

How To Write Proposals That Are Fun and Sometimes Fundable!

RAE M. LEVIS *

This essay should guide the reader in the fun-filled game of writing grant proposals!

ANYONE who ever received a competitive grant in the six-figure bracket automatically becomes a self-styled expert. The advice from such an "expert" often is a cross between how to write scholarly papers and how to beat the odds at Las Vegas. Here is a set of significant suggestions from a one-time winner of a long-shot grant. They almost unconditionally guarantee to turn an incipient educator into a polished grantsman. You will note that none of the suggestions has the speculative nature of gambling. They are just straightforward hints on how to get your hands in the till.

Hint #1: *The Proposal Title Must Be an Acronym.*

Early in the grantsmanship game it becomes apparent that the only projects being funded are those with initials that spell something. There are projects called LET, PRIDE, TALENT, WORTHY, YES, QUEST, SCORE—all pretty positive kinds of words. These words always represent some longer title, like Project LET, Learning Experience in

Technology. Of course, you have to be very careful that your acronym tells your story accurately. You also have to be careful if you choose *not* to select an acronym. There was a group that was *not* using its initials, NARCE (National Applications and Research in Cooperative Education Service) that changed its name to Federal Applications and Research in Cooperative Education. You can see the kind of problems this would create for the acronym-minded grantsman. To help the novice an Instant Developer of Educational Acronyms has been developed. Some excerpts from IDEA appear in the box on p. 470.

Other columns and charts in IDEA show how to use more than one word in a column, how to double vowels and consonants, the appropriate use of prepositions and articles, what to do with diphthongs and words with positive connotations, and other splendidly helpful provisions for acronym creation.

Hint #2: *The Proposal Must Use Pre-
vailing, Pedantic Words Currently in Vogue*

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Column I	Column II	Column III	Column IV
Bold	Action	Learning	Example
Meritorious	Administrative	Knowledge	Extensions
Regional	Exemplary	Needed	Developments
Student	Enlightened	Formative	Training
Timely	Innovative	Linkage	Laboratories
World	Approach	Instructional	Focus

Directions: Take suitable words from Columns I, II, III, and IV, and form your own acronym. (Caution: Use prepositions and dictionary as necessary. Some Column III words coupled with I, II, and IV will not always form an acronym.)

in the Funding Agency (sometimes called buzz words).

A relevant proposal will have orientation toward skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will challenge the learner in meaningful situations. (I try to model the behavior I advocate.) Your proposal will contain broad goals and mention that objectives are stated in behavioral terms in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. It will use CRT, ORT, SES, and NRT, safe in the assumption that all proposal readers will be as familiar with these initials as they are with USA. Accountability, equal educational opportunity, payoff, turnaround time, exit competencies, input-output model, process, advisory council, needs assessment, individualized instruction, mastery, consortium, teacher center, motivation, child-centered are all terms that should be generously sprinkled throughout the proposal narrative. A general rule of thumb is that the most popular current word should appear at least once on every page, and no fewer than ten of the terms in recent vogue should be included in each section.

Hint #3: The Writer Must Create a High Haze Index.

"Haze Index" is a numerical value assigned by the writer to various degrees of substitution of big words for small words, ambiguity of meaning, vagueness of tone, and obscurity of design. The index uses a 1-10 scale with the higher numbers indicating greater "haziness." For example, the first sentence in Hint #2 has a Haze Index of 9+.

Some proposal writers have developed

such ingenuity in the use of the index that they can write an entire application for funds without committing the applicant agency to anything. Skills of this kind are, of course, rare and are considered by some as inborn, genetic traits. Most grantsmen with this patent, journalistic ability are rapidly moved into high administrative posts at various levels of government.

Hint #4: The Needs Assessment Must Be Dry Labbed.

Somewhere in every proposal application, there is an area entitled "Needs Assessment." This section usually asks for a demographic description of the area and an appraisal of the needs of the population to be served. It also suggests that the needs be documented. Disregard the suggestions! If the demography of the project area is such that there are no minorities, go back enough generations to produce a reasonable, relevant percentage. If the populace has too high an income, too few children, too many cars, and not enough problems, look at the figures some other way. A simple reversal of numbers may suffice; and if you are later questioned, you can always explain reversals as typographical errors.

Hint #5: Survey of Relevant Literature.

Do not search the literature for possible solutions to the problem for which you have decided to ask for funds to solve. This will only confuse you, and you may get a proposal reader who is the sworn enemy of the source you quote. However, since footnotes make proposals look scholarly, it is a good idea to

use them. It is always dramatic to quote the latest U.S. census, almanacs, Shakespeare, or the Bible. These sources will indicate your flair for figures, your cultural background, and your conservative nature. It will also confound your reader and convince him or her that an applicant with such profundity can make the proposed project succeed.

Hint #6: Goals and Objectives Must Be Listed in General Terms.

The application will probably ask for the broad goals of the proposal. This is what you want to accomplish. The goals should be stated so broadly that there can be no question about their universality. Some goals that can be used over and over again are:

1. This proposal will make motherhood and apple pie available to those who need and want them.

2. This proposal will enhance the milieu for all living creatures.

3. This proposal will encourage good and discourage evil as individually defined.

Principal and subordinate objectives for all participants will be requested, or perhaps demanded, to indicate how the applicant will seek to meet stated goals. Most all applications recommend that these be in behavioral terms. This means that the person who wrote the application form has read books by Bloom and Mager and has come up with a six-part formula for making applications harder to write. Ignore this section. Include a sentence or two declaring, affirming, and asserting without doubt, hesitation, or uncertainty that you can and will solve the stated problems, evaluate the solution, disseminate the results, and diffuse the model by any and all pertinent, relevant, and applicable means at the disposal of the agency and with whatever consultant help that seems indicated. Each of these declarative statements should be at least seven type-written lines in length and should proclaim and expound rather than explain.

Hint #7: The Writer Must Outline a Plan of Action That Will Make the Proposal More Entertaining Than Playboy Magazine.

Although most proposal applications ask

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The successes and failures of open education in the U.S. will be examined. Major problems will be identified and alternatives explored. Time will be provided for interaction with consultants.

"Significant Values and Beliefs Exemplified in Successful Open Education Programs"

"Modification of the School Environment: Are Open Space Schools Necessary for Open Education?"

"In-service Education Requirements for Teachers"

"Implementation Strategies for Open Education—Case Studies of Success and Failure"

"What Kind of Teacher Attitudes on Open Education Can Be Anticipated?"

"What Does Research Say About Open Education in Attaining Cognitive and Humanistic Goals?"

Consultants: Roland Barth, Newton, Mass.; Vincent Rogers, U. of Connecticut; Barbara Wilson, Tulsa public schools; Virgil Howes, Encino, Calif.

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Consultants: Bruce Howell, Tulsa public schools; Norman Dodt, Florida State U.; Harry Brody, U. of Illinois; Howard Jones, U. of Houston; Richard Kimpston, U. of Minnesota; Ward Sybouts, U. of Nebraska; Jack Gant, Florida State U.

Registration Form

Open Education: Taking Stock / May 4-6, San Francisco (Holiday Inn-Financial District)

Analyzing Competency-Based Programs for Curriculum Specialists and Supervisors / May 12-14, Houston (Hyatt Regency)

Name _____

Title _____ Institution _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

My check (payable to ASCD) is enclosed

For each institute:

_____ \$75.00 ASCD member _____ \$100.00 nonmember

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Information on hotel reservations will be sent to you by return mail.

for a plan of action pertaining to the scope and detail of how the proposed work will be accomplished, this is pretty dull stuff. If, instead, you can put in some witty statements, a few cartoons, some of the local ethnic humor, and indicate that these are evidence of local *action*, your proposal will be very interesting. It will probably be more widely circulated than those in which the writers adhered slavishly to the guidelines and directions. Anyone can follow directions, but truly creative people create!

There is another side to this helpful hint that cannot be overlooked. You may choose a course of action in which you follow the proposal guidelines slavishly. This is a perfectly acceptable approach if you recognize that you are preparing your opus for ignorant bureaucrats. These people are impressed by demographic information and underlined headings and subheadings. Don't be afraid to repeat key ideas several times. The readers never look at an entire proposal anyway; so you must be repetitive. This also makes the proposal thicker, and bureaucrats and the Xerox Corporation like thick proposals!

Hint #8: The Proposal Must List Advisory Groups and Planners.

It is important to keep lists of names of cooperative representatives of various community groups and agencies by roles (for example, parents, industrialists, government officials, teachers, and administrators). These names can be included with their indicated involvement, or they can be designated as the advisory council as needed. It is a waste of time to explain the proposal to them. They won't understand it anyway, and if you have selected them correctly, they won't want to be bothered with details.

Hint #9: The Budget Must Be Impressive.

When preparing the proposal budget, it is important to be aware of how the total *sounds*. For example, \$100,000 sounds like a lot of money; \$98,000 sounds reasonable. It is also important never to use rounded-off figures and numbers—no matter what the guidelines say. Everyone knows that

\$98,423.72 reflects careful, conscientious figuring. This reflection is enhanced if you include minute detail in the budget breakdown, for example, 24½ boxes of paper clips, 81 #2 pencils. This will convince the proposal reader that you know exactly what you plan to do.

Hint #10: A Unique Evaluation Design Must Be Included.

Ingenious evaluation designs are effective as the final step in the proposal. A good statistics book is necessary for carrying out this step and may be used in several ways. One way is to thumb through the book until you find one or more pages with esoteric formulas and symbols. By copying these formulas and symbols and using some general evaluation words and sentences (for example, evaluation is in terms of the stated objectives; null hypothesis, sigma x, mean, median, normal curve, Bayesian, t, z, standard deviation) you can make it appear that you have a tight evaluation design and a research-oriented proposal. If you worry about plagiarism, another approach is to use your statistics book to locate unusual statistical tests. List these tests as your evaluative tools and note that the project decisions will be made in accordance with the results of the statistical evaluation. Some good terms to list are Stepwise Multiple Regression, Multivariate Analysis, Solomon-Four Design, Chi Square, Minimax, Maximax, and Maximin.

Hint #11: A Bibliography Is a Must.

Bibliographies, like footnotes, are impressive. As the final polished part of your proposal, find a long, spectacular bibliography in a recent book and copy it. A note stating that you *used* all of the sources in preparing your proposal but did not *quote* them because of space limitations is a good plan. It will impress the reader with your honesty, straightforwardness, and scholarship.

Even if you follow all this excellent advice, it may just be that what you propose to do isn't worth doing. But don't be discouraged, most funded programs aren't either.

Happy proposal writing! □

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