From Unfunded to Funded: What Makes the Difference in Grant-Writing?

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Spencer Programs

- Fellowships:
  - Dissertation
  - Postdoctoral
  - Midcareer Awards
  - Education Journalism

- Foundation-initiated:
  - The New Civics
  - Philosophy in Educational Policy and Practice
  - Data Use and Educational Improvement
  - Research-Practice Partnerships

- Field-initiated:
  - Small grants (up to $50,000)
  - Lyle Spencer Research Awards (up to $1M)
High-quality research to ensure that young people from diverse backgrounds reach their fullest potential.

W. T. Grant Funding Opportunities

- Research
- Distinguished Fellows
- Scholars
- Youth Service Improvement
What does Russell Sage Foundation Do?

The Foundation sponsors social science research in four program areas:

1. Behavioral Economics
2. Future of Work
3. Race, Ethnicity and Immigration
4. Social Inequality

We do this in two key ways:

1. Providing research grants
2. Visiting Scholar program
Funding Opportunities

RESEARCH GRANTS

- LETTER OF INQUIRY
  - Deadlines in January, May, and August
  - 4-6 week response time
  - Internal review for fit with current interests and funding criteria

- FULL PROPOSAL
  - External review
  - Internal review

- PI RESPONSE TO REVIEWS
  - Internal review
  - Board of Trustees meeting in March, June, and October
Writing a Proposal

How different from other academic writing:
- Promissory note, but don’t over-promise
- Avoid “trust me”
- Remember who is likely first reader
- Role of budget and timeline

How similar:
- Clear, direct writing
- Well-situated
- Awareness of audience
EVERYTHING STARTS (AND ENDS) WITH THE “QUESTION(s)"

The very first thing we ask REVIEWERS: Are the question(s) important and compelling?

- Are the questions consistent with Foundation funding priorities and programs?
- Are the key questions or hypotheses of interest clearly stated and identified?
- Can you explain why anyone should care about your questions in a convincing way?
- Theoretical Perspective – Need an interdisciplinary understanding of prior work
Grant Writing

- **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**
  - Define your interests and cultivate fit with the funder
  - Show strong links with theory and prior empirical work
  - Provide specific hypotheses or research questions
  - Tackle a few questions well

- **DESIGN, METHODS, & ANALYSES**
  - Map to research questions
  - Provide sufficient information for reviewers to evaluate
  - Demonstrate understanding of the strengths and limitations of the chosen design, methods, and analyses

- **THE WHOLE**
  - Demonstrate how your project adds to theory
  - Show relevance for policy or practice
  - Obtain feedback from others
Pitfalls to consider

- Knowledge of, or skill with, a new tool or methodology doesn’t mean it’s right for every project. The project should lead with problem.
- Inter- or trans-disciplinary work is welcomed. But simply using education as a setting because data are available doesn’t make it education research. Know the area, or partner with someone who does.
- Maintain balance in the proposal. All of the elements matter.
Final Thoughts

- This is hard, and most people don’t get it right the first time.
- Read each other’s work, especially if you’re in different areas/specialties.
- Think about partnering with someone more senior for early grants as a way to develop a track record.
- Learn from any feedback you get, and try again.
For More Information:

Spencer Foundation
http://www.spencer.org/

William T. Grant Foundation
http://wtgrantfoundation.org/

Russell Sage Foundation
http://www.russellsage.org/