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

Andrea Conklin Bueschel, PhD
   Vice-President, Program
   Spencer Foundation

Vivian Tseng, PhD
   Vice-President, Program
   William T. Grant Foundation

James A Wilson
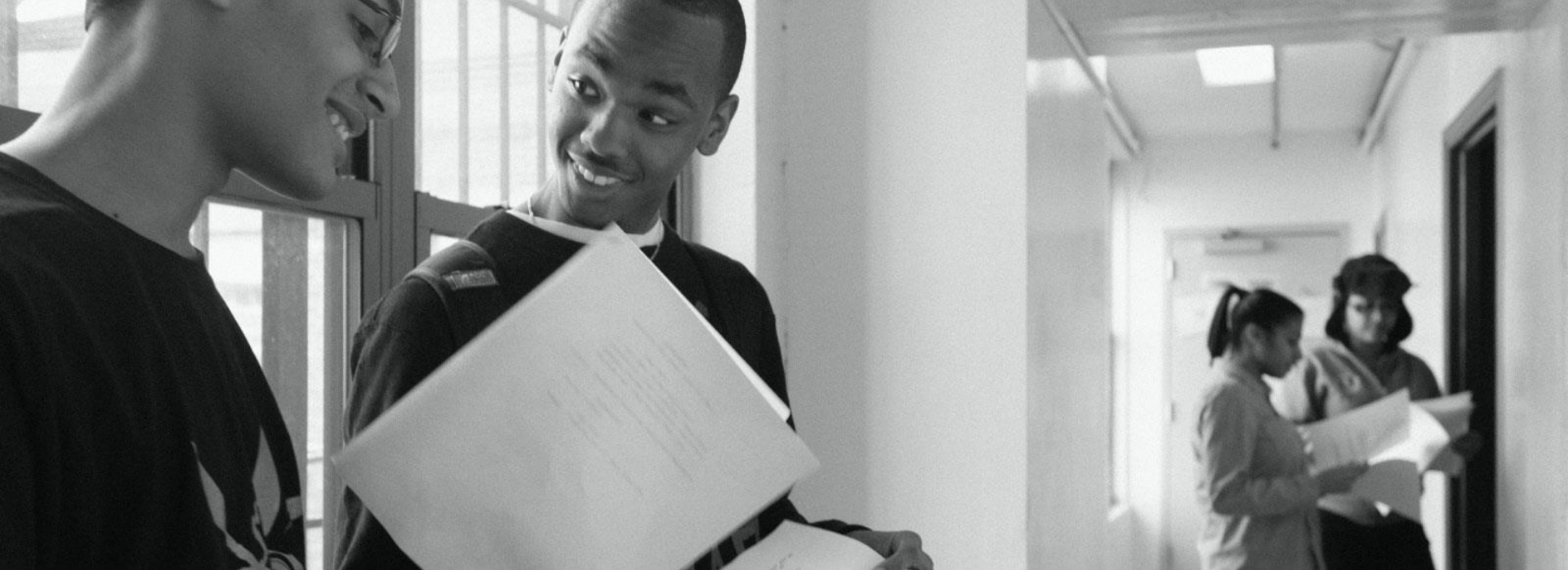   Program Director
   Russell Sage Foundation

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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)

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High-quality research to ensure that young people from diverse backgrounds reach their fullest potential

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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

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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

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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.

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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.

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For More Information:

Spencer Foundation

http://www.spencer.org/

William T. Grant Foundation

http://wtgrantfoundation.org/

Russell Sage Foundation

http://www.russellsage.org/