

9/28/2022

POSITIONING FOR SUCCESS & DETERMINING READINESS

- Evaluating the merit of your idea in relation to the opportunity
- Institutional capacity and applicant credibility
- Project feasibility: Organizational and investigator readiness

Office Of Research & Economic Development
2022 Seminar Series

Evaluating the Merit of your Idea in Relation to the Opportunity



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Evaluating the Merit of your Idea in Relation to the Opportunity

- Panelists' experience with externally-funded projects
- What do you look for in an RFP to determine if your idea aligns with the call?
- Which do you recommend – changing your idea to fit the funding opportunity, or keeping the idea and finding a different opportunity?
- Can you give an example of when your idea was the wrong “fit” for the funding opportunity? At what point in the process did you notice?
- What is the best way to share your idea with others prior to writing the full proposal? Is a concept paper the best approach?
- How do you engage agency officials to help determine fit?
- How do you engage MSU colleagues to help determine fit?
- Once you determine that your idea is aligned with the RFP, how do you emphasize that good fit in your proposal for the benefit of agency officials and reviewers?
- Questions

Institutional Capacity & Applicant Credibility



Dr. Giselle Thibaudeau Munn

Associate Dean, Professor & Interim Dept. Head
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Dr. Steve Pruett

Professor and Director of NIH Center of
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Institutional Capacity & Applicant Credibility

- Panelists' experience with large, externally-funded projects
- How do you undertake initial assessments of capacity for a project: Plan the work around the team or the team around the work? Do you build your *team* around your project and the stated review criteria? Or do you build the *project* around the team and add expertise as needed?
- What are your first steps in assessing MSU's institutional capacity for undertaking a large effort? Do you consider things like history of similar work, availability of preliminary data, access to resources and equipment?
- What indicators of institutional capacity do you look for to demonstrate in your proposal that MSU/your team will be able to manage the project effectively post award?
- Questions

Project Feasibility: Organizational & Investigator Readiness



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ORGANIZATIONAL & INVESTIGATOR READINESS

*IDENTIFYING MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA, EVALUATING STRENGTHS
& WEAKNESS, AND USING ORD DECISION MATRICES*

OFFICE OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Blair Reed, Kristen Sendelweck, Carmen Giles

TODAY'S GOALS...

- Is the organization prepared to support the project?
- Is the investigator ready to write a well-thought-out proposal?
- What are the methods and tools for evaluating readiness?

DECISION TOOL: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND PROJECT READINESS

| ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND PROJECT READINESS DECISION MATRIX | | | | Yes | Somewhat | No |
|---|---|--|--|-----|----------|----|
| Check Yes, No, or Somewhat for each question listed below. | | | | | | |
| <i>Administrative</i> | 1. | Are you familiar with the grant review and approval process at Mississippi State University? If not, refer to MSU Policy 70.01 | | | | |
| | 2. | Does the grant offer indirect cost recovery to the institution? | | | | |
| | 3. | Does the institution have the financial management systems in place to manage this type of funding? | | | | |
| | 4. | Does the PI's department have the financial management systems in place to manage this type of funding? | | | | |
| <i>Capacity</i> | 5. | Is there adequate time to write, compile, get authorization for, and submit the proposal before institutional and agency deadlines? | | | | |
| | 6. | Do you have adequate training, experience, and time to administer the grant? | | | | |
| | 7. | Does the institution have the resources (space, personnel, equipment) to administer this grant? | | | | |
| | 8. | If the project requires an institutional match, have you identified potential source(s) of the match? | | | | |
| | 9. | Does the institution have the resources to sustain this project beyond the period of grant support? | | | | |
| <i>Fit</i> | 10. | Does this project fit within the institution's mission and vision ? | | | | |
| | 11. | Does the project add value for the institution? Does it build capacity in an important area? | | | | |
| | 12. | Have you identified a source of funding for which the institution is eligible? | | | | |
| | 13. | Does the institution have a history/relationship/rapport with this funding agency? | | | | |
| | 14. | Are you familiar with the guidelines of the specific grant competition you seek to enter? | | | | |
| | 15. | Does your project fall within the scope of the funding agency and the specific RFP guidelines? | | | | |
| | 16. | Do you have a project concept that is based on best practices in the field? | | | | |
| | 17. | Have you identified collaborators internal or external to the institution? | | | | |
| 18. | Does this project advance scholarship or best practices and can it serve as a model to be replicated? | | | | | |
| <i>Communications</i> | 19. | Have you talked to your department head or dean about this opportunity? | | | | |
| | 20. | Have you identified with whom you will collaborate to develop/write/package the proposal? | | | | |
| | 21. | Have you discussed this opportunity with those partners? | | | | |

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND PROJECT READINESS: FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- **Administrative:** Does the university have the administrative capacity to support this project?
- **Capacity:** Available time, training, resources, etc.
- **Fit:** Source of funding, scope, and guidelines next to faculty/dept./university goals.
- **Communication:** Talking with department head, partners, and collaborators.

DECISION TOOL: INVESTIGATOR READINESS & IMPLEMENTATION READINESS

INVESTIGATOR READINESS ASSESSMENT

PROPOSAL WRITING

1. What is your **MOTIVATION** for writing a proposal?
 - a) I am obligated by tenure or other organizational duties
 - b) I need funding for an adjacent project
 - c) I want to further my education or the field of study
2. Will you have the **TIME** to write a quality proposal?
 - a) I have a full class load and after-work obligations, so very little time
 - b) I have both a teaching and research appointment with time to write every week
 - c) I have ADR's who encourage research and will give me release time and support to write daily
3. Have you **IDENTIFIED** a request for application/proposal?
 - a) I know how to find one on grants.gov or another search engine
 - b) I plan on fitting my idea to an RFA that I've found
 - c) I have been waiting on a perfect fit RFA to reopen.
4. Have you **SOURCED** information on what has already been funded through this competition?
 - a) I have not searched for other projects funded through this.
 - b) I know a couple of PIs who were funded last year.
 - c) I know how to use NSF Award Search, NIH RePORTER, and other sources of funded projects
5. Have you had time to **READ** the request for application and/or grant guidelines?
 - a) I have read the title and it seems like it might fit
 - b) I have skimmed the requirements and think I can get it to work out
 - c) I have studied the agency's detailed program plan and have sketched an outline
6. Can you identify your department's **BUSINESS MANAGER** or **GRANTS & CONTRACTS SPECIALIST**?
 - a) I do not know if our department has those staff available
 - b) I know we have those personnel but not who they are
 - c) I have reached out to one or the other for assistance
7. Do you have the **PRELIMINARY DATA** necessary for research or have you created a basic program plan?
 - a) I have a general idea I've been wanting to try but no real data or plan
 - b) This is my opportunity to collect data or pilot a program
 - c) I want to further research that I've already begun or want to build or expand a well thought program
8. Do you have an idea of the **COSTS** associated with your activities for a basic budget?
 - a) I do not have activities planned yet, nor have I identified personnel needs
 - b) I have a basic idea of what I want to accomplish but have not quotes or estimates
 - c) I have outlined the associated costs and received quotes and information related to those costs

AWARD & PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

1. Will you have the **TIME** to dedicate to implementation?
 - a) I planned to hire others to do most of the work
 - b) I can devote the minimum amount of time since I have a heavy teaching schedule
 - c) I have ADR's who encourage research and will give me release time and support
2. Have you thoroughly **READ** your award contract and are you **AWARE** of agency requirements placed inside award documents?
 - a) I received the contract in an email, but I haven't read it
 - b) I glanced at the award number, award dates, and final award amount
 - c) I carefully read through the award document and am aware of all requirements
3. Have you discussed your **EXPECTATIONS** with associated project personnel?
 - a) I have not spoken to these people since they agreed to be written into the proposal
 - b) I have set a meeting with included personnel but have no agenda
 - c) I have sent an agenda to personnel and set up times to discuss their participation
4. Have you thought about how your team will **COMMUNICATE** issues/tasks with the group?
 - a) I figured we would play it by ear as things come up
 - b) I have thought about best practices to keep the group informed but have not finalized anything
 - c) I have a written plan to give to each team member detailing expectations and best practices for communicating progress and issues
5. Are you aware of the annual or quarterly **REPORTING** requirements of the funding agency?
 - a) I did not know I would have to report to anyone on the project's progress
 - b) I know that reports are required but have no idea of what is included
 - c) I made myself aware of reporting requirements before I submitted the proposal
6. Have you considered your state of **READINESS** at the time of award?
 - a) I thought the first year of the program was for preparing
 - b) I have some site or structural issues that might cause a delay in beginning activities
 - c) I am ready to begin according to my proposed timeline, aside from unexpected delays
7. Have you initiated contact with your **DEPARTMENTAL** business manager or coordinator to assist with spending oversight and post-award tickets or other award maintenance?
 - a) I know that I have a department personnel who can help with spending practices
 - b) I have reached out to my department personnel to discuss MSU policies on spending and verifying allowable and nonallowable spending and other award maintenance issues
 - c) This ain't my first rodeo, and I know exactly where to go if I have issues arise

INVESTIGATOR READINESS

means being aware of

PROPOSAL REVIEW CRITERIA



This goes back to thoroughly reading your RFA.

- In addition to outlining the sections each agency requires within a proposal, you must write those sections with the review criteria in mind to fully address them.
- Generally, review criteria are found **AFTER** the narrative sections in the RFA. So keep reading!

MERIT REVIEW CRITERIA



A reviewer will look at the proposal to analyze the scientific, technical, programmatic and other appropriate factors to determine if the idea should be funded.



Agencies have standard criteria that they use for each proposal and then additional criteria that is specific to each call.



Some agencies (ED, DOL) within their RFA will allocate points for each section, making it easier to understand the value they assign.

EXAMPLE 1:

USDA PROPOSAL REVIEW CRITERIA

- First, the reviewer summarizes how well the application addressed each evaluation criterion. After the application has been assessed for strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, the reviewer then evaluates the overall likelihood that the project will have significant outcome and impact.
 - Scientific Merit of the Application
 - Qualifications of Project Personnel, Adequacy of Facilities, and Project Management
 - Project Relevance

All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of two National Science Board approved merit review criteria. In some instances, however, NSF will employ additional criteria as required to highlight the specific objectives of certain programs and activities.



Intellectual Merit: The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge.



Broader Impacts: The Broader Impacts criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.

EXAMPLE 2:

NSF PROPOSAL REVIEW CRITERIA

EXAMPLE 3: NIH PROPOSAL REVIEW CRITERIA



SIGNIFICANCE



INVESTIGATOR(S)



INNOVATION



APPROACH



ENVIRONMENT



ADDITIONAL
REVIEW CRITERIA
(SPECIFIC TO CALL)

LOOK FAMILIAR?

THESE ARE THE NARRATIVE SECTIONS.

ALL OF THESE SLIDES ARE MEANT TO HELP YOU BETTER ANALYZE:

1. Am I ready to write a proposal?
2. Am I writing what the agency is asking for?
3. Am I thoroughly answering the questions that the agency is asking?
4. Can I successfully manage the project I'm writing for if it is funded?

YOU HAVE THE TOOLS, NOW USE THEM!

QUESTIONS?

