STEPS TO CREATING AND SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL FOR FCD

The following paragraphs set forth the general routine at Baylor University for preparing and submitting a proposal to a non-governmental funding organization.

In some cases, a sequence of steps is implied or expressed. However, some steps can and should be accomplished in parallel with others. For example, some funding entity research can be conducted without a project budget, but enough information to establish an overall project cost is needed to identify and qualify potential funding sources.

**Step 1: Get Early Administrative Concurrence**

One of the last steps in the proposal process is getting various academic administrators to sign an Approval form (routed by the Office of Sponsored Programs) attesting that the proposed project has the approval and backing of the university, college/school, and department.

You should always inform your chair and/or dean at the start of your proposal effort and keep him/her apprised of progress and expecting this final approval form at the end of the effort. The information then should be handed up to the vice provost for research. These colleagues often are in a better position to know how the proposed project may dovetail-or interfere with that of another researcher, or with goals and policies of the department. This can avoid big headaches and delays at the other end of the proposal effort.

**Step 2: Planning and Strategy**

Start early. Just as no one ever has enough closet space, there is never enough time to do a proposal exactly the way you’d like to do it. But thoughtful planning and devising an appropriate strategy early in the process will diminish false starts, backtracking, and other frustrations by helping to flatten the learning curve.

One big decision that needs to be made up front is that of which funding path to pursue. If you feel the best chances for success lie with applying to a governmental agency like the National Science Foundation or National Endowment for the Humanities, contact the Office of Sponsored Projects and let them know what you're planning. If you decide to apply to a corporation, charitable trust, foundation or other non-governmental funding organization, notify Academic, Foundation, and Corporate Development (FCD). We'll help you research potential donors and work with you all along the way to reduce your workload and develop the best, most complete proposal package possible.
**Step 3: Do a Budget**

You will be tempted to put off development of a detailed project budget, but it is important to do one as early as possible in the proposal process. FCD defers to the experts in budgetary affairs, the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP), and you should also. OSP has done thousands of budgets and they are skilled in the preparation of proposal budgets of every kind, whether for governmental or non-governmental grant applications. OSP knows the right questions to ask and has the necessary overhead and indirect rates to add in as appropriate. Plus, they will appreciate the courtesy of not being called in at the last minute. Besides, having a budget—even an incomplete one—early in the proposal process forces you to think of details that might be showstoppers later on in the process and provides a flexible foundation for finalization of the budget at the end of the preparation process.

And remember, project cost is a prime factor in selecting funding sources. A $100,000, one-year project won’t be funded by a foundation whose largest grant over the last few years was $45,000.

**Step 4: Research**

If you will only be able to do your funding research during breaks in your work schedule, allow a week or more to do thorough research. (FCD will do the research for you if you wish but, because of the volume of projects we are usually working, this could take much longer.) Once you have found several potential sources you feel may be good matches for your project, focus on the best one or two.

**Step 5: Establish a Schedule**

Foundations, most of them at least, have varied but very specific and inflexible application cycles. Generally, the best source for submissions cycles is on the funding organization’s website, if they have one. A Google search on the name usually will turn up a link to the site. The URL also will be listed on various reports and profiles you can find and print using FCD or Baylor library resources. Some foundation boards meet annually, some constantly. Quarterly is common. It is not out of the ordinary for the board of a foundation that awards grants in March to meet the previous December to select from proposals that had to be delivered in September to allow staff enough time to pre-screen them. And those applicants fortunate enough to be offered a presubmittal review by the program manager might have had a June deadline.

Unfortunately, when researching donors you sometimes will discover that you have missed the submission date for the current review cycle of the donor(s) most likely to fund your project. When this happens, flag your calendar for the next cycle and go to the next best opportunity.
**Step 6: Get Guidelines and any Required Forms and/or Permissions**

A donor's grant application guidelines must drive every aspect of proposal form, content, and style. Study the guidelines closely and obey them without exception unless someone in authority at the foundation tells you otherwise. Some funding entities have forms that must be filled out and submitted prior to or along with the proposal narrative and budget. Guidelines and forms commonly are available on the appropriate website, but sometimes come only by regular mail. A large number of foundations and trusts require that you contact them for an invitation before sending in an application or proposal; one foundation we work with returns a kind of ticket or "pass" that must be included with the proposal.

**Step 7: Develop the Proposal Narrative**

When writing the proposal text, bear in mind that, unlike federal funding agencies such as NSF and National Institutes of Health which use proposal reviewers who are themselves researchers, proposals submitted to foundations and trusts often do not undergo a rigorous technical review. The argots, jargon, and even tone common to many fields in the sciences and humanities can confuse and even intimidate lay reviewers, threatening chances for an award. There are notable exceptions—The W. M. Keck Foundation and Howard Hughes Medical Institute are two—but in general a more "shirt-sleeve English" tone often is called for in dealing with non-governmental funding sources.

FCD editors and technical writers have experience in widely diverse areas that allows them to work with authors in tailoring their works to suit the reviewing audience. Where donor guidelines allow, FCD can generate a lay-friendly "executive summary" or abstract that can give reviewers a clearer understanding of the proposed project and perhaps stir a keener interest in it. But we also understand that sometimes there just is no simple way to bring an understanding of highly complex concepts to all potential reviewers.

**Step 8: Get Thorough Reviews**

When the proposal draft is sufficiently mature in development, distribute it to a few knowledgeable peers and administrators for technical reviews, and to your support staff for style, grammar, and uniformity reviews. Once you feel that the draft has been sufficiently reviewed by departmental staff, FCD will go through the proposal to provide a good "outside-the-department" readability and general review. Be receptive to revisions and changes suggested by all reviewers; they usually are offered by professionals and support staff with much knowledge and experience in communicating and in successful grant-seeking.

**Step 9: Get Administrative Approval**
Time to get signatures on the form described in Step 1.

**Step 10: Work With Us (Finalize and Submit)**

We in FCD are here in part to help alleviate some of the burden of proposal preparation and to help ensure that the best possible package gets to the potential donor on or before the deadline. During the final days and hours of a proposal effort there will inevitably be snags, revisions, and omissions that will require us to work closely together. But in the end, the result will be a great proposal with all the necessary supporting material, backed by the university, and "attired" in proper Baylor form.