Chapter 3 Proposal Preparation

3.3 Required Reviews

There are many steps and offices involved with the preparation and submission of a proposal. As any proposal is a contract between the University and the sponsor, with all of the legal requirements of a contract, multiple reviews are required. In effect, the University is entering into a binding legal agreement that the work described in the proposal will be performed as stated. The OGRS, Office of the Provost, and ultimately the Provost, is responsible for ensuring that all sponsored projects are completed according to the agreement(s) specified in the proposal. This chapter, along with Chapter 4, on budget preparation and Chapter 5 on submission, provides a basic guide to proposal preparation.

3.1 Initiating a Proposal with OGRS

Once a PI has an idea and/or has identified a potential sponsor, OGRS, OCFR, or OGR should be contacted as soon as possible to discuss the idea and/or sponsor. For Federal, State or local governmental programs, OGRS is the best first contact point, as ultimately, the proposal must be submitted through OGRS. PI's seeking funding from corporate or private foundation sponsors can contact OGRS or OCFR, but preferably both.   OGRS, OCFR and OGR work closely together to create a smooth submission process.

3.1.1 Working with OGRS

Faculty members who wish to seek funding for their individual projects should contact OGRS. This institutional notification has several benefits:

- Alerts the internal administrative offices that funds may be coming in; administrators can then respond knowledgeably to representatives from grant agencies when they contact the University about financial arrangements;
- Allows the University to track the total value of research proposal efforts;
- Facilitates the work of OGRS in finding other possible sources of funding for faculty research efforts;
- Averts potential conflict among fundraising efforts; and
- Provides a key indicator of a faculty member's initiative and productivity.

The proposal development and application process is usually lengthy and highly competitive. It is therefore advisable to start your search early.

3.1.2 Finding and Working with Potential Sponsors

Funding agencies generally support projects that are within their specified areas of interest. A key to success is to conduct background research on the funding agencies before preparing the grant application. The Internet contains an enormous amount of grant-related information and several search engines for fellowship and grant opportunities. Private and public funding agencies are increasingly posting their application packets online, along with abstracts of recently funded projects and contact information for grant recipients. Industry- leading searchable databases of grant opportunities are accessible from the OGRS website at http://www.shu.edu/offices/grants-research/.

A telephone conversation with the Program Officer of the agency or foundation at an early stage of the writing process can be a very good way of gaining valuable tips for the grant proposal. The PI can initiate the call after a thorough reading of the program guidelines. Remember to make this contact well in advance before the deadline, so that there is still time for the Program Officer to incorporate any critical input into the proposal. Studies have repeatedly shown that the single best thing PIs can do to increase the chances of their proposals getting funding is to contact the Program Officer for information and advice.

It is also usually very helpful for applicants to discuss proposal ideas with other members of their departments and colleagues in their fields, especially those who may have received grants from the prospective funding agency. They may be able to provide tips for approaching the sponsor and specific strategies for writing a strong proposal that are not available elsewhere. They may also be willing to read a draft of the proposal and make suggestions.

3.1.3 Proposal Development Considerations

Developing a proposal is usually a long-term process. The timelines can range from a few weeks, a semester or more. The more time and effort spent developing a proposal, the more likely it will be successful. OGRS, OCFR or OGR should be contacted as early on in the process as possible. These offices can provide critical guidance and assistance at each stage of the process. Whichever of these offices is contacted first, the others will be involved as needed. Ultimately, OGRS approval will be required for final submission.

3.1.3.1 Get to Know the Sponsor

Know what the sponsor wants from the researcher and what distinguishes this sponsor from others.

- Know the sponsor's funding priorities. Find out areas in which the funding agency puts its money; try to match this with your own priorities.
- Know the types of proposals it has funded in the past. Find out whom they have been funding from the agency's annual report. Are the grants funded in the past in areas similar to your own area of research?
- Read the sponsor's guidelines and procedures. Reviewers often lower review scores based on formatting problems and the proposal may not be reviewed at all if the

instructions are not followed. Make it hard for the reviewers to reject your proposal by carefully following all the guidelines.

- Contact the sponsor. Studies have shown that the single best thing PIs can do to increase their chances of getting funding is to contact the program officer. Program officers can provide up-to- date, valuable information about the program or even review a draft of your project proposal.
- Know the sponsor's rules for proposal submission. Must the proposal be submitted electronically or in hard copy? How many copies are required for submission?

3.1.3.2 Know What You Want and Why You Should Get It

- Be very clear about what you want to do with your award and demonstrate your expertise.
- Develop an outline of your proposal. Always be clear about exactly what you want to do with your project—from beginning to end. Sometimes PIs describe the problem they are focusing on, but neglect to describe the details of the project.
- Develop an appropriate CV. Describe your expertise as it relates to the project and leave out things that are extraneous—they won't help. You must assure the reviewer that you have the expertise to manage all aspects of the project.
- Know about the current state of research in your research area. Do a search on the topic that your grant focuses on. You must let the reviewers know that you are aware of how your research applies to the latest work in your area.
- Be realistic about your expectations and funding request for the proposed project. The budget is a fiscal representation of your project, and therefore it should accurately reflect the activities you outline in your proposal. The budget should never raise questions about the project, but rather it should reassure reviewers that you have wisely thought out and considered all of the expenses of the project.
- Most sponsors expect that funded research continue beyond the current proposal as part of a long- term vision for the work. Know how you will continue the research after the award period ends. It is not enough to show how you will conduct the project while being funded by the agency; you also have to demonstrate plans to continue the project after the grant funding has concluded.

3.2 Proposal Writing Guidelines

After determining which sponsors are good matches for the project, the PI writes a proposal that will interest the reviewers and set it apart from others. Some sponsors require that a letter of intent or pre-proposal be submitted prior to submitting a full proposal. If a pre-proposal or letter of intent is required, review the sponsor's guidelines for its content carefully and follow them exactly. In general, proposal reviewers want to know the answers to the following questions:

- How does the project match the interests of the sponsor?
- What exactly do you want to do?
- What makes you the best researcher for the project?
- How long will it take to do the research?
- How much money will you need, and is the University contributing anything?
- How many people will be actively involved in the project?
- Where will the project take place?
- What difference will the project make to Seton Hall, its students, and the discipline concerned?
- What has already been accomplished in the project's area? (Preliminary research findings are important.)

- How will the results be evaluated, and by whom?
- Are there any plans to continue the project after the initial funding period?

It is important to be familiar with the application guidelines. Carefully follow all instructions, including small details such as font size and page limitations. Unless the PI has spoken with a Program Officer and received special permission in writing, all application materials must be submitted by the specified due date. The key components of a typical proposal are described below. Sponsor guidelines should be followed carefully, including the appropriate headings and formatting for each proposal section, but most proposals will include the basic information described below.

3.2.1 Title Page

Many funding agencies, particularly government agencies, provide title page forms. The title page usually includes the following information:

- Name of the agency to which the proposal is being submitted;
- Name and address of the University;
- Name, department affiliation, address, phone number, email address, and signature of the PI;
- Title of the project;
- Total funds requested;
- Proposed starting and ending dates of the project;
- Name, title, address, telephone number, email address and signature of the authorized institutional official (OGRS Director).

3.2.2 Abstract

The abstract is a one-page description of the major objectives of the proposed research and the strategy used to meet these objectives. It should state the significance of the project, how the goals will be accomplished, and the time span of the project. Abstracts are often written for a non-technical audience. The abstract is often used to assign the proposal to the appropriate reviewers. Be as clear as possible about the focus of your project in your abstract.

Many PIs write the abstract last, to make sure that they have covered all aspects of the project. Pay great attention and care to the writing of the abstract. Since you do not know who will be reading your abstract, avoid the use of technical jargon. If your abstract is uninteresting or poorly written, it may be the last thing the reviewer reads in your proposal.

3.2.3 Description of Project/Narrative

The narrative should include a description of the project, including its overall goal and specific objectives, as well as a project timetable. The need for the project should be well justified in terms of its impact on the field and its relationship to the current objectives of the funding agency. The description should delineate how the project objectives will be achieved, how the project will be evaluated, and how the results of the research will be disseminated.

When writing the text of the proposal, it is important to establish a theoretical framework for the research. Investigators should state very clearly what they intend to do. Proposals are often dismissed because of vagueness in the research questions posed or jargon that is overused or misused. In your proposal, it is important to persuade the reviewer of the project's merit and of

the investigator's special ability to carry out the research. If the PI has done preliminary research, it should be included and discussed.

3.2.4 Budget

The budget should include any costs associated with the successful completion of the project. It must be as accurate as possible, based on estimated costs. It is typical to use a 2% - 3% annual increase in costs for all personnel salaries. Propose a modest budget and include a line-by-line justification or narrative of major purchases and personnel. The typical components of a proposal budget are described in detail in the next section.

3.2.5 Institutional Profile

The site of the project should be described with all equipment and facilities necessary to the success of the project. If funding is requested for additional facilities and/or equipment, the need for these items should be described. Sometimes proposals will require institutional statistics, such as the number of alumni in a particular field. OGRS can provide such details if sufficient advance notice is given for the specific data. (See the following: "Fast Facts," http://www.shu.edu/about/fast_facts.cfm and "Highlights and Facts," http://www.shu.edu/offices/career-center/highlights.cfm. Information can also be obtained from your school or college annual report (contact your dean for this) or the Seton Hall University Fact Book, located at http://www.shu.edu/institutional-research/fact-book.cfm.

3.2.6 Bibliography/References Cited

If a reference is mentioned in the text, it should be fully cited in the bibliography. Only those discussed in the proposal should be included. Please note that many sponsors impose a strict page limit on the bibliography.

3.2.7 CV

A CV for all senior personnel, including the PI and co-PIs and, depending on the sponsor, anyone else receiving financial compensation for the project is generally included. The format of the CV must match the sponsor's requirements exactly. Improperly formatted CV's are one of the most common reasons for proposal rejection without review.

3.2.8 Additional Information/Appendices

Although some guidelines specifically request that no appendices be added to a proposal, when allowed, they are often necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the proposal and to convey adequate information about senior personnel. Additional materials might include letters of support from the institution and peers, copies of publications, graphs and diagrams, lists of PI's (and sometimes key personnel) current awards and pending proposals, etc. In the appendices you may also wish to include letters of cooperation from other institutions or consultants. You should not include something in the appendices that you do not mention in the text of your narrative. If something is important, put it in the narrative, not in an appendix.

3.2.9 Required Reviews

All proposals submitted by the University must be reviewed and approved by the PI's Department Chair, Dean, and the Director of Research. In addition, a proposal may require additional protocol approval before submission or deadline date, such as approvals from the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subject research, the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) for animal subjects.   Approval of the University Libraries is required if significant new library acquisitions are proposed or the Department of Information Technology if major new data systems or software for the university networks is needed. These approvals are included in the "Intent to Apply for External Funding" Form.