

CHAPTER 15

THE BUDGET AND BUDGET JUSTIFICATION SECTION OF YOUR APPLICATION

By the time that you have reached this point in the preparation of your application, you should have a reasonably firm grasp of exactly what it is that you plan to do in this project. This is because you will have already completed the Projected Approach/Plan of Work and the Biographical Sketch sections of the application, and this will form the basis for your proposed budget. Therefore, you can now begin to think seriously about exactly what kinds of resources will be required to do the work. In this chapter, we will help you construct your Budget section and, perhaps more importantly, justify it accordingly. Virtually all grant applications are requests for resources (usually financial resources); therefore, as much time should go into the development of the Budget section as goes into any other aspect of the application, including the very detailed Projected Approach/Plan of Work section. It makes no sense whatsoever to write a wonderful grant application and then have the merits of that application compromised by a failure of attention to the preparation of the BUDGET section of the application.

The first thing to remember is that when most applicants set about to prepare a Budget section, most of them fail to do an adequate job primarily because of insufficient and inadequate justification for the funds requested. As a consequence, reviewers are often not convinced by what the applicant has requested and will often elect to significantly reduce that requested budget. We are reasonably convinced that most cuts of this kind are primarily, if not exclusively, the fault of the applicant, not the reviewers. By following the budgetary suggestions that we will now provide, you should be able to avoid this common lapse. Keep in mind two key things as you formulate your Budget section: 1) you need to request funds sufficient to perform the amount and kind of work that you have proposed, and 2) your credibility is potentially at risk every time you list a budgetary figure.

Regarding the amount of support that you will be requesting in the grant application, unless either there is an explicit statement in the instructions that limits the amount of funding that can be requested or you have a strong indication from discussions with your program officer that an unofficial (i.e., unstated) limit exists, request what you need and not what you or someone else has arbitrarily decided is some magic amount that reviewers will be likely to approve. Let the proposal itself dictate what your request will be, because you most assuredly do not want to submit a budget that, if approved, would leave you unable to do all what you have proposed. Justification is the key to convincing the reviewers, and ultimately the funding agency, that your budget request is both appropriate and reasonable. You must remember that you can very quickly lose credibility by asking for either too much or too little, and that once any figure becomes suspect, all your budgetary line items will be scrutinized more closely. What you will be striving for is a budget that is so well justified that your reviewers will readily accept it.

In the following sections, we will review most of the major categories of funds for which grant applicants request support. It is possible that the funding agency to which you will be applying may not allow the funds received from a given award to be used for a specific purpose