National Science Foundation: How to Write a Successful Proposal to NSF

NSF grants provide funds based on merit, not need.

The following tips are provided to help the proposal writer understand the process that goes into preparing a proposal and to share some advice that others have found useful.

5 Key Questions:

1) Do you have a good idea?
2) Are you the right person to do the research?
3) Do you have a solid proposal for conducting the research?
4) Do you have all of the resources to do what you propose to do?
5) Do you know how to evaluate your results?

Hints:

- Read the program announcement
- Work on projects you care about deeply
- Develop measurable goals and objectives
- Realistically assess your needs and determine your available resources
- Develop preliminary date
- Speak with a NSF program director about your proposal project
- Find out specific program requirements and limitations
- Think about target audience
- Research current program patterns
- Build on what others have done
- Think teamwork with internal and external advisors
- Work with your organization’s Sponsored Research Officer (SRO)
- Consult the program solicitation and follow the requirements carefully

Causes for a Declined Proposal:

- No innovative, cutting edge ideas
- Provides only an incremental advance to the knowledge base
- Unclear goals and activities
- Qualifications and expertise of the principal investigator not evident
- Target audience of the grant not clearly explained
- Lacks a focused plan to achieve goals
- Fails to follow the Program Solicitation Guidelines

If Your Proposal Is Declined:

- Learn from the criticisms of your proposal
- Contact your program director with any questions about the review or possible submission of a revised proposal at a later time
- Take time to self-evaluate the proposal and the project

Adapted from the NSF’s “How to Write a Successful Proposal to NSF” brochure | www.nsf.org