2020 SSS Program competition is 65 pages. Attach the *Project Narrative* document to the Project Narrative Attachment Form in the Grants.gov application.
- Part III- Other Attachments–Attach the following documents to the Other Attachments Form in the Grants.gov application.
 - SSS Program Profile Form
 - SSS Program Assurance
- Part III- ED Abstract-one-page limit–Attach this document to the ED Abstract Form in the Grants.gov application. This one-page abstract, which may be single-spaced, will not count against the recommended 65 pages you are allowed for your response to the selection criteria.
- Part IV- Assurances and Certifications
 - GEPA Section 427 Requirement
 - Assurances – Non-Construction Programs (SF 424B)
 - Lobbying Form (formerly ED Form 80-0013)
 - Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF LLL)

CHECKLIST FOR NSF R01

After reviewing competition parameters, develop a checklist. (The one below is adapted from [George Mason University's NIH Checklist for R01 Submissions](#).)

- Cover Letter (not the same as the PHS Assignment Request Form)
- Project Summary (30 lines)
- Project Relevance (3 sentences: relevance to public health in lay terms)
- Specific Aims (1 page with project goals)
- Research Strategy (12 pages)
- Bibliography and References
- Facilities and Other Resources
- Equipment
- Biographical Sketch(es) (5 pages per each senior/key personnel)
- Budget and Justification (under \$250K/year should be a modular budget; over \$500K requests should include IC approval obtained ≥ 6 weeks in advance)
- Other documents (Human Subjects, Inclusion of Women and Minorities, Inclusion of Children, Vertebrate Animals, Select Agents, Multi-PI Plan, etc.)

CREATE A PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (TASK LIST AND TIMELINE)

Draft a proposal development plan, including key milestones.

Milestone	Responsibility	Date
Contact Grants Office to Begin the Proposal Process		
Draft Project Description		
Draft Budget		
Draft Attachments		
Revise Documents		
Submit Drafts to Peer / External Reviewers		
Review Feedback		
Revise Documents		
Deliver Near-Final Drafts to Grants Office (2 wks before deadline)		
Final Review and Revisions		
Submit Final Documents (at least 3 days before deadline)		
Submission Deadline (ideally prior to the SPONSOR DEADLINE)		

CREATE A NARRATIVE OUTLINE OR TEMPLATE

Referring to the relevant grantmaker materials (e.g., solicitation, guidance, FAQs, examples), outline your proposal narrative.

Incorporate the:

- Required format
- Page or character limits
- Required elements
- Required order
- Strategic placement of content (headings)
- Review criteria
- Reviewer checklists, if available

How will you present your material so that reviewers find what they need and are inspired to fund your project?

An aerial photograph of a city street grid, viewed from a high angle. The streets are dark, and the buildings are light. The grid is overlaid with white lines and numbers, suggesting a design or planning process. The numbers '09' and '22' are visible on several streets. The text 'DESIGNING YOUR NARRATIVE' is centered in white, bold, sans-serif font.

DESIGNING YOUR NARRATIVE

WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY GOAL?

Review the:

Funding opportunity
(solicitation)



Eligibility, deadlines,
required content

Grantmaker guidance
(grants manual, “how we
do business,” etc.)



Funder policies,
procedures, language,
culture, and priorities

Funded grants in award
databases (if possible)



Structure, presentation,
tone, vocabulary,
persuasive moves

For:

Takeaway: Grant writing is all
about **alignment** with the:

- purpose** of the competition,
- the funder’s **mission** and **values**, and
- the funder’s desired **investment** in grant-funded projects

**Check for this alignment
throughout your writing process.**

PROJECT ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PROJECT DESIGN

In your planning, incorporate typical grant-funded project elements:

- Start and end dates
- Background and rationale
- Goals and objectives
- Activities and methods
- Project management plan and timeline
- Anticipated results and findings
- Plan for disseminating results and findings
- Discussion of impacts and outcomes
- Budget and budget justification/narrative
- Plan to sustain the gains of the project
- Future directions

Remember, your proposal is not just a dream. Instead, it is a practical document requesting funding to perform a specific project over a given time period.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS YOU PLAN



What will be done?



Who will do the work?



Where will they do the work?



How will they do the work?



What tools and resources will be used to do the work?



How will you know if your project is successful?

NSF LANGUAGE TO CONSIDER

d. Project Description (including Results from Prior NSF Support)

(i) Content

The Project Description should provide a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and must include the objectives for the period of the proposed work and expected significance; the relationship of this work to the present state of knowledge in the field, as well as to work in progress by the PI under other support.

The Project Description should outline the general plan of work, including the broad design of activities to be undertaken, and, where appropriate, provide a clear description of experimental methods and procedures. Proposers should address what they want to do, why they want to do it, how they plan to do it, how they will know if they succeed, and what benefits could accrue if the project is successful. The project activities may be based on previously established and/or innovative methods and approaches, but in either case must be well justified. These issues apply to both the technical aspects of the proposal and the way in which the project may make broader contributions.

An aerial, top-down view of a city street grid, rendered in a dark, monochromatic style. The streets are shown as a network of white lines on a dark background. Some streets are labeled with numbers, such as '222' and '09'. The text 'WRITING YOUR NARRATIVE' is centered in the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

WRITING YOUR NARRATIVE

CONTEXT: FOUR STAGES OF THE TYPICAL WRITING PROCESS

1. Prewriting

- Freewriting – sentences and paragraphs, usually for a set time
- Brainstorming – lists of items
- The journalist's questions – who, what, when, where, why, and how
- Clustering/webbing/mindmaps – drawing the thinking process
- Outlining – prescriptive (before writing) or descriptive (analyzing a draft's structure)

2. Drafting

- Required proposal elements (using a template)
- Individual efforts – making time to write; using voice-to-text or recording transcripts
- Collaborative efforts – assigning tasks, maintaining momentum, implementing Plan B

3. Revising

- Global/structural/ideas-related concerns
 - Competitive idea?
 - Activities lead toward accomplishing project goals?
 - Measurable outcomes?
- Clearly presented & readable? Appropriately structured? Explicit linkages among ideas?

4. Editing

- Standard written edited American English?
 - Logic of each paragraph and section?
 - Awkward wording? Unclear sentences?
 - Embarrassing typos?
- Outlining – prescriptive or descriptive
 - Adheres to required font size/style, margins, headings, title format, etc.
 - Word choice appropriate to grant proposals (**not** peer-reviewed publications)?

CONTEXT: UNDERSTANDING THE PROPOSAL **DEVELOPMENT** SEQUENCE

- Need, significance
- Hypotheses/problem statement
- Objectives
- Methods/work plan
- Evaluation
- Dissemination
- Budget/budget narrative
- Introduction
- Literature cited
- Future funding
- Title/forms page
- Summary/abstract
- Attachments: biosketches, etc.

CONTEXT: UNDERSTANDING THE PROPOSAL **PRESENTATION** SEQUENCE

- Title page/forms
- Summary/abstract
- Introduction
- Need/significance
- Hypotheses/problem statement
- Objectives/aims
- Methods/work plan
- Evaluation
- Dissemination
- Future funding
- Literature cited
- Budget
- Attachments

HOW GRANT WRITING DIFFERS FROM MOST OTHER ACADEMIC WRITING

Most Other Academic Writing	Grant Writing
Scholarly pursuit: <i>Individual passion</i>	Sponsor goals: <i>Service attitude</i>
Past-oriented: <i>Work that has been done</i>	Future-oriented: <i>Work that should be done</i>
Theme-centered: <i>Theory and rhetoric</i>	Project-centered: <i>Objectives and activities</i>
Expository rhetoric: <i>Explaining to the reader</i>	Persuasive rhetoric: <i>“Selling” the reader</i>
Impersonal tone: <i>Objective, dispassionate</i>	Personal tone: <i>Excitement, enthusiasm</i>
Few length constraints: <i>Verbosity often rewarded; can/should refer readers to other sources</i>	Strict length constraints: <i>Brevity rewarded; Self-contained</i>
Specialized terminology: <i>“Insider jargon”</i>	Accessible language: <i>Easily understood</i>

MORE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF GRANT WRITING

Grant writing presents a plan, one that typically has the following special characteristics:

- Presents a project, complete with start and end dates, goals and objectives, activities, anticipated outcomes, project management and results dissemination plans, and a budget.
- Justifies the approach/methodology you want to adopt.
- Presents alternatives to mitigate risk.
- Shows return on (the funding agency's) investment.
- Convinces readers that the project is feasible, that your team is the best to do this research ("Why us?"), and that you will be good stewards of the funder's investment.
- Can be read and understood by laypeople or people with less expertise in your specific area of your field.
- Provides visuals representing activity flow, methodological process, and/or overall framework of ideas.

GRANT STORYTELLING ILLUSTRATED

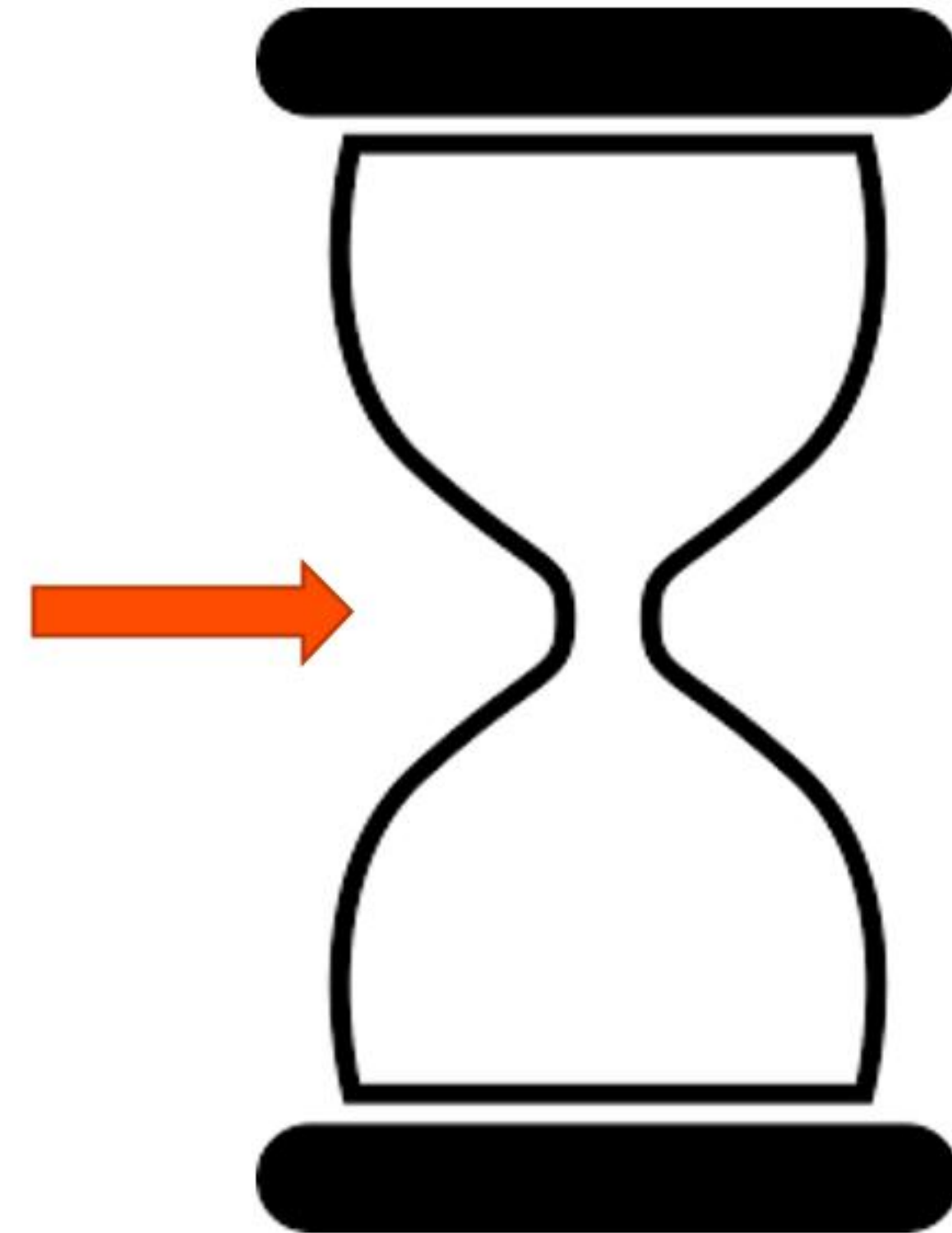
1. Context and challenge

State of the field (gaps)
Literature review
Preliminary evidence

2. Research plan

Assessment plan
Impacts and merits
Project timeline

3. Overall impact(s)



Grant format and structure are often strictly prescribed.

- Always check formatting requirements (e.g., font, margins) before you begin drafting, to avoid problems later.
- Structure your proposal transparently around the funder's required elements, even if the funder doesn't specifically ask you to do this.
- Use headings and sub-headings to make all elements easy to find.
- Remember that reviewers are working with a checklist: everything that's likely on their checklist should stand out.
- Remember that reviewers have many proposals to read. Make their task easy!

Although it may be tempting to use a creative structure, in almost all cases grant proposals should be structurally predictable and conventional.

COMPELLING GRANT WRITING

Use clear and simple language to engage and explain.

- Put yourself in the mind of the reviewer and work to inspire confidence by using Aristotle's principles: ethos, logos, and pathos.
- Use relatively short, declarative sentences about what you will do.
 - Write in active voice (e.g., "We will" or "The project team will")
 - Remember: If your proposal is funded, the narrative will be referenced in the terms and conditions of the award as the "approved plan of work."
- Stay chronological – explain the project step by step.
- Write with journalistic detail – who, what, when, where, how, why.

Remember that you're focused on sending a single coherent and consistent message to the reviewers.

TYPICAL GRANT NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Strong narratives have similar core elements:

- Introduction
- Statement of the Problem
- Literature Review / Significance / Rationale
- Conceptual Framework
- Hypotheses or Research Questions
- Methodology/Strategy
- Scope of Work
- Management Plan
- Staff and Institutional Qualifications
- Evaluation Plan

Note that each solicitation will require information to be presented in specific ways.

The Introduction should bring reviewers into the world of your project and make them want to read the whole narrative

Do:

- ✓ Spark the reader's interest.
- ✓ Orient the reader to your project and your narrative.
- ✓ Specify the project's overall goals.

Don't:

- ✗ Meander or digress.
- ✗ Include unnecessary background information.
- ✗ Make unsubstantiated claims about your project's impact.

The Introduction is your chance to get reviewers engaged and “on your side.”

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Statement of the Problem lets the reader know why the project is worth doing

Do:

- ✓ Concisely describe the problem you will solve or the question you will answer.
- ✓ Show that the problem or question is important.
- ✓ Point out the potential impact of solving this problem (or filling/partly filling the noted gap in knowledge in your field).
- ✓ Use data where necessary (especially for program grants).

Don't:

- ✗ Restate the information in the solicitation (they already know that).

The Statement of the Problem should interest the reviewer.

The Literature Review should map the territory for the reader

Do:

- ✓ Describe the background from broad to narrow – landscape view to microscopic.
- ✓ Review what has been done to address the problem so far.
- ✓ Clearly delineate the gap you will fill.
- ✓ Show that you understand your field.
- ✓ Cover your bases in terms of important citations.

Don't:

- ✗ Omit key citations.
- ✗ Fail to address conflicting work.

The Literature Review is your chance to show how well you know your field; it should make the reviewer confident that you have fully surveyed the field.

The Conceptual Framework communicates your approach to the work

Do:

- ✓ Identify the theories or concepts that will guide the project.
- ✓ Describe how they guide the project.
- ✓ Connect the theories or concepts to the work itself (e.g., via a logic model).

Don't:

- ✗ Be vague.
- ✗ Fail to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The Conceptual Framework should convince the reviewer that you are taking the right approach to solving the problem.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, OR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Project Aims, Objectives, or Research Questions show the reviewer what the research will accomplish related to the Stated Problem

Do:

- ✓ Clearly state hypotheses and questions.
- ✓ Explain how testing these hypotheses and/or answering these questions will solve the stated problem and/or fill identified gaps in the literature.

Don't:

- ✗ Use vague or confusing wording.
- ✗ Include hypotheses that are not fully testable and falsifiable.

These should crystallize the impetus for the proposed work.

**The Methodology/
Strategy
communicates the
research tools and
strategies you will
use to accomplish
the work**

Do:

- ✓ Clearly describe your planned implementation methods.
- ✓ Include details for all procedures, work, and implementation protocols.
- ✓ Include enough detail so that the reader can judge feasibility and appropriateness.

Don't:

- ✗ Assume the reader knows what you're talking about.

**The Methodology/Strategy should leave
the reviewer confident in your project design.**

**The Scope of Work
communicates
exactly what you
will do**

Do:

- ✓ Describe exactly what will be done, including the sequence of the proposed activities and the anticipated outcomes and/or deliverables.
- ✓ Include all activities necessary for completing the project.
- ✓ Provide a viable schedule for carrying out the tasks (work plan).

Don't:

- ✗ Forget sufficient detail.

The Scope of Work should leave the reviewer confident that you have thought through the process and intend to follow a well-considered plan designed to accomplish the project objectives.

SAMPLE PROJECT ACTIVITIES / WORK PLAN TABLE

Objectives	Activities	Outcomes/Products

The Management Plan communicates your structure for accomplishing the Scope of Work (who will do what)

Do:

- ✓ Explain how you will manage the project.
- ✓ Indicate who will be responsible for each work component.
- ✓ Describe how each element of the project will be coordinated.
- ✓ Include an organization chart where appropriate.

Don't:

- ✗ Be vague about responsibilities and management structure.
- ✗ Fail to adequately address the potentially challenging elements of the planned work.

The Management Plan should assure the reviewer that you and your team will be able to get the work done.

SAMPLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN TABLE

Key Personnel (Title, Institution, Project FTE)	Project Role and Responsibilities	Experience and Capabilities

The Evaluation Plan communicates how you will ensure and measure the project's success

Do:

- ✓ Follow the funder's guidance regarding the evaluation approach.
- ✓ Include formative and summative evaluation plans.
- ✓ Describe how you will use the evaluation to improve the project.
- ✓ Describe data collection and analysis instruments and procedures.
- ✓ Describe evaluator qualifications.

Don't:

- ✗ Provide an evaluation out of scale with the funder or the work.

The Evaluation Plan should make the reviewer feel confident that you have the necessary structures in place to evaluate the project's success and/or effectiveness.

SAMPLE PROJECT EVALUATION PLAN TABLE

Performance Measures	Data Source & Timing	Responsible Staff	Data Analysis Method

The Budget shows the funder how you plan to spend their money to accomplish the proposed project.

Tips for budget development:

- ✓ Gather estimates, quotes, and documentation early in the process. Avoid cost surprises!
- ✓ Talk with faculty/staff to determine typical budget arrangements.
- ✓ Compile all revenue and expenses to make sure you will have to resources to do what you need to do.
- ✓ Use an internal spreadsheet to “tinker” with the budget until it is final.
- ✓ When the budget is final, “translate” it to the funder’s required forms.

The Budget Narrative must be consistent with the Project Narrative.

The Budget Narrative justifies the listed budget amounts, describes your calculations, and shows how each budget item will help accomplish the project.

Tips for budget narrative development:

- Show a clear method of calculation for each item.
- Link each item back to grant activities and grantmaker goals.
- Use the same terminology that you used in the project narrative.

When each element of the proposal is complete, assemble the final package.

- Review the package as a whole:
 - Is it internally consistent?
 - Does it follow all funder guidelines?
 - Will a reviewer be able to find what they need in the package?
 - Will a reviewer who doesn't know you, your institution, or your work need any additional information to understand your project?
- Double check to make sure the package is complete.
- Obtain internal approvals for submission.
- Submit the package **well before the submission deadline** if possible.

SEEK FEEDBACK

WHO?



Mentors, Colleagues, Other Peers, Program Officers, Consultants

HOW?



Ask early, meet the deadlines you promise, be specific about what you want and when, and explain why you asked them specifically.

WHAT?



- Honest, objective, straightforward feedback.
- Funder-specific or field-specific preferences and expectations.
- Content-oriented vs. stylistic or formatting-oriented comments.

WHEN?



- Concept stage
- When you have a first draft
- When you have a near-final draft

MAKING THE MOST OF FEEDBACK

- Carefully consider the scientific merit of the critiques and modify your descriptions to address misunderstandings or modify your approach to address true flaws.
- Be most attentive to criticisms presented by *multiple* reviewers.
- Ask some reviewers to review your changes to confirm that you have sufficiently addressed the critiques.
- Remember: Your intent/meaning **does not matter** if the reviewer thinks it meant something else (so avoid any language that *might* lead to misinterpretations or misunderstandings).



Q & A



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

- The National Organization for Research Development Professionals (NORDP) maintains a [Writing a Grant 101](#) page, which includes links to many useful guides, as well as a more general [Resources](#) page.
- The Foundation Center provides an [Introduction to Proposal Writing](#) course, focused more on private grants.
- The NSF [Proposal and Award Policy and Procedures Guide](#) is indispensable, as is the NIH [SF 424 R&R Guide \(version H\)](#).
- The University of Wisconsin – Madison’s Extension Program Development and Evaluation Unit has a [Logic Models site](#), including templates and development guides.
- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s [Logic Model Development Guide](#) is a key resource.

RESOURCES FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

- The **Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE)** maintains a list of [evaluation planning resources](#).
- The **Institute of Museum and Library Services** also provides a list of [evaluation resources](#).
- The **US Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences (IES)** maintains the [What Works Clearinghouse](#), which includes specific standards that apply to many DoE-funded grant evaluations.
- The **National Organization for Research Development Professionals (NORDP)** maintains a [list of program evaluators](#); also, the **American Evaluation Association** maintains a [database of member evaluators](#).
- **ED** and **NSF** have collaborated on a [User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation](#) (and one for [Mixed Method Evaluations](#)).



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