Proposal Writing Workshop

Hosted by the Foundation Relations & Corporate Philanthropy Team

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Meet your facilitators:

Margaret Guerrero, Director of FRCP
David Siegfried, Director of FRCP
Aaron Diaz, Director of FRCP

Agenda for today's workshop

- Modules
- Introductions (12:30 – 12:45 PM)
- Module 1: Interpreting the RFP (12:45 – 1:15 PM)
- Module 2: Goals and Outcomes (1:15 – 1:35 PM)
- BREAK: 1:35 – 1:50 PM
- Module 3: Clear writing (1:50 – 2:35 PM)
- Module 4: Methodology (2:35 – 3:00 PM)
- BREAK: 3:00 – 3:10 PM
- Module 5: Outputs, outcomes, and impact (3:10 – 3:30 PM)
- Module 6: Closing discussion (3:30 – 4 PM)

Housekeeping:

- Confidentiality
- Distribute handouts
- Ask questions throughout
- If need to take a break mid-session, please grab key from front table to get back into office suite

Introductions

- Name
- Department
- One to two things you hope to learn

Module 1: Interpreting the Opportunity

Overview: Evaluate an RFP and other program information to inform proposal content and organization

Module 1: Interpreting the Opportunity (30-45 minutes)

Key things to identify:

- Key Language
- Eligibility
- Application process including due dates
- High Level Goals for the Foundation *in general*
- High Level Goals for the *program or RFP*
- Activities supported/examples of successful proposal ideas
- Award amounts and # of years funded
- Budget requirements for different stages of the proposal (ie. LOI vs full proposal)
- Indirect cost guidelines
- Selection criterias

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Module 1: Interpreting the Opportunity

Step 1: Gather all your resources:

- Foundation's Homepage
- Foundation's RFP webpage
- The .pdf of the RFP
- Any other materials such as FAQ's that they list on their site

Module 1: Interpreting the Opportunity

Step 2: Underline/highlight all relevant information and language! Specifically look for key things to identify such as:

Key things to identify:

- Eligibility
- Application process including due dates
- High Level Goals for the Foundation *in general*
- High Level Goals for for the Foundation *in issuing the RFP*
- Activities supported/examples of successful proposal ideas
- Award amounts and # of years funded
- Budget requirements for different stages of the proposal (ie. LOI vs full proposal)
- Any mention of indirect vs direct costs
- Selection criterias

Module 1: Interpreting the Opportunity

Step 3:

1. Create an LOI outline using the questions or the format requested in the RFP;

2. Insert as "Comments" any key information or language from the RFP, website, or any other foundation materials which might help you develop responses to each section of the LOI.

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Module 2: Goals & Importance

Overview: Foundations are interested in how your work will help to accomplish their stated goals in their RFP or program description. Identifying the overarching goals of your work early and the impact it will have if successful will help to shape your proposal.

Module 2: Goals & Importance

Questions to consider:

- What are the goals of the foundation?

- What is the impact you will achieve with your work?

- Why is it important to solve the problem you and the foundation are aiming to address?

Tip: insert a comment into your proposal outline with the foundation's language on its goals and the problem it wants to address. Refer back to this language throughout proposal development to help to continue to reiterate

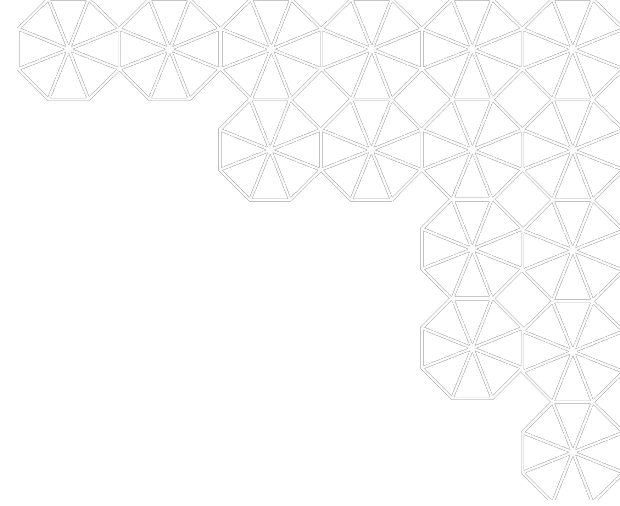how your work will help meet their goal.

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Module 3: Clear writing

Clarity

is

persuasive.

Module 3: Clear writing

Overview: Understand your audience, what they need to know and strategies for conveying the information to a broad audience.

Your audience:

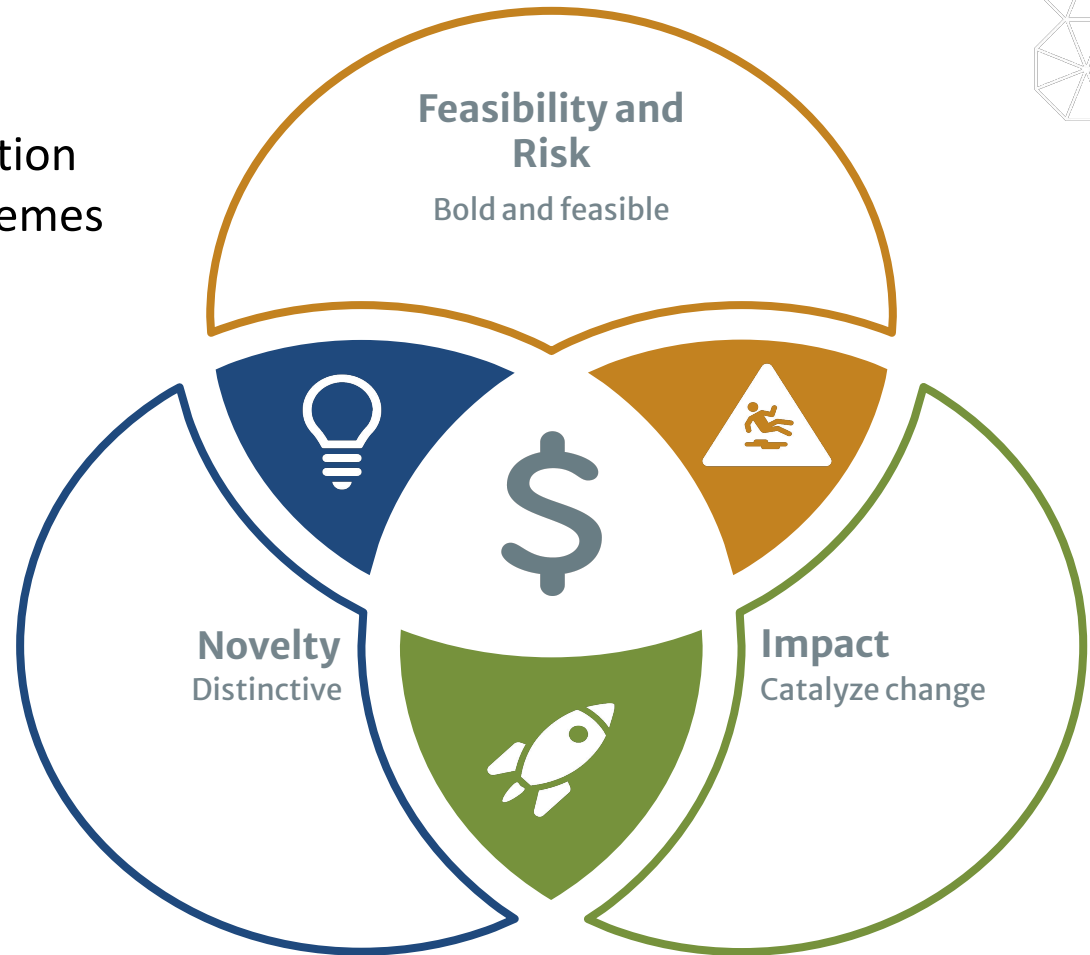**Program officers** = primary reviewers, translators and advocates

External panels, consultants, advisory board members = secondary reviewers

Board members/trustees/directors = final reviewers and decision makers

Let's take a moment to look at a foundation board.

What do they need to know?

Refer to the Writing Tips handout for more information on bringing these three themes out in your proposals.

Feasibility and Risk
Bold and feasible

Novelty
Distinctive

Impact
Catalyze change

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Features, differentiators, benefits

Features: aspects of your project or experimental approach

+

Benefits: why those aspects are significant

=

Differentiators: the features of your project that set you apart from what others in the field are doing.

Emphasize benefits by connecting them directly to features in your proposals.

We will design the first field-deployable continuous 15N2O pool dilution approach for quantifying N2 production and N2:N2O:NOx partitioning. Linking these gasses via microbial metabolisms will not only provide the first continuous N2 gas flux measurements but also the most comprehensive understanding of gaseous N losses from soil.

The Berkeley Underground Scholars program's three-pronged approach in recruitment, retention, and advocacy is building a prison-to-school pipeline for 5,000+ students in California state prisons currently enrolled in UC transferable community college courses.

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Unsupported claims

Beware superlative language and appeals to authority or reputation:

This project will leverage the most advanced cryo-EM facilities in the world.

The novelty of this project lies in the interdisciplinary composition of this team.

No other group has come close to solving this problem.

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Unsupported claims

Unsupported claims can be subtle:

We will use a combination of a cutting-edge stable isotope method ($^{15}N_2O$ pool dilution) coupled with newly developed printed sensors to quantify the $N_2:N_2O:NOx$ partitioning and associated drivers (mineral N, N_2O, pH, temperature, moisture, oxygen) in undisturbed field soils. The high frequency data produced will allow us to develop algorithms to model fluxes and behavior associated with environmental drivers, and ultimately upscale our results to ecosystems and regions and from days to centuries.

A revision:

Comprehensive understanding of soil microbe contribution to the N cycle requires the ability to continuously measure gaseous N losses from soil in the field against background atmospheric N. Previous efforts identified a lab measurement for N,, but it is non-continuous, only measures concentrations, and is untenable for intensive field measurements needed to quantify patterns (doi:10.1021/acs.est.9b00812). We seek to build a field-deployable $^{15}N_2O$ pool dilution approach that will quantify N_2 production with $N_2:N_2O:NOx$ partitioning. Our approach uses novel printable, continuous environmental sensors that are small and easy to replicate. With continuous measurement of partitioned N gas fluxes we will develop the first coupled dynamical model of N_2 and N-gas emissions from soils and upscale our results from small areas to ecosystems and regions and from days to centuries.

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Tips for clarity

1. Minimize or explain jargon
2. Avoid long sentences
3. Favor active voice over passive
4. Minimize wordiness

Jargon

Tips:

1. Minimize jargon when summarizing.
   a. Overview
   b. Unique aspects
   c. Significance
   d. Benefit statements
2. Define necessary jargon
3. Use the foundation's jargon where possible
4. Jargon in methods sections is okay, but keep benefit statements jargon-free.
5. Use acronyms carefully
   a. Explode where necessary for clarity
   b. Overuse convolutes

Long Sentences

Beware long sentences:

For many years, it seemed nearly impossible to rationally design a protein to fold into a specific structure, but the speed of today's computers, in concert with the lessons learned by biologists about the factors controlling protein structure and creative methods to translate these rules into algorithms, has made it possible, now, to design a protein that not only folds into a stable structure, but can function like an enzyme.

70 words

Better:

Recent advances in computation have made it possible to design a stable protein that functions as an enzyme.

18 words

Active voice

Active voice: A does something or acts upon B.

Postdoc Gomez will analyze samples.

Vs.

Samples will be analyzed by one of our postdocs.

Tips:

1. Use active voice unless you have good reason to use passive

2. Use personal pronouns to convey responsibility

    a. 'We' and 'our' are acceptable substitutes for teams or organizations.

3. **Do not obscure your work with passive voice! If you did it, say it in active voice so your reader knows!**

4. Convert passive to active by rewording sentences:

    It was discovered that cigarette smoking is strongly linked to lung cancer.

    We demonstrated that cigarette smoking is strongly linked to lung cancer.

Passive voice: When to use it

Passive voice has its place. Use it when:

- You do not know the actor
- You do not want to mention the actor
- The receiver is more important than the actor

To prevent contamination and spoilage, field samples are rapidly packaged and preserved on site.

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Minimize wordiness: Cliches and Idioms

Beware noticeable cliches:

The holy grail

State-of-the-art

New paradigm

More idioms and expressions in the Eliminating Wordiness handout

Replace idioms with simpler words:

Idiom	Simple replacement
As a general rule	Usually/generally
In the final analysis	Finally
Of considerable magnitude	Big/large/great
In light of the fact that	Since/because

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Wordiness: Choose simple words.

Minimize/replace long or pretentious words:

Wordy	Simple
Configuration	Shape, design
Demonstrate	Show
Methodology	Method, approach, process

Wordy and unclear: In this project, novel Raman spectroscopy will be **utilized** to observe chemical reactions…

Better: We will use novel Raman spectroscopy to observe chemical reactions…

Refer to the Eliminating Wordiness Handout for more examples

Trimming wordiness

Replace imprecise verbs like allow, permit, perform or provide for with precise verbs:

Less clear: Our formula allows for speedier diffusion of molecules.

Better: Our formula diffuses molecules more efficiently.

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Wordiness: Nominals

Change nominals to verbs:
The project team had a **meeting**.
Better: The project team met.

What to do:
- Convert nominals to verbs or adjectives
- Convert prepositional phrases to adjectives or adverbs

Verb	Nominalization
Configure	Configuration
Demonstrate	Demonstration
Measure	Measurement
Prolong	Prolongation
Remove	Removal

Refer to the Eliminating Wordiness Handout for more examples

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Persuasive Proposal Writing: General advice

1. Emphasize benefits.
2. Favor active language.
3. Minimize wordiness.
4. Minimize jargon.
5. Support your claims with evidence.

Module 4: Methodology/Theory of Change

Overview: The methodology section of a proposal is where you can explain how you will do your proposed work. This section is where you can get into more detail about your work plan, timeline, and approach as well as demonstrate your expertise. This will be your most technical section of a proposal.

Methodology/Theory of Change

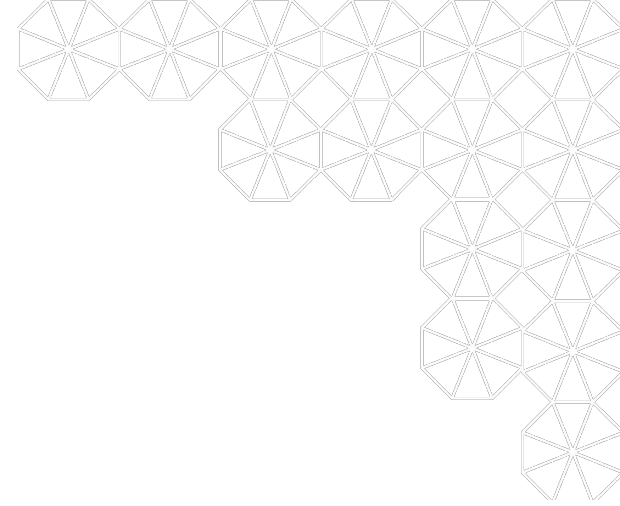Some key questions to consider when developing this section include:

- What are your key research questions or problem you are solving?
- What is the current landscape of the field?
- What is novel about your approach?
- How will you structure your study or solution?
- What is the timeline of your work?
- What is your team's makeup and how are you uniquely qualified?
- Why now?
- What are the risks to your approach and how will you mitigate them?

Activity

Examples mocked up:
[Mellon](#)
[Keck](#)

Module 5: Outputs, outcomes and impact

Outcomes/outputs:

- Who is the audience that is going to use this work?
- How will the work be disseminated/scaled?
- What are the end products? Who will use them?

Impact:

- What are the long term implications of the work? Big picture: what is this doing?
- What is the science or new work that could be enabled by your work?

Module 5: Outputs, outcomes and impact

Overall Goal (Impact): To significantly contribute to advancing the Chancellor's goals of increasing Cal's African American and Latinx undergraduate student body over the next 10 years.

Objective #1: Maximize UC Berkeley's outreach to and recruitment of low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented minority (URM) students in California, with an emphasis on the Bay Area.

Activities/outputs:

- Expand the DCAC program to an additional 3–6 schools in Contra Costa County and Oakland high schools.

- Place trained, recent Cal graduates from URM groups in full-time positions at Bay Area high schools to educate college counselors, students, parents, and community members on the attainability of a UC Berkeley education.

Thank you for participating! Keep in touch.

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https://frcp.berkeley.edu/about-us

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