Prepare a More Competitive Major Research Instrumentation Grant Application for NSF

Presented by: Dr. Karen Markin
A Note from the Editor

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We are always on the look-out for interesting topics, researcher needs, and ways we can be of service to you. If you have a success story you'd like to share with your colleagues, please do not hesitate to contact me. I'd be thrilled to hear from you, and I look forward to serving you and your organization with the best advice and information available in the months and years to come.

Best Regards,

Leslie Norins
Publisher
info@principalinvestigators.org
What is NSF MRI?

• Supports acquisition and development of high-end scientific instrumentation for research and student training.
• Instruments too costly for support through other NSF programs.
• Aimed at improving research & research training.
• Must collaborate with other organizations; can involve private sector.

Examples of Funded Projects

• Single crystal CCD X-ray diffractometer
• High-resolution optogenic microscope
• Development of a dynamic atom probe
• Instruments for sequencing DNA
• List of 2010 examples:
What is not eligible?
Not for:
• General-purpose equipment (e.g. fume hoods)
• Assorted unrelated instruments
• Equipment for standard science courses
• Construction or renovation
• Maintaining infrastructure (e.g. electrical & plumbing)

The Competition
• Success rate has hovered around 30% for the past few years (excluding ARRA).
• NSF has budgeted $90M for this program, and will make 175 awards in this round. Proposals range from $100K to $4M (Certain <$100K projects eligible).
• Average award has been ~$451K; median, ~$330K.

Submission Limit
• Each university can submit only three applications, two for acquisition and one for development.
• Ask your sponsored projects office how your institution manages limited competitions and follow the procedure.
• If institution submits too many, all may be returned without review!
Shared Use

NSF wants bang for its buck, i.e. many users of instrumentation
• Show a need at your university.
• Show that instrument can be used by investigators from many disciplines, not just your own. Document their projects.
• Canvass fellow faculty members and those at nearby institutions.
• Recruit students, both graduate and undergrad.

Impact on Infrastructure

• Describe how the instrument will make a substantial improvement in the institution’s ability to conduct leading-edge research.
• Will new courses be developed?
• Will there be outreach to secondary schools?

Broader Impacts

• Try collaborating with diversity-related programs at your institution.
• For examples of broader impacts, see www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/broaderimpacts.pdf.
• You must discuss broader impacts as a discrete criterion in your abstract.

Tip from grantee: Discussing the social benefits of the equipment is essential for a successful proposal.
Management Plan

• Where will equipment be housed?
• Who will operate & maintain? How?
• How much will it cost to maintain?
• How much will it cost for a technician to operate the equipment?
• How will instrument time be allocated?

Tip from grantee:
This section is very important. NSF does not want to pay for an expensive doorstop.

Institutional Commitment

Institution must provide letter stating it will operate & maintain instrument during & after grant period.
• Letter should also list the MRI awards to your institution in past 5 years.
• Describe the status of instrumentation from each award.
• Ask your sponsored projects office for help.

How many awards?

Ask your sponsored projects office
or
Check NSF award database:
http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/
• Choose “Search all free-text” tab
• “Search award for” MRI
• “Organization” is your institution
• Choose “active and expired awards”
Cost Sharing

• Cost sharing: Exactly 30%. NSF will not accept voluntary cost sharing.
• Non-Ph.D. granting institutions are exempt from cost sharing.
Contact your sponsored projects office for assistance in obtaining this letter.

Data Management Plan

• Required for all NSF grants, but fairly new
• See details at:
• See FAQs at:

Other Components

• Postdoc mentoring plan (if applicable)
• Letter stating your institution’s status as Ph.D.-granting or not
NSF FastLane will no longer allow you to submit an application that doesn’t include these sections.

Tip from grantee: Follow instructions exactly or your proposal may not be reviewed.
Distinguish Yourself

- Match your effort to your institution's mission, the goals of your region or societal goals, e.g. president's strategic plan, statewide Epscor goals, state economic development plan.
- Show transformative impact of activities across & within disciplines.
- Explain why your area of inquiry is new & exciting. Show your enthusiasm!

Other Information

- Useful checklist on p. 13 of program announcement pdf version.
- Due date is January 27, 2011.
- Contact NSF program officers with questions.
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