



## WHAT WORKS - A PKAL ESSAY

# GETTING SUPPORT AND BUDGET FOR YOUR GREAT IDEA II

## Grants Officers

### Creating a Proposal Budget

One way to get funding for your idea is to write a successful grant to a foundation or a governmental funding agency for the direct costs of your envisioned project. Depending on the guidelines of the funding agency, you can usually put into your proposal's budget the dollars it would take to allow you to spend some percentage of your time during the academic year working on the project. Your percent of time and effort translates into that same percentage of your academic year salary plus the benefits your institution pays on that portion of your salary. Benefits are easily calculated by using an official statistic established by your institution, e.g. 10 percent for part-time staff or faculty and 30 percent for full-time staff or faculty.

Typical employer benefits expenses include the institution's share of contributions to programs like:

- ♦ government-mandated state disability and worker retraining programs
- ♦ government-mandated federal social security and Medicare
- ♦ optional health, medical, dental insurance
- ♦ optional or government-mandated employee retirement programs
- ♦ optional life insurance taken out by the institution in your name
- ♦ optional institutional tuition remission programs
- ♦ optional employee crises counseling programs
- ♦ optional day-care, recreation facilities useage
- ♦ optional subsidies for the use of public transportation or parking.

Contact your dean, human resources department, or pre-award research grants office about what percentage to apply.

One quick and easy way of calculating how much of your academic year salary to associate with your grant is to imagine that as a full-time tenured or tenure track faculty member during the academic year your work is made up mostly of teaching, but also of research and faculty service. For example, you might ordinarily be assigned to teach six standard courses, to advise students, and to work with some students on independent studies projects. Call that 60 percent of your academic year's effort. Assume that 25 percent of your time and effort during the academic year, if you are full-time tenured or tenure track, goes to research, and 15 percent goes to service.

**Peter A. Facione**

Senior Associate

Stratus-Heery International Inc.

### KEY ISSUES IN GETTING SUPPORT

- ♦ Seek the advice of people on campus familiar with funding agencies.
- ♦ Balance your budget and time with teaching and research.
- ♦ Consider all other expenses that are necessary for carrying out your idea.
- ♦ Be familiar with the funding agencies' guidelines, qualifications, and Requests For Proposals (RFPs).
- ♦ Work with the dean and the chair in finding ways for the department and institution to benefit from your grant.



# GETTING SUPPORT AND BUDGET FOR YOUR GREAT IDEA II

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The goal here is that you will be able to devote all the needed time and effort to your funded grant and that you would still be able to do a good job in whatever teaching or service duties you may be assigned. To make this balance happen, most deans or academic vice presidents would be happy to have you put one or more courses worth of effort on the grant budget and agree that if you are funded you would be released from that teaching to engage in the grant.



If you are building a budget for a proposal to an outside agency, you will have to consider all of the project's various expenses.



A rule of thumb might be that one course is roughly 10 percent of your academic year salary and its related benefits. Release from three courses would mean budgeting 30 percent of your salary and benefits to the grant. Your dean may already have a more sophisticated and appropriate metric for you to follow. Check with your dean or pre-award research services director to be sure you are following the policies and practices of your institution in this important area of time and effort budgeting.

## Project Expenses

If you are building a budget for a proposal to an outside agency, you will have to consider all of the project's various expenses. For example, if you are planning to work on the project over the summer, you should put summer salary and related personnel benefits into the budget. The salaries and related benefits costs of any other staff you need to work on the project can be part of the grant's proposed budget.

For example:

- ◆ temp support
- ◆ a project director
- ◆ research assistants
- ◆ graduate student stipends
- ◆ scholarship support.

Think about all the things you will use and costs you will incur in completing your project and build those expenses into your proposal's budget. For example, think about travel and travel-related expenses, like lodging and meals, specialized software, research or studio equipment, consumable office and lab supplies, rent, bus tickets, printing, toll call charges, copier expenses, T-shirts, tools, etc.

There are specialists in the pre-award research services, faculty development, dean's, or academic vice president's offices at most colleges and universities to help you think about how to translate what you want to do into budget categories. They will know the rules and regulations which apply to those budget categories and they will be able to help you think through how much money you should think about asking for in each category.

## Funding Agencies and Foundations

Government agencies and some private foundations put out calls for proposals. These calls have strict deadlines and specifications relating to:

- ◆ what sort of project proposal is being sought
- ◆ what the funding limits are
- ◆ how the proposal is to be presented.

Responding to one or more of these might yield the funding for your project for one or more years to come. Because many granting programs require rigorous peer reviews, and seldom fund more than 10 percent or 15 percent of the many proposals they expect to receive, they have explicit and stringent standards. Always learn what these might be before taking the time to prepare an application. It is a good idea, for example, to:

- ◆ contact the director of pre-award services, faculty development director, or the person who works with non-governmental foundations on campus
- ◆ learn what funding agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, are interested in supporting
- ◆ phone the grant agency and talk to the program officer about other unanswered questions you might have
- ◆ think about how your project can fit— no doubt with some adjustments— into one or another of the Requests for Proposals (RFP) coming from a funding agency.



# GETTING SUPPORT AND BUDGET FOR YOUR GREAT IDEA II

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Unsolicited applications or applications which do not respond to the agency's RFP in every respect are often not worth the effort it would take you to write them. The reviewers whom the agencies use to evaluate proposals are trained to discard proposals that fail to address the agency's grant application guidelines exactly. Often your best sources of guidance about how to craft your grant proposal are:

- ♦ those people on your own faculty who serve as grant reviewers for various agencies
- ♦ a copy of someone else's successful grant proposal made to that same agency or that same RFP in a previous year.

Expect to reshape your project, after you are familiar with the RFPs of various agencies, so that what you propose to do is exactly what the agency is most excited about funding someone to do.

Because competition is stiff, often some strong and potentially fundable projects rank just outside the range that the agency can afford to support. Frequently the agency will share the reviewers' comments with you and invite you to resubmit in the next round.

Do it! The chance of success on a second or third invited resubmission are much higher. They would not have invited you if they felt your project was not meritorious.

When you resubmit:

- ♦ pay close attention to the reviewers' comments and address every one of them
- ♦ adjust and expand your narrative where you can
- ♦ explain why you disagree with a comment or two if you must.

Remember, resubmitting is a smart thing to do.

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Expect to reshape your project.. so that what you propose to do is exactly what the agency is most excited about.

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## Indirect-costs

If you are already bringing externally funded grant dollars into the institution and your grant includes an amount that flows to the institution for indirect-costs, then you might see whether the chair or the dean has access to any of those dollars. If so, perhaps he/she could allocate some percentage toward your use for this new project. This can be attractive to a chair or dean if your new project has the potential also to become externally funded and thus to generate additional indirect-cost expense dollars down the road.

If you are not familiar with this category, indirect-cost expense dollars come to the institution— if allowed by the granting agency and not negotiated away up front— when an external grant is funded. These are dollars to reimburse the institution for the various expenses associated with making it possible for you to conduct your externally funded project at that institution.

They are thought of as addressing overhead expenses such as:

- ♦ utilities, facilities, custodial and maintenance expenses
- ♦ financial auditing and accounting services
- ♦ compliance monitoring
- ♦ research library holdings
- ♦ payroll and other human resources services
- ♦ institutional computing and telecommunications infrastructure costs
- ♦ pre- and post-award services staff.

These are all real expenses for your university, but typically they are not itemized on your grant's budget page. Your institution is very likely to have already negotiated a federal grants indirect-costs rate, e.g. 47 percent of personnel expenses.



# GETTING SUPPORT AND BUDGET FOR YOUR GREAT IDEA II

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In some cases, that rate is applied to the part of your grant budget which qualified. This increases the grant's overall budget by that amount. Some universities negotiate part of those dollars away as "in-kind" contributions to show the granting agency that you have your institution's financial backing for your project. Most universities do not, however, do that. They know that the costs have to be covered somehow and they do not want to use student tuition money or state subsidies for that purpose.



Nail down with your chair and your dean what your teaching load is going to be in future semesters if and when you are funded.



If for some reason, indirect-cost expenses are not allowed by a given foundation or funding agency, see if you cannot put some of the more obvious things you will be needing into your direct-cost expense budget. Think about space rental, utilities costs, staff for budget and reporting purposes, research materials and books, and the like.

## Incentives

For purposes of putting positive incentives in place to encourage grant writing activity, often some formula exists to return to the principal investigator's school dean or department chair a small fraction of the indirect-cost expense dollars received by the institution.

Find out what happens to the dollars that come back to the institution when you put some of your academic year salary on the externally funded grant budget. Many institutions return those dollars to the dean.

The best approach is to nail down in advance with your chair and your dean what your teaching load is going to be in future semesters if and when you are funded. The chair, at the same time, will be working with the dean to be sure that your department receives back the money it needs to cover course sections which you would otherwise have been teaching. ■