

Common Grant Writing Pitfalls



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Session Overview

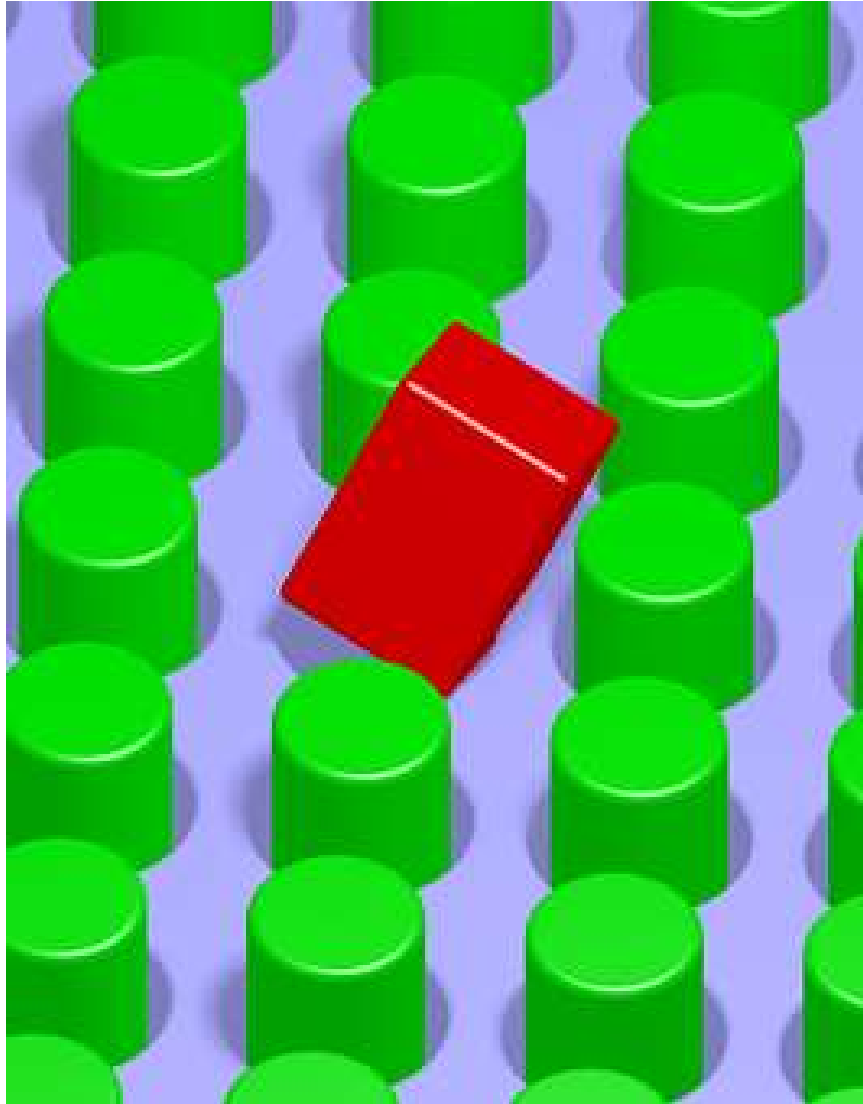
- Potential proposal pitfalls
- Proposal writing strategies for avoiding pitfalls



“Is it just me or are these review panels getting a lot tougher?”

Cartoon attributed to Dr. Eoin (Owen) O’Sullivan

Pitfall: Lack of fit



- Your goals aren't the same as their goals
- Not the right fit
- The funding agency's priorities and interests changed; your project focus or idea may no longer be priority
- Your proposal did not align with the funding opportunity
- Your project was too close in scope, emphasis, or geography to one or more projects already funded

Strategy: Connecting to the sponsor



- Checking awards
- Similar concept? Confirm differing approach
- Explore the sponsor mission, goals, objectives
- Contact a program officer
- Do not imply; use a direct approach, integrate sponsor text into application writing

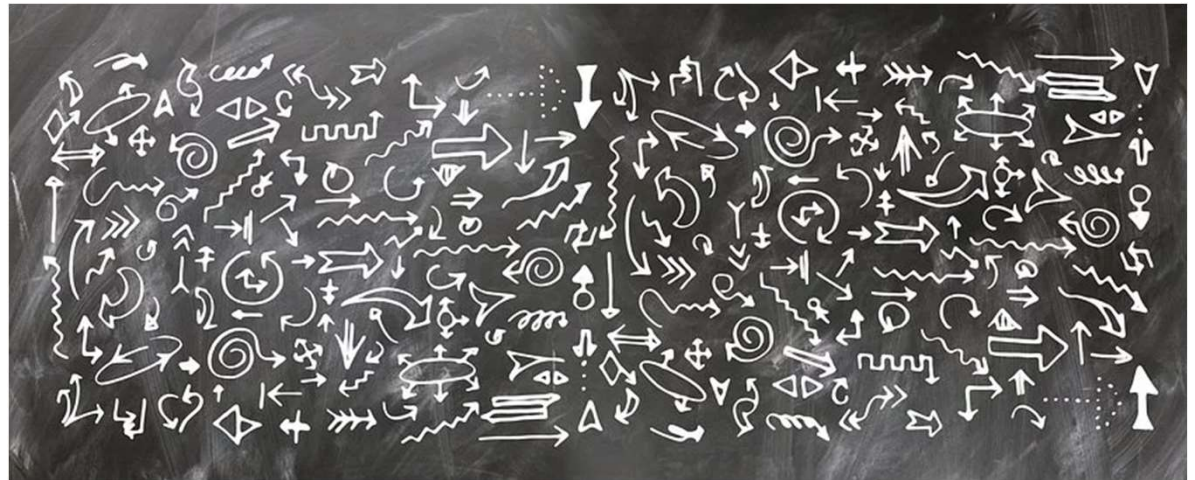
Proposal sample: “The proposed research directly **meets the goals of the RFA-MH-12-061** – Promoting Engagement in Care and Timely Antiretroviral Initiation Following HIV Diagnosis (R34)), which **aims at reducing health disparities and testing interventions that impact adherence to HIV therapeutic regimens and retention in medical care.**”

Pitfall: Not adhering to the guidelines



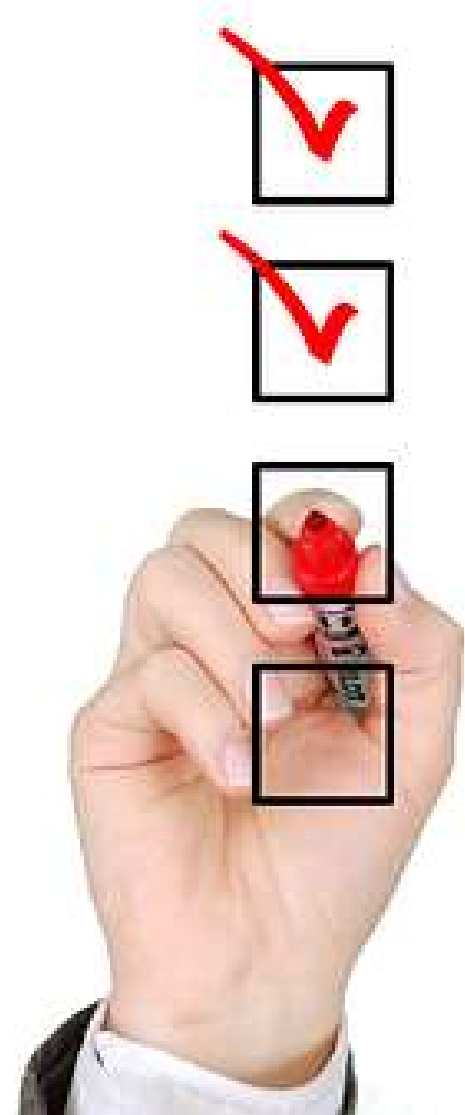
*RFP/Grant guidelines:
sponsor perspective*

*RFP/Grant guidelines:
applicant perspective*



Strategy: Outlining the guidelines

- Formatting requirements
- Narrative content, sections and requirements
- Review criteria
- Budget requirements and restrictions
- Forms, certifications, attachments, appendices
- Letters of collaboration/support

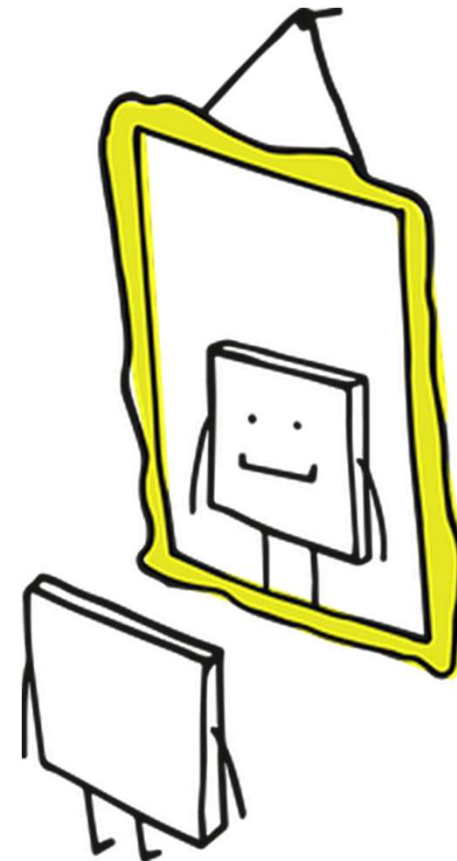


Abstract/Project Summary

Pitfall: Abstract/Summary does not reflect the project



Strategy: Write the section **AFTER the narrative is final**

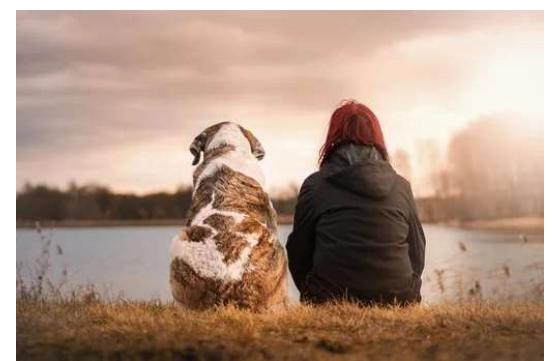
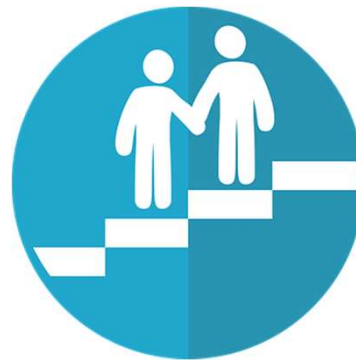


Pitfall: The absence of research, a resource, or an event/program does not establish need

- **The Senior Resource Center in Smithville, Ohio does not currently offer a smoking cessation program for its stakeholders.**
- **Researchers have not examined the influence of the shape and color of Brussels sprouts on children's refusal to eat them.**
- **Students at University X do not have access to an academic support center for their supplemental learning needs.**
- **Historians have long ignored the role that pets played in the decision-making processes of European countries' leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.**

Strategy: Questions to address for establishing project need

- Concise, coherent statement on why project needs to be undertaken
- What are the current knowns? What is the problem/need/gap to be addressed?
- How do you know it is a problem? Supported by current evidence (qualitative or comparative quantitative data)
- Describe the target population, its needs/conditions
- Is the problem/need urgent? What is the significance to the sponsor, especially if gap/need not addressed?



Problematic Objectives

Overall project objective: Our overall objective for this application is to identify the underlying causes of increased smoking and vaping rates among teens.

Vague research objective 1:

Examine whether existing media messages influence increased smoking and vaping activity rates among teens.

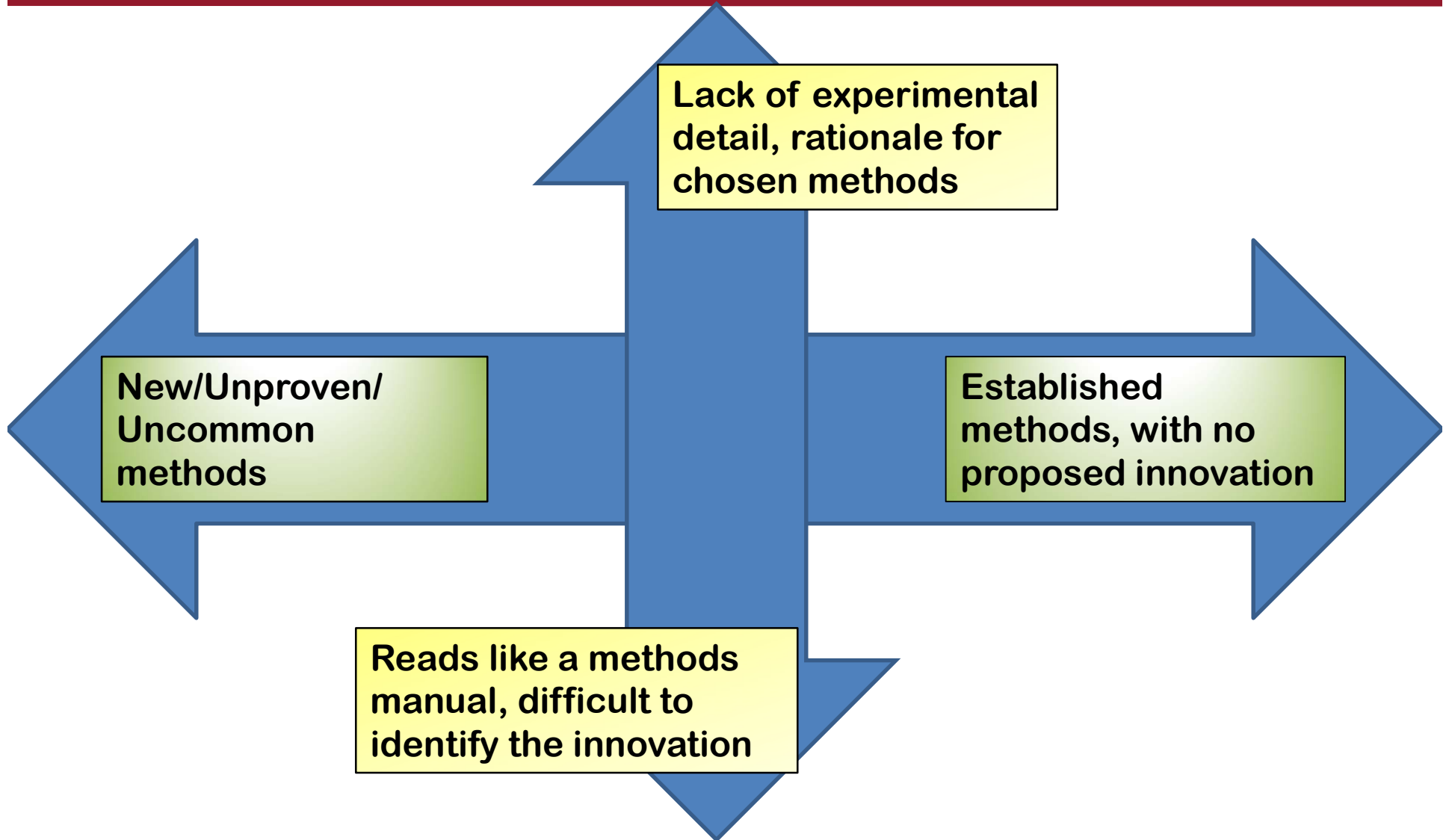
Research objective 1: Identify key media material influences predictive of increased smoking and vaping rates among teens.

Overly dependent research

objective 2: Determine the types of postal-received print media that are most predictive of increases in smoking and vaping rates among teens.

Research objective 2: Classify the top smoking and vaping product placement strategies employed by convenience stores that attract the most teen purchases.

Pitfall: The spectrum of methods



Strategy: Innovative/Grounded methods, written clearly and concisely

Grounded: You should be able to explain the premise for your research methods

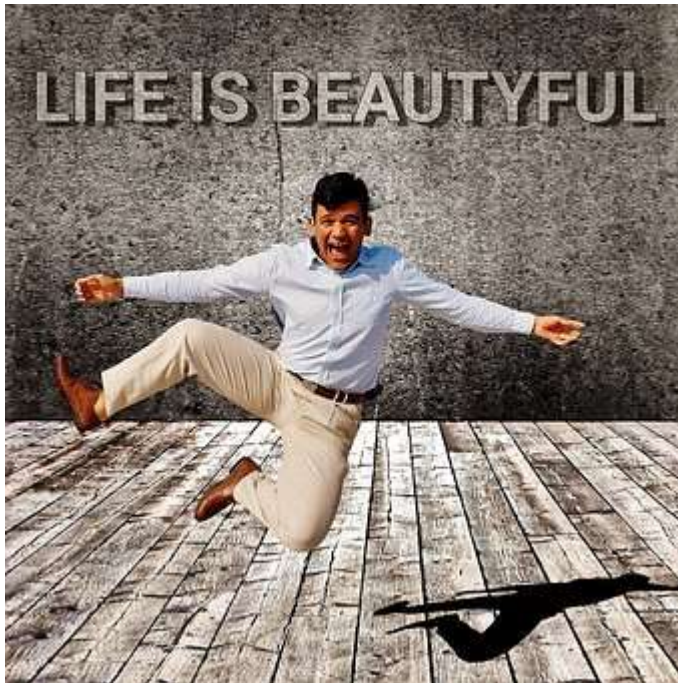
Innovative: (If there is nothing new to your approach, why are you proposing the project?) “The innovativeness of this approach can be found in the...”

Clarity: Describe what you propose to do in enough detail, jargon-free, understandable to educated layperson

Concise: Succinctly provide meaningful detail, what can't be found in a methods manual

Methods: Nothing is perfect!

Pitfall: Leaving no room for error or unexpected problems



Strategy: Acknowledge potential problems; propose alternatives/workarounds



Evaluation: Measuring effectiveness and impact

Pitfall: Approaching the evaluation section as an afterthought

Strategy: Consider assessment activities/personnel throughout project development

Outcome:

- Abbreviated proposal section lacking critical details about evaluation people, processes and outcomes, or
- A rambling proposal section that loses reviewers in a sea of words and leaves them confused about evaluation people, processes and outcomes

Outcome:

A clearly articulated proposal section containing a well-conceived evaluation plan that connects to project objectives and methods and proposes data collection activities that will skillfully measure progress, effectiveness and impact.



Evaluation: A depiction (companion) strategy

Objective	Methods	Evaluation Activity	Evaluation Timeline	Person(s) Responsible
Objective 1	Method/ Activity 1	Survey; Focus groups	Survey every 3 months; convene focus groups every 6 months	PI, Co-PI, Faculty advisors
	Method/ Activity 2	Client interviews; Pre- and Post-tutoring test scores	Interviews and grade retrieval beginning/ending of semester	Faculty advisors, tutors
Objective 2	Method/ Activity 1	Track # of web site hits and web-based client requests	Monthly for project duration	Project Manager

Pitfall: The budget “doesn’t add up”

- The budget doesn’t add up, literally
- Asked for too much funding
- Asked for too little funding
- Contained ineligible items/activities
- Budget items not linked to project activities
- Training grant? Per participant costs are too little/much



Budget preparation strategies

- Identify cost items as you draft the narrative
- Need it? Have it? Acquire it?
- Show the calculation
- Consider the project time frame
- Non-standard budget needs?
Talk to a program officer
- Work with your OSP office



Pitfall: Not putting words to the numbers in the budget justification



“The reviewers thought fieldwork in the Galapagos was a bit extravagant. So Darwin’s travel budget got slashed.”

- Simply stating is not justifying
- Neglecting to make a case for the cost
- Ignoring RFP info requirements
- Failing to connect the budget to the project
- Overlooking an opp to persuade the sponsor

Cartoon attributed to Dr. Eoin (Owen) O’Sullivan

How to fix the justification

Weak justification

Personnel: The PI will commit 1.5 months per year to provide project oversight, supervise the student researchers, and submit annual project and fiscal reports. The budget includes \$10,543 per year in support of the PI's requested time.

Better justification

Personnel: Dr. Roger Moore, PI for the proposed project, will commit 1.5 summer months effort per year to the project. In addition to overall project oversight and report production, he will supervise student researchers as they work through the compound characterization process for Research Objective 1; and analyze the assays developed for Research Objective 3. The salary request for Year 1 is \$10,543, based on his IBS of \$63,258. The requested amounts in out years include a standard annual cost of living increase of 3%.

How to fix the justification

Weak justification

Travel: Two members of the project team will attend at least one professional conference per year of the project. Requested travel costs per person include \$500 registration, \$1000 hotel, \$300 per diem, and \$700 air and ground transportation.

Better justification

Travel: Two members of the project team, including the student researchers, will present ongoing project results at one professional conference per year. Potential conference venues include the American Chemical Society and the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Requested costs per person are based on past conference venues: \$500 registration, \$1000 hotel, \$300 per diem, and \$700 air and ground transportation.

How to fix the justification

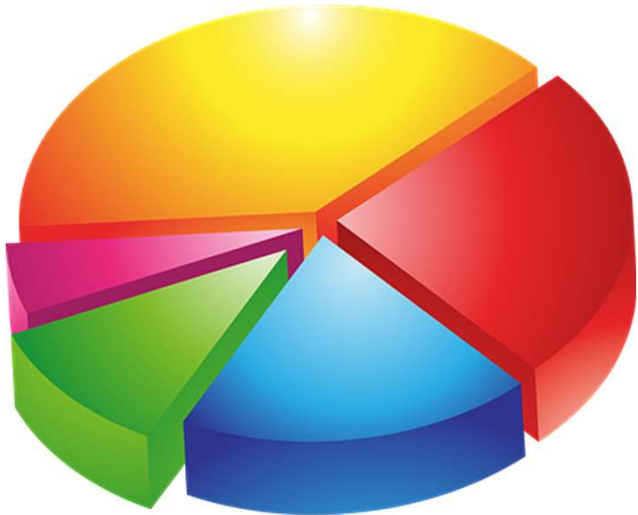
Weak justification

Equipment: The budget includes a request of \$36,549 to purchase the Hisun Micro-Analyzer 850j for materials analysis. The Attachments section includes a quote for the equipment from the vendor.

Better justification

Equipment: To accomplish the methods identified for Research Objectives 1 and 2, the project team requires a micro-analyzer for materials analysis, and one is not available internally or within a reasonable distance. The budget includes a request for \$36,549 to purchase the Hisun Micro-Analyzer 850j, a model that employs the level of magnification necessary for meaningful data collection. The cost includes installation and training support. The Attachments section includes a quote for the equipment from the vendor.

Strategies for thinking about sustainability



Proposed Project Costs

- Personnel
- Supplies/Equipment
- Travel
- Web site development
- Marketing



Should it/Is it ending, or is it just the beginning?



Institutionalization?



Future Funding?

Presentation takeaways

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Additional takeaway: Strategies for successful submission

START

START EARLY! This will allow you to...

- Review and rewrite, rinse and repeat
- Reach out for internal/external feedback
- Review the final proposal against guidelines, sponsor review criteria
- Engage your evaluation team in designing an effective evaluation
- Inform OSP about your impending submission

SUBMIT

SUBMIT EARLY! This will allow you to...

- Work with OSP to fix errors/gaps you did not catch during final review
- Avoid unforeseen IT glitches that would delay the submission
- Resubmit, due to unidentified errors caught during submission

Audience questions?



WISYS QUICK PITCH

UW-Green Bay

April 1, 2020

Reg. deadline: March 4

UW-Eau Claire

April 28, 2020

Reg. Deadline: March 6

UW-Stevens Point

April 8, 2020

Reg. deadline: March 11

UW-Platteville

April 28, 2020

Reg. deadline: April 6

UW-Parkside

April 15, 2020

Reg. deadline: March 16

UW-Stout

May 5, 2020

Reg. deadline: April 7

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Webinar Topics for AY 2019-20

- Funding Opportunities for Your Teaching, Research, and Scholarship, October 3
- Funding Focus: The National Science Foundation's Major Research Instrumentation (MRI) Program, October 9
- Budget Building Fundamentals, November 7
- The Timeline From Great Idea to Project Execution, November 13
- Analyzing RFPs for Sponsor Hot Buttons, December 5
- Searching for Non-Federal Grant Funding, February 6
- Funding Focus: The National Science Foundation's Faculty Early Career Development Program (CAREER), February 12
- Improving Your Odds for Success, Even before Writing Your Application, March 5
- Common Grant Writing Pitfalls, March 11
- **Goals, Objectives and Outcomes: The "GOO" that Holds a Proposal Together, April 2**

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