

Windows of Opportunity

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

FALL 2012

I am delighted to present to you the inaugural edition of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) newsletter, "Windows of Opportunity" This newsletter, published quarterly, will highlight recent awards, and include articles written by ORSP staff on topics such as finding funding opportunities, proposal development, grants management and compliance. We'll also provide up-to-date information on any important news items that may pertain to research and sponsored programs. Finally, we plan to include feature articles written by faculty and staff outside of ORSP on a wide variety of topics. We hope you enjoy the newsletter. As always, please feel free to provide feedback at orsp@mail.montclair.edu.



*Ted Russo,
 Director, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP)*

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS

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The Importance of Contacting Program Officers

One of the most important steps in the proposal submission process can also be one of the most anxiety provoking, particularly for the beginning investigator. While it's not always a requirement, the importance of contacting a program officer cannot be overstated—first and foremost, it will establish what you hope will be a fruitful advising and funding partnership for years to come; secondly, it will help to ensure you do not waste critical time preparing a proposal that is outside of a funding agency's interests. Even researching the intended sponsor's funding goals does not supplant the need to speak with a program officer (though it is necessary to know the sponsor's goals and see how your project fits in, to prepare yourself for your conversation).

The best advice is to prepare yourself with knowledge about the sponsor's goals, your project aims, and how they overlap. Then take the leap, *contact the program officer every time you apply for new funding*, and it will become like second nature, and more comfortable.

To prepare yourself, write an abstract no longer

than one to two paragraphs that describe your project (main goal, hypothesis, impact). E-mail your abstract to the appropriate program officer, stating what program you intend to apply for, and ask them for a convenient time to follow up with a call to discuss your submission.

Meanwhile, collect some basic information about your department, college, and MSU, to have handy for your discussion as they relate to your specific project.

Hopefully, you will get a response setting a time and date for a phone conversation.

The next step is to prepare the questions you will want to ask the program officer. Here are some sample questions¹:

- Does my project fall within your current priorities? *If it does not, explore different objectives that may yield a better fit or ask for suggestions of other programs that might be interested in your project.*

Marina Aloyets
 Pre-Award Officer, ORSP

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“A competitive grant proposal requires technical prowess, creativity, careful planning, organization, and adherence to required specifications.”

Common Grant Proposal Development Pitfalls

Although just about all proposal writing tips sound obvious, all too often even the most experienced researchers fail to “hit the mark” when attempting to prepare a competitive grant proposal. A competitive grant proposal requires technical prowess, creativity, careful planning, organization, and adherence to required specifications.

Dana Natale
Research
Development
Specialist,
ORSP

Technically speaking, the “sweet spot” for a competitive proposal is to be firmly grounded in current research, precisely focused on a set of research questions, and innovatively demonstrate promise for future research and discovery. However, a technically solid project can be dismissed if an applicant fails to convince reviewers that he or she has *feasible* plans for getting the work done. And let us not forget that most proposals returned without review failed to comply with the *mechanical* instructions provided by the funder.

Below is a list of the aspects of a proposal where the most common and costly pitfalls occur.

I. Technical Pitfalls

Research Question

- Failure to tailor the proposal to the Request for Proposals (RFP), causing reviewers to suspect the applicant does not understand the reason why the agency is issuing the RFP.
- The proposed project is not significant to the overall scientific issues in the field.
- The proposed project is too diffuse, superficial, or unfocused.
- The proposal lacks critical literature references, causing reviewers to suspect the applicant either does not know the literature or has purposely neglected critical material.

Hypothesis

- The proposed project is based on a weak hypothesis or alternative hypotheses are not considered.
- The proposed project is simply descriptive or does not test a specific hypothesis.
- The proposed project is innovative, but there is no preliminary data.

Methodology

- The proposal fails to demonstrate to reviewers that all feasible research designs have been considered and the most appropriate has been selected. This is why a consultant review (especially statistical review) is important and can strengthen the application.
- The grant application contains insufficient methodological detail to convince reviewers that the investigator knows what he or she is doing.
- The data analysis is vague or unsophisticated.
- The link between specific aims, hypotheses, and analysis is unclear.

II. Feasibility Pitfalls

- The proposed workload is unrealistic or overly ambitious.
- The proposed budget is unreasonable (too high or too low) or incomplete.
- The Principal Investigator (PI) does not have experience with proposed techniques or has not recruited a collaborator who does.
- The PI lacks the resources or facilities to conduct the project.
- The PI has no access to the subject population (letters of support are very important in showing access to the subject population).
- The proposal does not explain how or by whom all aspects of the project will be managed.

III. Mechanical Pitfalls

- Failure to *strictly* adhere to the RFP instructions regarding organization of the proposal, inclusion of required information, page limits, font type and size, margins, etc.
- Failure to take evaluation criteria and allocated points (if applicable) into consideration when preparing your proposal.
- Proposal is unprofessional in appearance (typos, blank pages, unnumbered pages, etc.).

Featured Awards



The National Science Foundation awarded **Eric Forgoston** and **Lora Billings** (Mathematical Sciences, CSAM) with a grant of \$278,966 for their project "Understanding the Dynamics of Stochastic Disease Spread in Meta-

populations." Its goal is to attain an understanding of infectious disease outbreak, spread, and extinction in metapopulation models, where migratory effects and stochasticity are included.



The National Science Foundation awarded **Edina Renfro-Michel** (Department of Counseling and Educational Leadership, CEHS) \$118,837 for "Collaborative Project: Integrating Learning Resources for Information Security Research and Education (SECURE)," which will develop a course search tool that can be integrated into online security courses to help increase retention rates.

to help increase retention rates.

Teresa Rodriguez (University Art Galleries, CART) has been awarded a grant in the amount of \$12,828 by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) for FY13 General Program Support. Funds are being used for the ongoing support of the gallery, which promotes culture and art through exhibitions and educational programs.



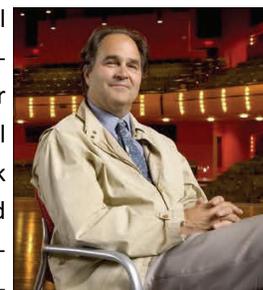
Pankaj Lal (Earth and Environmental Studies, CSAM) was awarded \$349,963 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for his project "Assessing Socioeconomic Impacts of Forest Biomass Based Biofuel Development on Rural Communities in the Southern United States (U.S.)."

Jennifer Pardo (Psychology, CHSS) received an award of \$400,100 from the National Science Foundation for her project "RUI: Phonetic Convergence in Spoken Communication." This project continues a program of research investigating phonetic form variation in spoken communication.



Stephanie Silvera (Health & Nutrition Sciences, CEHS) received the first year of a National Institutes of Health Career Development award, in the amount of \$137,618, for her project "Exploring Sociodemographic and Behavioral Factors Underlying Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Cancer Prevention Behaviors in New Jersey."

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) awarded **Jedediah Wheeler** (Arts and Cultural Programming, CART) a general program support grant of \$49,513 for fiscal year 2013. This provides partial support for the presentation of Peak Performances annual programs and helps to increase audience participation in educational discussions, workshops, and collaborations.



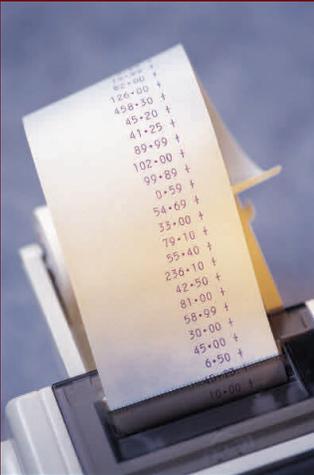
Robert McCormick (Center for Child Advocacy, CHSS) received \$267,627 from the N.J. Department of Children and Families for the project "Post BA Certificate in Adolescent Advocacy." This 15 credit post-BA certificate is being developed initially for DYFS (Division of Youth and Family Services) workers and DCF (Department of Children and Families) workers who wish to further their expertise in working with adolescents in the public welfare system.

For More Information on Funding Sources, Submittal Strategies, Awards Management, and Much More,

Please Visit ORSP Online at <http://www.montclair.edu/research-sp>

Change—It *Might* Be Inevitable

“When there is a change, there’s no need to panic and think you cannot continue your work. ORSP is here to help you!”



**Catherine
Bruno**
Post-Award
Officer, ORSP

During grant writing, principal investigators (PIs) take great care in describing their research. They fine tune their methods and budget, ensuring that their proposals are clear and reviewers will not only know what they wish to accomplish, but also how they’ll reach their intended goals and objectives.

Alas, when it comes down to it, the proposal is a plan; a best case scenario; a roadmap *if* the research goes exactly how it’s been planned in the proposal. As we all know, things do not always go according to the plan.

Things happen when doing research or running a program. For example, an investigator might not have been able to recruit as many participants in the first few months so her data collection is delayed or an experiment might be postponed because a piece of equipment broke. Moreover, programmatic changes will most likely have an effect on a budget. For example, a principal investigator might have collected so much data that he or she will need to hire an additional student to assist with data analysis. In science experiments, a principal investigator may have underestimated how much of a chemical will be needed to run experiments. The examples are endless.

When there is a change, there’s no need to panic and think you cannot continue your work. ORSP is here to help you! Sponsors understand that changes occur and they provide guidelines on which changes might need prior approval. Some common examples of changes in a project that require prior approval from the sponsor:

- No-cost extensions (the need for more time to fulfill the objectives of the proposal at no additional cost).
- Change in key personnel named in the award agreement, e.g., your named evaluator has left.
- Absence of the principal investigator for a

period of time, e.g., you’ll be on Fulbright for an academic year.

- Subawards that were not part of the original application, e.g., the plan to do a specific task yourself isn’t feasible, but you have a colleague at another university that could do this work for you.

With that said, many federal agencies waive prior approvals on certain changes and delegate universities “expanded authority,” which assigns the university the authority to approve some changes that require prior approval. For example, the NSF waives its prior approval of the first no-cost extension on the award. It authorizes the university to approve the first no-cost extension provided sufficient justification.

The Federal Demonstration Partnership has developed a helpful “Research Terms and Conditions Prior-Approval and Other Requirements Matrix” that demystifies when agency prior approval is necessary. Here’s the link: <http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/rtc/priorapproval.pdf>.

When the funder is not the federal government, it will typically have language in the award letter and/or agreement describing when prior approval is required and what the process is in notifying them.

In summary, all is not lost if a change happens, and ORSP is here to help you manage the change efficiently and effectively.

Facts@ORSP

MSU received over \$11 million in awards during the last fiscal year, making it the most successful year on record!

Grant or Contract: What's the Difference?

Ted Russo
Director,
ORSP

In the world of Sponsored Programs there is often an expectation by the sponsor that the recipient of an award provide something in return. This “quid pro quo,” or “something for something,” while common, isn’t always clearly defined. For this reason, it’s important to contact ORSP as soon in the proposal process as possible so that these kinds of issues can be identified and discussed up front, before they might become larger issues.

Most of the externally sponsored funding that MSU receives comes in the form of a “grant.” The sponsor expects that the awardee will carry out the project as stated in the proposal. However, awardees are generally provided a degree of flexibility in carrying out the project. Annual and final technical and financial reports are typically required. There may be other expectations as well which are often spelled out in the original proposal guide, or indicated under the terms and conditions of the resulting award agreement.

“Contracts,” by contrast, are very different than grants. Under a contract agreement, the sponsor typically agrees to pay the contractor a fixed price for the delivery of goods or services. Clearly defined “deliverables” are spelled out in the proposal, and a timetable for delivery is usually required. Government procurement contracts for example, can be quite complex. The terms of U.S. Government contracts are guided by Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), which as of this writing, is over 2,000 pages in length! Where private, and in particular, corporate sponsors are concerned it’s very important that potential awardees notify ORSP as soon as discussions on a possible collaboration begin. Negotiations on terms to include intellectual property, confidentiality, publication and payment can be quite complex and time-consuming, yet almost always proceed more smoothly when “surprises” are minimized, and the parties enter into the process with a good understanding of each other’s needs and expectations.

Regardless of whether an award might come in the form of a grant or contract, at the time of submission, it’s very important to carefully review proposal guidelines as well as the terms and conditions under which a future award may be subject, as some may be unacceptable, and in some cases, non-negotiable as a “condition” of the award.

While the end result of award or contract negotiation can’t be predicted with 100% accuracy, the vast majority of negotiations conclude to the satisfaction of all parties. Favorable outcomes are more likely when potential “red flags,” or areas of potential concern, are addressed sooner, rather than later. As always, ORSP will be available to help in sorting through the complexities of these issues.

Adapted and Revised. Franc Lemire (WPI) & Ted Russo, “Quid Pro Quo: ‘Something for Something means Something,’” WPI ORA Newsletter, Fall 2008.

When Is a Survey Just a Survey?

Amy Krenzer,
IRB Coordinator

I often get phone calls from faculty members that begin, “I’m just giving a survey in my class, I don’t need IRB approval do I?” It’s not as easy a question to answer as you might think, but I’m hoping this will clear up some questions.

Is the survey just for your own use to evaluate your program or find out your students degree of knowledge on a certain topic? AND will the results of the survey NOT be shared outside of your classroom, presented or published? If you answered “yes” to both of these questions, you would not need IRB approval before giving your survey. You are not intending to add to generalizable knowledge.

One of my students wants to give a survey in our class as part of a classroom research project. Do they need IRB approval? No, if the student’s research is only for a classroom project and will not be presented, shared, or published outside the classroom, they do not need IRB approval.

One of my students wants to give a survey in our class as part of a classroom research project, and wants to submit this research project to be included in our college’s research symposium. Does this student need IRB approval? Yes! The presentation of this research would be seen as adding to generalizable knowledge, and would require IRB approval prior to recruiting participants and conducting research.

I’ve given the same survey in my class for five years now, and I’ve gotten some really interesting results. I’d like to apply for IRB approval so I can present or publish this work. Yikes! I hate to say it’s too late, but in this case it almost is. The only way this professor could use these survey results would be to apply for IRB approval and get permission to go back to each of his or her past students and consent those students after their participation. Another option would be to start at this point and go forward with applying for IRB approval to use their current students and collecting data from their approval date on.

Find the Funding

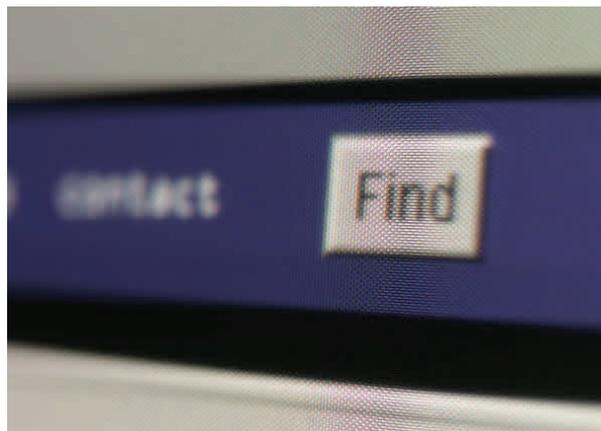
Proposal development requiring technical and creative writing skills, in addition to subject expertise. Here are some valuable resources, handpicked from the very best in the field, to assist you in the process.

National Organization of Research Development Professionals (NORDP)

Resources Page: <http://www.nordp.org/resources>

Guides to Writing Successful Proposals

- American Scientist, [The Science of Scientific Writing](#)
- Columbia University, [Writing a Grant Proposal](#)
- Foundation Center, [Short Course on Grant Writing](#)
- Geological Society of America, [Graduate Student Grant Writing Seminar](#)
- Science Careers Journal, [Getting Your Postdoc Grant-It Takes More Than Just Writing!](#)
- Science Careers Journal, [The GrantDoctor: Advice for Grant Seekers](#) (a series of articles)
- Jacob Kraicer, [The Art of Grantsmanship](#)
- University of Michigan, [Proposal Writer's Guide](#)
- University of Minnesota, [How to Write a Research Grant](#)
- University of Wisconsin, [Grants Information Center](#)
- James Madison University [Proposal Development Guides](#)



Upcoming Workshops

Finding the Right Funding Opportunity: Strategies for Success

Tuesday, October 23, 2012
Courtyard Lounge, University Hall

1:00 to 2:30pm

ORSP Pre-Award Staff

Managing Your Grant: A Roadmap to the Finish Line

Thursday, November 15, 2012
University Hall Room 4116

10:00 to 11:00am

ORSP Post-Award Staff and Grant Accounting

Program Officers (continued from Page 1)

- What would you recommend to improve my chances for a favorable review? *Do not be bashful about asking this question—the program officer knows this is the main reason for your call!*
- What is the anticipated proposal success rate? *Success rates are your statistical odds for success. First-time submissions have lower rates, resubmissions are higher.*
- What are some of the common reasons for proposal rejections? *This will help you understand likes and dislikes of review panels that do not show up in the program's written materials.*

Following your conversation, sending an e-mail to the program officer is always a good idea. Thank them for their time and summarize your understanding of the main points of advice you received. It's both a good way to continue with the line of communication in case you have further questions about your proposal, as well as a first step in the development of an on-going advising and funding partnership.

¹ Porter, Robert, "Can We Talk? Contacting Grant Program Officers", University of Tennessee Research Management Review, Vol. 17, No. 1 Fall/Winter 2009, p 14-15

THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS

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