

CHAPTER 2

PREPARATIVE STEPS BEFORE BEGINNING TO WRITE

TIP: The bottom line in writing a successful proposal, regardless of funding agency or discipline, is knowing how to identify the ‘hot buttons’ that are of importance to the targeted funding agency, and then having the grantsmanship skills needed to ‘punch’ those buttons.

Once you have developed and refined the idea for your proposal, but before you even begin to think about writing, there are four key factors that you will need to think about in order to give yourself the strongest possible starting point. Often times these things are not stressed in manuals that discuss the grant writing process; however we are convinced that they are the key to approaching your grant writing responsibilities with the greatest degree of understanding as to what is required in order to be maximally successful.

1. *Understand Your Reviewers:* As you begin to think about how you will develop and present your ideas within the framework of the grant application format, it is important to remember that your proposal will be read by individuals who will be specifically selected for this task. These individuals will be reading your grant application (and most likely many other grant applications) with the objective of determining the relative strengths and weaknesses of your idea in comparison to the relative strengths and weaknesses of competing ideas. It is, therefore, critically important to you that you always keep in mind several important concepts that specifically relate to your potential relationship with *your* reviewer. Specifically, there are four key questions that you need always keep in mind:

- a) *What is the level of expertise of the reviewer?* Reviewers are usually selected to participate in the review process and/or to sit on review panels because they are recognized authorities in a general area or field related to the subject area of your grant application. While this is certainly true of most reviewers, it is also equally likely, and perhaps even more likely, that the majority of the reviewers who will contribute to the decision-making process regarding the merits of your grant application will not have an intimate familiarity with the subject area of your proposal. As a consequence, therefore, it is imperative that you keep this in mind as you begin to develop your ideas. It is important that you provide sufficient background information to bring all reviewers "up to speed" with respect to exactly what is that they need to know in order to understand your project or idea and why it is important.
- b) *What is the level of interest of the reviewer in your project?* As we pointed out in an earlier section of the Workbook, you as the applicant are the rate-limiting factor for the level of enthusiasm that reviewers will have in evaluating your proposal. In this regard, it is highly improbable that reviewers will have a greater level of enthusiasm for your ideas that you will. Most likely, reviewers will be significantly less excited about your ideas that you are. Therefore, it is imperative that you have a genuine interest in, and enthusiasm for, your project because it will be readily apparent to reviewers if you do not, and if you do not-they will not!