



Grant-Writing Tips

November 7, 2009

General Grant-Writing tips:

- Use plain, descriptive language. Avoid jargon. Strive for clarity and brevity.
- Don't rely solely on your spell checker -- watch out for those homonyms and letter translocations that still render valid words but shred meaning.
- Neatness and following directions/rules/templates matters -- I've never met a review panel yet that didn't say, in some form, "If they can't pay attention to details here, why should we trust them with money?" -- and of course, if there are lots of proposals to wade through, it's way too easy to call non-compliance and toss.
- Way too many proposals spend too many column inches on general stuff (I have read more proposals that start out with a paragraph or more of "Gathering Storm" citations ...), and as they get closer and closer to their piece of the picture, start assuming the reader knows what they are talking about (their campus, program, platform, etc.). This priority of attention should be reversed.
- One's budget numbers should demonstrate some research into and/or understanding of the costs. Rounding, especially to even 100's or 1,000's, can be a mistake. However, counting pennies is probably also a mistake.
- I've seen several proposals run into trouble because the evaluation was too much of an afterthought (although I think the logic model would help this tremendously) or inadequately explained. More on logic models (think of these as a tool to help one think through the connections and execution plans):
 - Kellogg Foundation Logic Model - http://opas.ous.edu/Committees/Resources/Publications/WKKF_LogicModel.pdf
 - Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook - http://opas.ous.edu/Committees/Resources/Publications/WKKF_EvaluationHandbook.pdf
 - Kellogg Foundation Weblink (right-hand column), get your own copies of this stuff for free -- <http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=100&CID=281&CatID=281&NID=211&LanguageID=0>
 - SMILE Logic Model Exemplar - http://opas.ous.edu/Workgroups2007/SMILE_Theory_Change.pdf (read both pages to really get it; to compare what you see on the page to what SMILE does, check out smile.oregonstate.edu)
 - **The elevator speech on logic models:** What needs doing? What are you going to produce (materials, events, ...) and how is that going to make change (behavior, attitudes, ...) and how are you going to measure that?
- Try, as best one can, to understand one's audience. In at least some foundations, that audience is the board -- so, business expertise (think resume vs. CV, elevator speech vs. dissertation); general knowledge of the problem domain ("hunger in Oregon", "engineering education"); expertise in some area which may or may not impinge on your project; experience and expertise in planning and what can go wrong; a thirst for documentable results (both quantifiable and qualitative); and often really, really good BS filters (although against that you have to place the Gates Foundation and the Small Schools fiasco). Many review panels are constituted similarly.