Proposal Writing Workshop for Funding Opportunities

September 30, 2009 from 5:30-6:30 PM in 172 Macy Hall
Facilitated by Zeena Zakharia, Ed.D., ITS Department, Teachers College, Columbia University

- Agenda
- Find funding opportunities

  How many of you are doctoral students? Masters students? Looking for research funding? Looking for project funding?
  
  - Think broadly about your project and yourself.
    - Create a list of key words that describe you and your research/project (Discipline, field, topic/subtopic, region, nationality, project type, degree program, etc.)
  
  - Start NOW--Use the internet AND your feet.
    Begin to collect information on opportunities as they arise. Often they are annual competitions, so you can expect the same content/expectations/deadlines from year to year. Start filing them, taking note of deadlines, etc.
    - Academic sources
      - TC
        - SIE funding list → Look at list: big and small grants; area studies; TC/CU; grants for all stages of process
        - SIE and department listservs
        - Office of Sponsored Programs
      - Columbia University
      - Other education/disciplinary programs outside of CU
    - Government sources
    - Private sources
    - Clearinghouses like FastWeb, Foundation Center, etc.
    - Sign up for listservs now
  
  - Your colleagues are excellent resources
    - Check out the website to see what grants people have won
    - Contact students with similar interests or backgrounds (but be considerate of their time, and make sure to repay the favor when someone asks you!)
  
  - You are also a resource to your colleagues
    - In a perfect world, we’d all be funded, but don’t let the competition over money stop you from sharing information about grants you come across. The more of us who post opportunities, the more we all benefit.

- Plan ahead
  - Pre-order transcripts and other documents
  - Start a master document now with all of your funding, experience, presentations, publications, teaching positions, etc.
  - Foster relationships with faculty members, not just your advisor
    - Respect the busy schedules of your recommendation writers—give at least two weeks’ notice for letter-writing; provide your recommender a summary of the award, your research/project/personal statement, CV, bullets on how you/your project fits—this is very important for ensuring coherence of the
Create a timeline for your degree and post-degree aspirations. This can help work backwards to determine when you need to start applying for grants - often deadlines are 9-12 months before the money is given.

Create a timeline of future funding opportunities, and match this with your degree timeline. Keep adding grants you find for all stages of the process. Organize them by how they match up with your degree milestones (coursework, proposal defense, data collection, writing, postdoc, junior faculty) so you can easily access these in the future.

Always try to be at least one step ahead in the process.
- Note: This isn’t a static process, but by having this outline, you can continue watching the listservs and adding in deadlines as necessary.

Create a master budget.
- Your proposals for big awards will be much more convincing if you have already gotten a sense of your research and its findings. Search out pre-dissertation grants (e.g., travel grants from the area studies institutes at Columbia). Don’t underestimate the power of small grants to add up and give you an advantage for the bigger grants.
- In a master budget, you can track how you’re planning to cover your expenses and make a more convincing argument for funding.

Look at sample successful grants in the binder at 374 GDH

Choose a grant or fellowship.
- Learn about the program and the organization funding it. Make notes on it.
  - Read the call for proposals thoroughly. Note key words and concepts.
  - Read the mission statement of the organization or of the fund. What is valued? What do/can they fund? What don’t/can’t they fund? Will they care about your research?
- Note on Eligibility - when will you be able to apply for grants, some require a defended proposal, for example. Think broadly, but don’t waste your time, or anyone else’s, by applying for grants for which you are ineligible. Make sure your project fits.
- Read all the fine print (related to degree/field eligibility, service requirements, etc)
- Look at winners from previous years – what projects were funded?
- Look at review committees where possible – what is their disciplinary bent?
- Consider applying for several small grants, not just one or two large ones—smaller grants lead to the larger ones, ultimately.

Writing the proposal

Excellent resource: SSRC Website – “The Art of Writing Proposals”
- Consider your audience.
  - First, remember that they are going to be sorting through stacks of these, so you want to make it as interesting and compelling as possible so that they want to keep reading.
They will be unfamiliar with your exact literature, so be concise and avoid jargon. Be more explicit than you think you need to be without promising more than you will deliver.

- Bartlett: Answer CLEARLY AND EXPLICITLY three basic questions
  - What are we going to learn as the result of the proposed project that we do not know now? (content)
  - Why is it worth knowing? (innovation, contribution)
  - How will we know that the conclusions are warranted? (methods)

- To me, it helps to realize that you are making two concurrent arguments.
  1) whatever your research argument is conceptually
  2) that your research is worth funding practically

- Organization
  - Tailor your application to each individual grant.
  - Make a preliminary outline based on what they suggest, if they are specific. Make sure you include all sections and answer all questions that they request. You have to respect their format.
    - BOREN EXAMPLE (again, sell yourself while selling the research!)
  - If there isn’t a specific format, you can look at proposals that have been successfully funded (see program office binder).

- Introduction - grab your audience!
  - Critical. Relevant and interesting. Clearly state the problem, and propose your hypothesis, noting what makes your approach important and different. Current events, real facts, or compelling brief stories to be good openers.
    - Be compelling
    - Be explicit why your topic is important
    - Suggest possible implications
    - MY EXAMPLE

- Body: adapted from Bartlett: in a precise, succinct way, you want to
  - Explain clearly what you will investigate - argue it, don’t just assert it
  - Emphasize ideas and concepts
  - Establish the context for your research, and the debates or areas to which it will contribute.
    - Help the reader understand where the problem intersects the main theoretical and topical debates in your field(s).
    - Current literature (reviewed or in bibliography) that includes contributions from the part of the world you are working in
    - If possible, show how you are aware of other perspectives

- Methods-- Bartlett: A methodology is not just a list of research tasks but an argument as to why these tasks are the best approach to the problem. Methodologies emerge from worldviews and theoretical considerations.
  - Specify the research operations you will undertake (how, when, where)
  - Tell specifically how you will spend your time: if possible, include a table
  - Include a data analysis plan
  - Include your preparation to carry out the methods: language skills, previous research experience, statistical training, etc.

- Benefits:
- Planning ahead keeps you organized across your student experience.
- Helping your classmates with resources and drafts allows you to develop a strong cohort of colleagues. You will learn a lot that you can’t learn in classes.
- Developing relationships with multiple faculty members is positive.
- You learn how to make your ideas accessible.
- You can often rewrite based on feedback from an organization.
- You now have a record of your academic thought development.