ESSENTIALS OF COMPETITIVE GRANT PROPOSALS

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A WEBINAR FROM HANOVER RESEARCH

WEBINAR LOGISTICS

PRESENTATION LENGTH

~60 minutes with time for Q&A

Q&A

We will have time for questions throughout the presentation. You may also ask questions via the chat link at the bottom of your screen, and the presenter will reply.

RECORDING & SLIDES

All attendees will receive a copy of the recording, including the slides.

PRESENTER

Susan Perri
GRANTS CONSULTANT

TOTAL WINS

$70+
MILLION

More than $70 million in total grant funding for clients since 2007.

- MA in Public Administration
- Joined Hanover in 2011
- Specializes in education, healthcare, and economic development grants

AGENCY EXPERTISE

On a Personal Note...

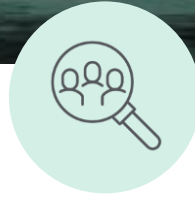AVID GARDENER: Lives in Ithaca, NY

DUAL CITIZEN: European traveler

MOTHER OF FOUR: 3 kids, 1 dog

OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S TOPICS

THE GRANT FUNDING PROCESS

- ↗ Know your Field
- ↗ Know your Funder
- ↗ Know your Framing

PROJECT DESIGN: DEVELOPING YOUR PROPOSAL

- ↗ Putting your Best Foot Forward
- ↗ Get Organized: Timelines, Tools, & Writing Tips
- ↗ Gather Feedback

EXAMPLES & RESOURCES

- ↗ Grant Narrative Breakdown
- ↗ Grantseeker Resources
- ↗ Hanover Resources

THE GRANT FUNDING PROCESS
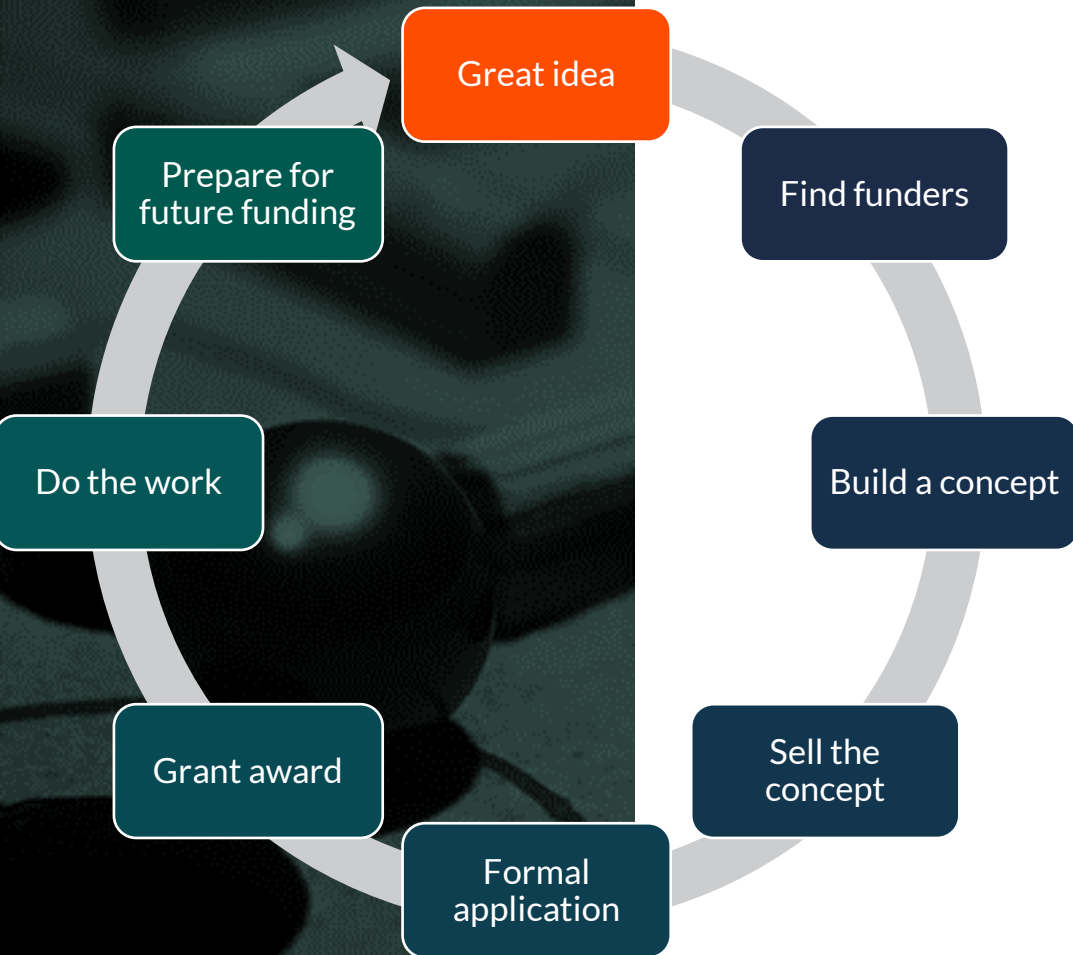

PROPOSE THE RIGHT THING TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

**KNOW YOUR
FIELD**

**KNOW YOUR
FUNDER**

**KNOW YOUR
FRAMING**

HOW GRANTS WORK

Great idea

Find funders

Build a concept

Sell the concept

Formal application

Grant award

Do the work

Prepare for future funding

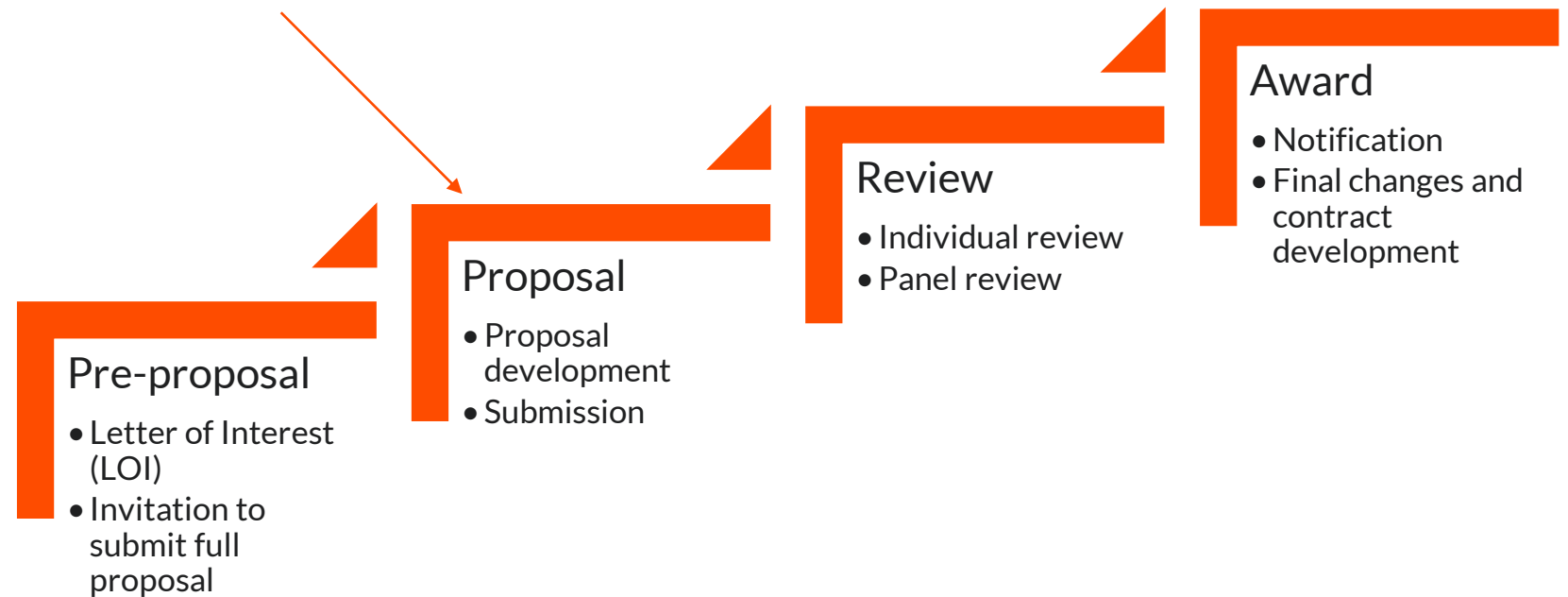*The grant funding process: from idea to implementation.*

1. Start with a great idea.
2. Find funders who are interested in the idea.
3. Build a solid project concept aligned with funder goals.
4. Sell the concept to funders.
5. Complete the formal application process.
6. Receive a grant award.
7. Do the work.
8. Prepare for future funding.

This process varies across funder types.

THE GRANTS PROCESS

Formal processes vary widely across funders.

A typical grant application process includes:

Pre-proposal
- Letter of Interest (LOI)
- Invitation to submit full proposal

Proposal
- Proposal development
- Submission

Review
- Individual review
- Panel review

Award
- Notification
- Final changes and contract development

The formal process generally takes 3–9 months to complete.

COMPETITIVE PROPOSALS: KNOW YOUR FIELD

HOW DOES YOUR WORK RELATE TO OTHER WORK IN THE FIELD?

Your answers should guide your grantseeking process…

What gap in knowledge or services would your work fill?

Does your work build on previous work?
What are the next steps?

Would your project duplicate what others are doing or forge a new path? What are the near- and long-term contributions?

Is your work a priority for the field? If so, who are your competitors, and what are your advantages?

COMPETITIVE PROPOSALS: KNOW YOUR FUNDER

WHO IS FUNDING THE TYPE OF WORK YOU WANT TO DO?

Your answers should guide the funding programs you target...

Who are the key federal, state, and foundation funders in your field?

What are their *current and future* funding priorities?

What are the funding trends in your field? Who is getting the money and why?

Are there any overlooked opportunities? Are there any programs designed to support researchers at your career stage?

COMPETITIVE PROPOSALS: KNOW YOUR FRAMING

HOW CAN YOU FRAME YOUR WORK TO INCREASE FUNDABILITY?

Your approach should increase your proposal competitiveness...

Fill a demonstrable gap in knowledge or services.

Propose something innovative and interesting to people in your field while addressing your funder's priorities.

Propose to do or produce something of value in a specified timeframe.

Show how your work will have a strong, timely, and measurable impact on the need, the field, and the funder priority.

PROJECT DESIGN:

DEVELOPING YOUR PROPOSAL

**PUTTING YOUR
BEST FOOT
FORWARD**

**GET ORGANIZED:
TIMELINES,
TOOLS & WRITING
TIPS**

**GATHER
FEEDBACK EARLY
& OFTEN**

PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD – TALKING TO THE PO

- Identify the right PO.
- Be respectful and professional in every interaction.
- Provide a concept paper or aims, if requested.
- Make contact early to show preparedness / seriousness.
- Request a consultation by email (for a phone call).
- Ask great questions and take notes!
- Spend as much time listening as talking.
- Always follow up with a thank you email – and summary of key takeaway points.
- Be thorough – always reference the call in any future communication.

REMEMBER:
You are building a REPUTATION and a RELATIONSHIP

GET ORGANIZED

When you are ready to begin the formal application process, take stock of all funder requirements.

To prepare for a competitive grant proposal:

- Make a checklist of all required application elements.

- Note required timelines and deadlines.

- Create a grant development plan, including a timeline.

- Gather required information.

- Draft proposal documents.

- Get feedback and refine documents.

- Submit grant well ahead of application deadline.

GET ORGANIZED – USE A TIMELINE

Sample timeline:

Draft a proposal development timeline, including key milestones.

Milestone	Responsibility	Date
Contact [insert] to Begin the Proposal Process		
Draft Project Description		
Draft Budget		
Draft Attachments		
Revise Documents		
Submit Drafts to Peer / External Reviewers		
Review Feedback		
Revise Documents		
Complete Routing Form (at least 2 weeks before deadline) [edit]		
Final Review and Revisions		
Submit Final Documents (at least 3 days before deadline) [edit]		
Grant Deadline		

GET ORGANIZED – READ ALL FUNDER MATERIALS

After reviewing all grantmaker guidance, assess and revise your project design.

Ask, Assess and Adjust:

- What are the funder's aims?
- How does your project accomplish these aims?

Note:

- Key elements to emphasize
- Keywords / buzzwords

GET ORGANIZED - CREATE A NARRATIVE OUTLINE

Referring to the relevant grantmaker materials (e.g., solicitation, guidance, examples), outline your proposal narrative.

Take note of:

- Required format

- Required elements

- Required order

- Strategic placement of content

- Review criteria

- Reviewer checklists, if available

How will you present your material so that reviewers find what they need and are inspired to fund your project?

WRITING THE APPLICATION

The elements of a grant proposal vary widely across funders.

A typical application package includes:
- Standard informational forms
- Abstract or summary
- Narrative description of proposed project
- Budget and narrative description of budget elements
- Documents describing applicant qualifications and resources
- Documents describing collaboration plans and agreements
- Attachments or appendices supporting project narrative

While the narrative project description is the heart of the proposal, note that other documents may also require significant time and energy.

WRITING TIPS

Grant format and structure are often strictly prescribed.

- Always check formatting requirements (e.g., font, margins) before you begin drafting, to avoid problems later.
- Structure your proposal transparently around the funder's required elements, even if the funder doesn't ask you to do this.
- Use sub-headings to make all elements visible.
- Remember that reviewers are working with a checklist: everything on their checklist should be easy to find.
- Remember that reviewers have many proposals to read. Make their lives easy!

Although it may be tempting to use a creative structure, in most cases grant proposals should be predictable and conventional.

WRITING THE APPLICATION

Grant writing is not like academic writing.

- Grant writing styles differ depending on the funder.
    - To determine style, find out who the reviewers will be and tailor your writing for them.
- Grant language should always be clear and straightforward.
    - Do not let the language get in the way of the content.
    - Do not make your language complex to attempt to sound knowledgeable.
    - Remember that reviewers are often tired: if your language is too complex, they may miss things or lose interest.
- Grant writing is persuasive writing.
    - Write to excite.
    - Balance selling and telling depending on the funder.

GOOD GRANT WRITING

Since reviewers tend to make decisions based on an emotional response – a connection – to your work, use clear and simple language to engage and explain.

- Put yourself in the mind of the reviewer.
- Use short, declarative sentences about what you will do.
- Write in active voice with strong verbs.
- Keep it simple and avoid language or explanations that are overly technical.

DON'T: The project will be administered by an interdisciplinary team of faculty who are well versed in the project methodology and fully support this work.

DO: An interdisciplinary team will manage the project with full support from the institution.

MAKING THE MOST OF FEEDBACK

WHO?

Mentors, Colleagues, Other Peers, Program Officers, Consultants

HOW?

Ask early, meet the deadlines you promise, be specific about what you want and when, and explain why you asked them specifically.

WHAT?

- Honest, objective, straight-forward feedback.
- Funder-specific or field-specific preferences and expectations.
- Content-oriented vs. stylistic or formatting-oriented comments.

WHEN?

- Concept stage.
- After first draft.
- Nearing final.

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MAKING THE MOST OF FEEDBACK

- Remember your intent/meaning does not matter if the reader thinks it meant something else.
- Beware of the reviewer who steers you toward something more aligned with his/her work.
- Carefully consider the scientific merit of the critiques and modify your descriptions to address misunderstandings or modify your approach to address true flaws.
- Be most attentive to criticisms presented by multiple reviewers.
- Ask questions if you don't understand the criticisms.
- Ask some reviewers to review your changes to confirm they sufficiently address the critiques.

REMEMBER:
It's your proposal—make sure you are happy with it.

RESOURCES:

EXAMPLES AND TOOLS

GRANT
NARRATIVE
BREAKDOWN

GRANTSEEKER
RESOURCES

HANOVER
RESOURCES

GRANT NARRATIVE BREAKDOWN

Strong narratives have similar core elements:

- Introduction

- Statement of the Problem

- Literature Review

- Conceptual Framework

- Hypotheses or Research Questions

- Methodology/Strategy

- Scope of Work

- Management Plan

- Staff and Institutional Qualifications

- Evaluation Plan

Note that each solicitation will require information to be presented in specific ways.

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The Introduction should bring the reader in to the world of your project and make them want to read the whole narrative.

Do:

- Spark the reader's interest.
- Orient the reader to your project and your narrative.
- Specify the project's overall goals.

Don't:

- Meander or digress.
- Include unnecessary background information.
- Make unsubstantiated claims about your project's impact.

The Introduction is your chance to get reviewers engaged and "on your side."

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Statement of the Problem lets the reader know why the project is worth doing.

Do:

- Concisely describe the problem you will solve or the question you will answer.
- Show that the problem or question is important.
- Point out the potential impact of solving this problem.
- Use data where necessary (especially for program grants).

Don't:

- Restate the information in the solicitation (they already know that).

The Statement of the Problem should inspire the reviewer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature Review should map the territory for the reader.

Do:

- Review what has been done to address the problem so far.
- Clearly delineate the gap you will fill.
- Show that you understand your field.
- Cover your bases in terms of important citations.

Don't:

- Omit key citations.
- Fail to address conflicting work.

**The Literature Review is your chance to show how well
you know your field: it should make the reviewer confident in you.**

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Conceptual Framework communicates your approach to the work.

Do:

- Identify the theories or concepts that will guide the project.
- Describe how they guide the project.
- Connect the theories or concepts to the work itself (e.g., via a logic model).

Don't:

- Be vague.
- Fail to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

**The Conceptual Framework should convince the reviewer
that you are taking the right approach to solving the problem.**

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AIMS, OBJECTIVES, OR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The project aims, objectives, or research questions show what the research will accomplish.

Do:

- Clearly state hypotheses and questions.
- Explain how testing these hypotheses and/or answering these questions will solve the stated problem and fill the identified gaps in the literature.

Don't:

- Use vague or confusing wording.
- Include hypotheses that are not fully testable and falsifiable.

These should ground and frame the proposed work.

TYPES OF OBJECTIVES

1. **Process objectives**—activities or tasks to be completed by a specific date.

    - *By the end of the project year, 10 healthcare providers will be trained in the American Academy of Pediatrics Immunization Practices and Procedures model.*

2. **Impact objectives**—benefits to end users that continue after the grant funding has ended – tells how you will change attitudes, knowledge or behavior in the short-term and describes the degree to which you expect this change.

    - *By the end of the project year, the parents participating in the education program will demonstrate an 80% increase in awareness of the benefits of immunizations.*

3. **Outcome objectives**—long-term implications of your program by describing the expected outcome for the community or stakeholders.

    - *By the end of the project year, we expect an 80% increase in the number of infants in the county with up-to-date immunizations.*

The Methodology/Strategy communicates the tools and strategies you will use to accomplish the work.

Do:

- Clearly describe your planned implementation methods.
- Include details for all procedures, work, and implementation protocols.
- Include enough detail so that the reader can judge feasibility and appropriateness.

Don't:

- Assume the reader knows what you're talking about.

The Methodology/Strategy should leave the reviewer confident in your project design.

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METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE PROJECT METHODOLOGY TABLE

Objectives	Activities	Outcomes

The Scope of Work communicates exactly what you will do.

Do:

- Describe exactly what will be done, including the sequence of the proposed activities and the anticipated outcomes and/or deliverables.
- Include all activities necessary for completing the project.
- Provide a viable schedule for carrying out the tasks (work plan).

Don't:

- Forget sufficient detail.

The Scope of Work should leave the reviewer confident that you've thought through the process and have a plan.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Management Plan communicates your structure for accomplishing the Scope of Work.

Do:

- Explain how you will manage the project.

- Indicate who will be responsible for each work component.

- Describe how each element of the project will be coordinated.

- Include a graphical organization chart where appropriate.

Don't:

- Be vague about responsibilities and management structure.

The Management Plan should assure the reviewer that you will be able to get the work done.

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MANAGEMENT PLAN

SAMPLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN TABLE

Key personnel (Title, Institution, Project FTE)	Project roles and responsibilities	Experience and capabilities

EVALUATION PLAN

The Evaluation Plan communicates how you will measure and ensure the project's success.

Do:

- Follow the funder's guidance regarding evaluation approach.
- Include formative and summative evaluation plans.
- Describe how you will use the evaluation to improve the project.
- Describe data collection and analysis instruments and procedures.
- Describe evaluator qualifications.

Don't:

- Provide an evaluation out of scale with the funder or the work.

The Evaluation Plan should make the reviewer feel confident that you have the necessary structures in place to evaluate the project.

EVALUATION PLAN

SAMPLE PROJECT EVALUATION PLAN TABLE

Performance Measures	Data Source & Timing	Responsible Staff	Data Analysis Method

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PROJECT BUDGET

The budget shows the funder how you will spend money to accomplish the proposed project.

Tips for Budget development:

- Gather estimates, quotes, and documentation early in the process. Avoid cost surprises!

- Track all revenue and expenses to make sure you will have to resources to do what you need to do.

- Use an internal spreadsheet to "tinker" with the budget until it is final.

- When the budget is final, "translate" it to the funder's required forms.

PROJECT BUDGET

The Budget Narrative justifies the listed budget amounts and shows how each budget item will help accomplish the project.

Tips for Budget Narrative development:

- Show a clear method of calculation for each item.

- Link each item back to grant activities and grantmaker goals.

- Use the same terminology that you used in the project narrative.

- A table can make the information easier to digest, even in the budget narrative.

The budget narrative must be consistent with the project narrative.

Be specific in the Budget Narrative!

Vague: The University will subcontract with a program evaluation company. Funding is requested at $25,000.

Specific: The University will contract with an independent professional evaluation service to conduct a rigorous program evaluation to verify impact and results as outlined in the Evaluation Plan. This cost is estimated at $100/hour and includes 200 hours of work plus $5,000 in travel costs associated with two site visits during the grant term. Total: $25,000.

After each element of the proposal is complete, assemble the final package.

- Review the package as a whole:
  - Is it internally consistent?
  - Does it follow all funder guidelines?
  - Will a reviewer be able to find what they need in the package?
  - Will a reviewer who doesn't know you, your institution, or your work need any additional information to understand your project?

- Double check to make sure the package is complete.

- Obtain internal approval for submission.

- Submit the package **before the final moment** if possible.

QUESTIONS?

GRANTSEEKER RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Resources for finding grant opportunities:

- Grants.gov is a clearinghouse for information on federal grants.
- Funder databases like NSF Award Search, NIH RePORTER, and the NEH Funded Projects Query Form are good resources for information on previous funding and trends.
- The US Department of Education Grants Forecast provides information on upcoming DoE competitions (note that it is not always up to date).
- Funding Institutional provides a database of public and private sponsors.
- Simple Google searches for keywords can often uncover private funding sources, particularly corporate funding.

Resources for proposal development:

- The **National Organization for Research Development Professionals (NORDP)** maintains a <u>Writing a Grant 101</u> page, which includes links to many useful guides, as well as a more general <u>Resources</u> page.
- The **Foundation Center** provides an <u>Introduction to Proposal Writing</u> course, focused more on private grants.
- The **NSF** <u>Proposal and Award Policy and Procedures Guide</u> is indispensable.
- The **University of Wisconsin – Extension Program Development and Evaluation Unit** maintains a <u>Logic Model site</u>, including templates and development guides.
- For private grants, the **W.K. Kellogg Foundation** <u>Logic Model Development Guide</u> is a key resource.

Resources for program evaluation:

- The Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE) maintains a list of <u>evaluation planning resources</u>.
- The **Institute of Museum and Library Services** also provides a list of <u>evaluation resources</u>.
- The **US Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences (IES)** maintains the <u>What Works Clearinghouse</u>, which includes specific standards that apply to many DoE-funded grant evaluations.
- The **National Organization for Research Development Professionals (NORDP)** maintains a <u>list of program evaluators</u>.
- The **American Evaluation Association** maintains a <u>database of member evaluators</u>.

HANOVER RESOURCES

HOW HANOVER CAN HELP WITH THE GRANT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:

- Concept development and funder outreach support

- Proposal planning guides with project planning questions and proposal development timeline

- Project narrative templates with section headings and prompts for required and competitive content

- Proposal development and revision

- Technical proposal review

- Each project type has specific requirements for preparation and lead time.

FACULTY PROPOSAL SUPPORT

WHAT WE HEAR

↗ Institutions seek to improve the **quality and competitiveness** of their proposals.

↗ **Consultation, editing, and writing support** from an external expert can make all the difference in boosting submission quality.

↗ Converging deadlines and limited internal resources often create **bottlenecks for proposal support**, leaving some proposals neglected.

HANOVER'S APPROACH

PROPOSAL REVIEW
Critique of proposal content focused on compliance and alignment with the funding mechanism and improving grantsmanship aspects of the proposal.

PROPOSAL REVISION
Editing and revision of proposals for a polished final draft, with an eye toward funder compliance, grantsmanship, style/presentation, and overall competitiveness.

STRATEGIC CONSULTS
Consultation to ensure alignment with funding mechanism and to evaluate key concerns relating to project competitiveness.

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PROPOSAL SUPPORT PROCESS

CONTENT DIRECTOR

Project manager and team facilitator

GRANTS CONSULTANT

Expert on grant writing and funding mechanisms

SCOPING

Content Director:
- Evaluates needs of the PI and identifies best-fit Grants Consultant to support the proposal
- Learns key questions and areas of concern from PI

Grants Consultant:
- As needed, is available to consult with the PI in advance of the review

PROPOSAL REVIEW OR REVISION

Content Director:
- Delivers proposal review or revision documents to the PI or project team

Grants Consultant:
- Provides a proposal review or revision depending on scope requested, with an eye toward funder compliance, quality, and grantsmanship
- Provides margin comments and key recommendations for Proposal Reviews
- Provides documents with tracked changes for Proposal Revisions

DEBRIEF

Content Director:
- Coordinates and facilitates conference call with PI and the Grants Consultant

Grants Consultant:
- Debriefs with the PI to review key recommendations and/or changes made to the proposal
- Addresses outstanding questions and comments from the PI

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