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Chapter 36
EHDI Grantsmanship 101

Terry E. Foust, AuD

> Securing grant funding from federal, state, and other sources continues to be the largest contributor to financial sustainability for most programs today. Without a doubt, successful grant writing will be a key factor for sustainability and program growth in the future.

Most state Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) programs were started with and continue to be sustained through grant funding. Both the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have provided grant funding to EHDI programs for startup, quality improvement, and data management efforts. Securing grant funding from federal, state, and other sources continues to be the largest contributor to financial sustainability for most programs today. Without a doubt, successful grant writing will be a key factor for sustainability and program growth in the future. Every EHDI program must invest in the appropriate resources necessary to apply for and secure grant funding at every opportunity.

Successful grant writing involves solid advance planning and preparation. It takes time and resources to coordinate planning; research, organize, write, and package a proposal; submit the proposal to a potential funder; and follow-up. The following chapter is broken down into key steps to facilitate an appropriately written grant and maximize the chances for funding.

Identify Appropriate Grant Funders

The key to successfully obtaining funding and to avoid wasting valuable time is the accurate identification of appropriate grant funders. It is crucial to research potential grant funders to determine funding purposes, priorities, and applicant eligibility. Determine whether the funder's goals and objectives match your grant-seeking purposes. Target your proposal to funders appropriate to your field and project (EHDI), but do not limit your funding request to one source. Contact the grant funder before writing a proposal to be sure you clearly understand the request for proposal (RFP) guidance and deadlines.

Grants.gov

Since the majority of funding for state EHDI programs is currently provided through grants from MCHB and/or CDC, it is vitally important to be familiar with www.grants.gov. This website serves as the central information and application clearinghouse for federal grant programs.

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It currently houses information on over 1,000 grant programs and provides access to approximately $500 billion in annual awards.

Grants.gov is managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is not only where to find information on federal grant opportunities, but also the method by which applications are electronically submitted and tracked. The website provides grant searches, application instructions, electronic filing, application status tracking, and resources for applicants. While the website is the complete resource for federal grants, the application process can be time consuming and cumbersome. For example, the registration process can be slow and confusing. Registration is different for an organization/agency versus an individual and can take as little as 3 business days to as long as 4 weeks, if all steps are not completed in a timely manner. It is very important to register early—allowing sufficient time to complete the application and submit the electronic submission in by the deadline.

One of the most helpful features of Grants.gov is the self-help web portal called iPortal (www.grants.gov/iportal). iPortal is the entry point to live 24-hour assistance. This feature includes the top 10 requested help topics, a searchable knowledge base (400 answers to common issues), self-service help ticket generation, live one-on-one help via web chat, as well as alerts and important updates. It is crucial that anyone interested in federal grant opportunities become very familiar with Grants.gov and its resources and requirements for registration, application, and electronic submission. Not following the guidance exactly, failing to include all required materials, missing important deadlines, or otherwise relatively minor infractions may disqualify an otherwise worthy grant application from consideration by a federal agency.

The best advice with regards to federal grant applications is to allow plenty of time to complete the application process. Register early, finish the application early, and submit the application electronically well ahead of the deadline for submissions.

Allow sufficient time to deal with unanticipated problems with the electronic submission process. Not infrequently, there are issues with various organization's firewall and security software, which is common in settings such as EHDI, where health and personal information must be safeguarded.

Get Prepared

Adequate preparation is vital to the grant writing process. Solid planning and research will simplify the writing stage. To ensure efficient and thorough completion of your application, consider taking the preliminary steps shown in *Table 1*.

For innovative grant announcements, it is important to ask yourself, "Is your idea original?" The uniqueness of your idea and proposal will help it stand out in competitive grant competitions. Review the literature and available databases to minimize overlap with similar studies and verify that the exact project you are considering has not been done before. Many funding agencies, such as National Institutes of Health (NIH), MCHB, and CDC, have databases that can be accessed for this purpose.

In some cases, funding may be available to replicate projects that have been funded in the past. Often, a pilot study may be funded initially to test the feasibility of a concept on a relatively small scale. If successful, funding may become available for other grantees to replicate the concept on a larger scale. In this case, you must closely adhere to the grant guidance and agree to replicate the procedures exactly as outlined.

Whenever you are considering submitting a grant proposal, it is important to study and assess the competition. See what other projects in your field are being funded. More importantly, consider turning competitors into collaborators to improve the strength of your proposal. It is important to secure a collaborator(s) on your project who can provide expertise you may lack.

Most successful grantees try to carve out a niche that will allow them to advance

Adequate preparation is vital to the grant writing process. Solid planning and research will simplify the writing stage.

Table 1
Preliminary Grant Writing Steps

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Clearly understand the funder's guidelines before you write a proposal. Review the grant application instructions for important information on the application process and guidance for preparing specific sections of the application. Make sure the funder's goals and objectives match the purposes of your grant-seeking process.	Carefully read the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) or (RFP) for all requirements and special instructions.	Solicit feedback from colleagues and/or mentors on your grant idea while it is still in the concept stage.

Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Prepare an outline following the framework and structure described in the application guide.	Make sure you have adequate supporting data, where required.	Develop a feasible timeline consistent with application deadlines. Be realistic about the time it can take to write and revise the application—allowing plenty of extra time for unanticipated delays.

Step 7	Step 8	Step 9
Ask your agency and colleagues for copies of successfully completed and funded grant applications. Examine them closely. The National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM) website has copies of past successful grants at http://www.infanthearing.org/stategrants/20002001.html	Communicate with others who can assist you in understanding and completing the application materials. Most state EHDI programs are willing to support each other in grant funding efforts. Secure a mentor(s) who can provide advice and guidance on developing and writing a successful grant application.	Become familiar with the review criteria that will be used to rate your application.

Photo courtesy of John Tracy Clinic

knowledge in their respective areas or improve procedures in their specific program. For the purposes of MCHB and CDC grants, consider what ideas/proposals would promote advanced knowledge in EHDI or produce measurable improvement in some aspect of your program.

These considerations should help you refine your ideas and generate a hypothesis for any new concepts or ideas. Discuss your ideas with colleagues and mentors and ask that they review the initial draft of your proposal early in the process. Doing this can save a great deal of valuable time. Be sure your proposed goals and objectives can be accomplished within the time and resource allocations permitted by the RFP.

Convey and confirm your confidence and enthusiasm for the proposed project. It is important to propose projects and research that you are passionate about and committed to doing. If funding is awarded, you will be responsible for seeing that all the processes and procedures you outlined in your proposal are actually carried out.

What to Know Before You Start Writing the Grant Proposal

Careful preparation saves time and resources—helping you to build a solid application. For most federal grants, a panel of experts review grant applications submitted in a process known as "peer review." Reviewers are selected from a pool of applicants with considerable knowledge of the topic of the grants. Reviewers must declare any conflict of interest and do not score grants where a potential conflict may exist. Reviewers are assigned a number of grant applications to examine and score individually. After that has been completed, reviewers are convened in a group—called a "panel"—where applications are reviewed, discussed, and scored again. The composite group score may be used to determine which applications are funded and which are not—or just applied as an overall indicator of the quality of the application. The panel also completes a report that

is used to provide feedback to both the applicant and the funding agency. In some cases, the panel may recommend revision or clarification of specific points in the proposal.

Although several factors contribute to whether or not your application will be funded, great emphasis is placed on this evaluation and how the reviewers rate the merit of your proposal. The following sections describe the criteria reviewers typically use to evaluate applications. Read them carefully for helpful hints on the information and content you should include in the application to garner a favorable evaluation.

Know the Peer Review Criteria

Reviewers judge the proposed project on the RFP criteria and goals to evaluate the likelihood that the proposed project will have a substantial impact on the attainment of one or more of these goals. Reviewers assign an overall score based on each of the RFP criteria and a judgment of overall merit. Some common review criteria are shown in *Table 2*.

Developing Your Plan

The grant application describes your proposed project, justifies the need for funds, and specifies how proposed activities will be conducted and evaluated. Remember, an application must appeal to two audiences: (1) personnel from the funding agency and (2) independent reviewers who are familiar with the activities proposed in the grant application. All reviewers are important, because each reviewer gets one vote and usually has an opportunity to provide input that may sway or influence other reviewers. To have a successful review, you must convince the assigned reviewers. They act as your advocates in guiding the review panel's discussion of your application.

Organize and write your application, so the primary reviewers can readily understand and explain what you are proposing and

> Most successful grantees try to carve out a niche that will allow them to advance knowledge in their respective areas or improve procedures in their specific program.

Table 2
Common Review Criteria

Significance	Personnel	Innovation
Does the project address an important problem or critical barrier to progress? In EHDI, for example, a critical barrier is the lost to follow-up problem. If the goals of the project are achieved, how will knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the goals change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive EHDI?	Are the program personnel well suited to the project? If they are new, do they have appropriate experience and training? If they are experienced, have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their support of EHDI? If the project is collaborative, do the personnel have complementary and integrated expertise? Are the leadership approach, governance, and organizational structure of the applicant appropriate for the project?	Does the application challenge and seek to shift current processes and thought paradigms by utilizing new and novel theoretical concepts? Does it propose innovative approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Is it a proposed refinement or new application of theoretical concepts, methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions?

Collaborators

It is often advisable to expand the number and type of organizations represented in the proposal. Funders will sometimes fund a single organization but look more favorably on proposals involving multiple groups. This demonstrates to grant reviewers that your proposal has the potential for greater community impact, because you are reaching out to other organizations or communities. If your proposal has two or three organizations working together, it will probably score higher than a similar proposal (equally well written) from a single source without	community partnerships. Many RFPs are requiring partnering with other organizations and in some cases actually "suggest" potential partners. Determine the expertise and resources needed to support and accomplish your proposed project. Have you clearly demonstrated partnerships that make up a team consisting of individuals, collaborating organizations, community partners, and resources? Large-scale projects, such state EHDI programs, require collaboration among agencies in both the public and private sector (audiologists, hospitals, clinics, etc.).	Most funding sources are dedicated to fostering such relationships. Letters of commitment in your application should clearly spell out the roles of each collaborator. The grant application should contain a signed letter from each collaborator to the applicant that lists the contribution he or she intends to make and their commitment to the work. These letters are often the primary assurance the reviewers have that this work will in fact be done. For consultants, letters should include rate charged for consulting services.

Approach	Environment	
Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific goals of the project? Are potential challenges and problems with associated alternative strategies and benchmarks for success presented? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and how will particularly risky aspects be managed?	Have you clearly delineated factors, such as institutional support, equipment, agency environment, collaborations, etc., and their impact on the proposed project? Are the institutional support, equipment, and other physical resources available adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the agency environment, state factors, or collaborative arrangements?	

Photo courtesy of Cochlear Americas

fairly score your application. For reviewers, it is very frustrating to have to closely read through an application several times to determine the real merit of a proposal. It is very important to use language that stresses the significance of your proposed work and how it relates to the published guidance for grant applications. This may be one of the most important factors in appealing to reviewers.

Important Factors in Grant Writing

Listed in *Table 3* are five factors that all grant writers should keep in mind throughout the application process. Also outlined are basic steps to follow for a well-written proposal.

The central purpose for any grant application is to convince the reviewers of the legitimacy of the problem, demonstrate that you offer a viable solution, and that you can successfully execute the solution. A grant proposal is intended to sell your problem and solution to the funder. You must be persuasive. Support your argument with as many facts as possible. Use statistics, program data, state and national information, and documentation wherever possible.

It is helpful to:

- Show how other groups and/or communities are involved.
- Convey the number of people expected to benefit from your solution.
- Demonstrate that your solution is practical, legitimate, and applicable to others.
- Establish specific goals and objectives that can be measured.
- Convey your ability to meet the identified goals and objectives.

It should be noted that many funding agencies solicit grant applications by invitation only and require potential applicants to submit preliminary proposals in the form of inquiry letters or a "letter of intent." Those selected are then invited to submit a full proposal. Inquiry letters are designed to convince the grant funder to

consider your request. They provide you the opportunity to give the grant agency a snapshot of your proposed project/ program. Be sure to clearly establish a connection between your proposal's goals and the grant funder's priorities. Focus on detail and clarity while concisely conveying the impact your proposal will make on the need or problem you are addressing.

Your inquiry letter should condense all of the key information into the following main elements:

1. Organization overview/purpose.
2. Describe needs or problem (including target population, statistics, examples).
3. Concisely describe the proposed project or program.
4. Reason for and amount of funding requested.
5. List other prospective or committed funders.
6. Request funding application.

Elements common to grant applications are shown in *Table 4*, and final grant writing tips to consider are shown in *Table 5*. It is crucial to carefully read and closely follow all instructions in the application, RFP, and guidance. Often a very good proposal has not been considered due to not meeting a minor requirement or deadline. Remember, the online submission process can be complicated and may take extra time to successfully complete. It is a good idea to have the grant application completed with several days to spare, so you can devote enough time to the process and ensure the submission process has been successful.

Budget Considerations

Before you start writing the application, think about the budget and how it is related to your proposed activities. Everything in the budget must be justified by the work described in the proposal.

Outsourcing Grant Writing

It may be advisable to consider outsourcing the writing of your grant

Table 3
Important Factors in Grant Writing

Basic Steps to Follow

1 Cearly demonstrate a significant need or problem in your proposal.

2 Deliver a response to the need or solution to the problem based on experience, ability, logic, and imagination.

3 Reflect planning, research, and vision throughout your proposal.

4 Submit your proposal in the prescribed format, including all required attachments.

5 State your organization's goals and objectives clearly and concisely. Write well and do not waste words. Use active rather than passive verbs. Use proper grammar and correct spelling. Be clear, factual, supportable, and professional. A well-written proposal is a key factor in the grant funder's review and decision-making process.

6 Clearly describe why you are seeking a grant, what you plan to do with the money, and why you are a good fit with the grant funder's priorities. Prepare an interesting, persuasive, and unique proposal.

7 Always cover the following important criteria:
- Project purpose
- Feasibility
- Community need
- Funds needed
- Applicant accountability
- Competence

Five Factors to Keep in Mind

1. Adhere closely to the grant guidance.
2. Organize your proposal.
3. Pay attention to detail and specifications.
4. Use concise, persuasive writing.
5. Request reasonable funding.

8 Answer the following questions:
- Who are you?
- How do you qualify?
- What do you want?
- What problem will you address and how?
- Who will benefit and how?
- What specific objectives will you accomplish and how?
- How will you measure your results?
- Can you demonstrate appropriate project logic and outcomes, impact of funds, and community support?
- Have you clearly described broad goals, measurable objectives, and quantified outcomes?

9 Always follow the exact specifications of the grant funder as outlined in their application, RFP, and guidelines. Specifically state how your funding request complies with the grant funder's purpose, goals, and objectives.

10 There are many different forms and formats for funding proposals. Every funder has different guidelines, priorities, timetables, and deadlines. Some funders accept a Common Application Form (CAF)—a single proposal accepted by a number of grant funders to help save time and streamline the application process.

11 After it is submitted, follow-up with the grant funder about the status, evaluation, and outcome of your proposal. Request feedback about your proposal's strengths and weaknesses.

application by contracting with a professional grant writer. The wisdom of hiring a grant writer depends on several factors, such as the availability of in-house, company, or department grant writers. Some organizations employ an in-house grant writer; many do not. Grant writing is often added to the list of responsibilities of personnel already burdened with many organizational responsibilities. Additional considerations for outsourcing include limitations of personnel time and lack of the organizational and writing skills necessary to write a competitive application.

If you do choose to hire a professional grant writer, it is usual and customary to expect the grant writer to provide the following:

- Writing grant applications in response to (RFPs).
- Prepare funding requests.
- Coordinate preparation and submission of grant applications.
- Lead and conduct literature review and research.

Cost for professional grant writers varies depending on several factors, such as:

- Retaining a professional company or writer. This is more common with organizations or departments that are continually seeking funding opportunities across multiple RFP types. Typical retainer agreements start at $1,000 monthly, and the company or grant writer will provide a timesheet indicating hours and activities completed for each project.

- Project-by-project is a more common scenario for smaller organizations, limited RFP opportunities, etc. Currently, project-by-project hourly rates start at approximately $75.00 per hour. Most professionals should provide a time and cost estimate for each project. It is customary to pay half the estimated fee upfront. Detailed timesheets indicating hours and activities for each project should be provided.

> It may be advisable to consider outsourcing the writing of your grant application by contracting with a professional grant writer.

Table 4
Grant Application Formats

Cover Sheet

A case statement and proposal summary.

Needs Assessment

Concise demonstration of the specific situation, opportunity, problem, issue, need, and community your proposal addresses.

Program Goals and Objectives

A succinct description of the proposed project/program's outcome and accomplishments in measurable terms and how it matches the funder's interests.

Methodology

A rational, direct, chronological description of the proposed project and the process proposed in order to achieve the outcome and accomplishments.

Evaluation

The plan for meeting performance goals and objectives.

Budget

A realistic budget with a detailed explanation of the funding request, committed matching funds, evidence of sound fiscal management, and long-term funding plan.

Qualifications

Your organization's background, its funding history, board involvement and staff qualifications, and specifically its capacity to carry out the proposed activities.

Conclusion

A brief, concise summary of your proposal.

Appendices

Additional attachments required by the funder, such as proof of tax-exempt status, organizational and financial documents, staff/board lists, support/commitment letters.

Table 5
Final Grant Writing Tips to Consider

Tip 1	Tip 2	Tip 3
Use terms that are easily understood in a clear and concise writing style, so that a non-expert can understand the proposed project. Make your points as directly as possible. Avoid using jargon or excessive verbage. Be consistent with terms, references, and writing style. Spell out all acronyms on first reference.	Most grant instructions require that materials be organized in a specific format. Reviewers are accustomed to finding information in specific sections of the application. Organize your application to guide reviewers effortlessly through it—allowing for an efficient evaluation process. Reviewers dislike having to hunt for required information, which is often reflected in their evaluation.	Think like a reviewer. A reviewer must often read multiple applications in great detail and form an opinion about each of them. Your application has a better chance of being favorably reviewed if it is easy to read and follows the specified format. A clear, well-written, properly organized application always makes a favorable impression on reviewers.

Tip 4	Tip 5	Tip 6
Capture reviewers' attention by clearly justifying why your project should be funded. Convince them that funding your proposal is worth the money, why you or your agency can clearly accomplish the goals and objectives, and how your institution can provide the support needed to get it done. Be persuasive.	Be realistic. Don't propose more work than can reasonably be done during the proposed project period. Provide assurances and evidence that the personnel have appropriate expertise and training.	Unless required, do not include an index or table of contents or bind the proposal. Be sure to obtain all required signatures and submit the number of copies specified in the guidance.

Tip 7	Tip 8	Tip 9
Grant proposals should read as if one person wrote the entire document. Sometimes more than one person participates in the writing of the document; however, the proposal will read better for the reviewer if someone in the group acts as the editor to ensure continuity in writing styles. Consider having one person responsible for coordinating the proposal planning and development. Someone needs to coordinate all the activities to ensure that all the required steps are accomplished.	Do not include Web addresses (URLs) in your proposal unless clearly instructed to do so. Some governmental agencies, such as NIH, have policies that prohibit the submission of URLs in grant applications in place of text describing the same material. This policy eliminates the potential for providing a large amount of extra material from a website in excess of the page limit—giving an unfair advantage to some applicants and creating a large additional burden for reviewers.	Many grants must now be submitted electronically—either directly to a website or scanned PDF email. Regardless of how it is to be submitted, your full proposal must be received neatly, professionally, and well organized. Write, organize, and present your proposal in the order and format listed in the application and guidelines. **ONLY** include information and materials specifically requested by the grant funder. A proposal is judged on content and presentation, not weight. As a matter of fact, submitting excessive materials may disqualify an application.

Tip 10
Include sufficient background information to enable an intelligent reader to clearly understand your proposed goals and objectives.

Helpful Links and Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Grants—Funding Opportunity Announcements. Contains links to announcements, applications and forms, assurances certifications, and frequently asked questions, http://www.cdc.gov/od/pgo/funding/grants/foamain.shtm

Examples of previous state MHCB EHDI grants: http://www.infanthearing.org/stategrants/20002001.html

Grants.Gov: Offers one-stop shopping for information on applying for grants at all federal agencies. The website includes information on over $500 billion in grant funds administered by over 900 grant programs at the federal government's 26 grant-making agencies. The Department of Health and Human Services is the managing partner for the federal Grants.gov initiative, http://www.grants.gov/

*Grant guides and tip sheets for National Institutes of Health***:** http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/grant_tips.htm

Grant writer source: http://www.grantwritersource.com

Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA): Grants—Open Opportunities. Contains information regarding available grants, the grant cycles, and links to a list of grants administration references. The site links to HSRA grant preview and grant guidance information, http://www.hrsa.gov/grants/

Intermountain Healthcare Foundation: Grant submission guidelines, 2010

National Health Council: Health research funding. Focused for biomedical research, this site, developed with input from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is designed to bring researchers with peer-reviewed, worthwhile, unfunded projects together with patient advocacy organizations and other funding sources to foster the funding of new research that will provide hope to millions of people in this country with chronic diseases and disabilities, http://www.nsf.gov/funding/

Office of Minority Health (OMH): Funding. Provides information to support minority heath projects, including private and public foundations, directories, and community resources. The site has a search engine and allows the user to browse by the following subject categories: funding resources, grants, foundations, and financial aid. A highlighted list of funding resources and new opportunities is now available. The Resource Center provides free search services for information on funding and other resources related to minority health, http://www.omhrc.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=1&lvlID=1

Partners in Information Access for the Public Health Workforce: Grants and funding. Opportunities for fellowships, grants, and other awards related to public health issues, http://phpartners.org/grants.html

ScanGrants: Designed to facilitate the search for funding sources to enhance individual and community health. The funding sources listed may be of interest to virtually anyone associated with the health field, including medical researchers, social workers, nurses, students, community-based health educators, academics, and others, http://www.scangrants.com/

The Grantsmanship Center: Funding sources. Links to federal, state, community foundations (by state), and international funding sources, http://tgci.com/funding.shtml

USA.gov for nonprofits: Designed to help nonprofit organizations access online federal information and services. It contains information about grants, regulations, taxes, and other services. In the section "Non-Profit Resources," check out "Grants and Non-Financial Support," which is searchable by Cabinet Department, Federal Agency, and Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). NOFAs are announcements that appear in the federal register daily, http://www.usa.gov/Business/Nonprofit.shtml