

BASIC GRANT PROPOSAL PREPARATION TIPS

Determine eligibility

- Make sure you are eligible
 - Eligibility may hinge on any of the following: your department or discipline; your rank at Mount Holyoke; when you received tenure; whether you will be on sabbatical; your age; the time since your highest degree; citizenship; racial/ethnic status; male/female; whether you've received other awards in the past. When there are stated eligibility requirements, there are usually no "exceptions to the rule." If you're unsure about eligibility ask the Director of Sponsored Research.
 - For some competitions Mount Holyoke must nominate you, and for others you may apply directly. In all cases, the Director of Sponsored Research should be notified of an application. In cases where Mount Holyoke must agree to cost-sharing or matching funds, or you might need to take a leave at a time other than that already negotiated, such notification is **required**.

- Make sure your project is eligible
 - Eligibility may be restricted to specific disciplines or sub-disciplines; to certain types of projects (e.g. – finishing up a book project; archival research; curriculum development); to resources at specific sites; or to geographic locations. Again, exceptions are normally not made.
 - Review the mission statements of the funding source, previously funded projects, and review criteria to get a sense of whether your project is a good fit for the competition. Ask the Director of Sponsored Research or Director of Foundations and Corporations for insights on this if in doubt.

Submit all required application materials: no more and no less

- Read all the guidelines and follow all instructions to the letter. Proposals get denied because required information was not submitted. Additional information is not a good idea unless permission has been granted in advance (and it seldom is).
- Apply on time. If mailing at the last minute, know that a Mount Holyoke College postage-meter mark is **not** an acceptable proof of mailing.
- If letters of reference are required, determine from the application materials who may write on your behalf, and line them up early. Typically letters are due at the same time as your application. Give the referees complete contact information and instructions as to whether to submit to the funder directly, to you, or to the Dean of Faculty's office – these requirements vary by competition.
- Note that some proposals are accepted or required online, but most still are not. Always keep a copy, as well as a proof of mailing or submission.
- Send out only perfect copy. Proofread and ideally have someone else do so.

(continued)

Address all review criteria

- Often review criteria are stated. If not, the description of the program will usually give ample clues as to what reviewers will be looking for. If in doubt, ask the Director of Sponsored Research.
- Make sure **each** of the review criteria is covered, ideally in some explicit way such as with the use of headings and subheadings, or a sentence that begins with the referenced criterion.
- If “suggested” page limits are given, adhere to them – they are more than suggestions. Reviewers will be expecting to see that much written for that topic, but not more. Proposals often contain excessive detail.
- If required elements are listed, it is usually a good idea to discuss them in the order listed. If you must stray from this, at least use headings so reviewers know where to find it. If not, follow a typical format for all good proposals, such as:
 - Proposal summary/abstract
 - Introduction: statement of the issue, problem or focus of research; what is known about it to date.
 - Project statement: What do you want to accomplish in this project to further the knowledge base on this issue, and why you’re the perfect person to do so at this stage in your career.
 - Objectives and methodology: What **specifically** will you do and how will you do it? What is your research plan? What will you do, where, and when?
 - Budget: How much will it cost (if a budget is required)? Do you have funding (awarded or pending) from other sources, including the College?
 - Outcomes: What will be the outcomes of the project? Don’t forget to mention benefits to others besides just yourself (especially students).

General writing tips

- The above is simply a generic outline for writing. As most competitions will have various criteria that need to be addressed, consult with the Director of Sponsored Research if you need help on what to include or exclude.
- Use active voice throughout the application. (e.g. - “I will conduct the research” rather than “the research will be conducted by me”)
- Don’t forget that your c.v. is an integral part of the application package that gets reviewed. You may want to tailor it to reflect your qualifications for a particular proposal. Similarly, inform those writing references on your behalf of the specifics of your project so that they can connect your previous work and your qualifications to the new project.
- Unless it is clear that your proposal will **only** be reviewed by peers in your own discipline, write for a more general audience. Many major competitions are open to a number of disciplines, and reviewers are likely to include faculty or foundation officials who are not familiar with your discipline, the jargon used within it, or special terminology and acronyms.
- Ideally, ask for feedback on your draft proposal from at least two sources: one in your discipline and one outside of it. The Director of Sponsored Research is happy to give such feedback, if given the proposal in advance (i.e. – not the day before it’s due!).