

Book Review

Successful Grant Writing. Strategies for Health and Human Service Professionals (3rd ed.)

Laura N. Gitlin and Kevin J. Lyons

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As university research administrators, we sometimes wonder why the grant proposal submission process, which is relatively straightforward and about which faculty members seek support, can be so problematic for accomplished researchers. In this context, the third edition of this popular book by Laura Gitlin and Kevin Lyons provides insights not only into the development of a grant proposal, but how this activity fits within faculty members' career progression in the university setting.

Both authors are highly qualified scholars, researchers, and administrators with Thomas Jefferson University's Jefferson College of Health Professions. Dr. Gitlin, founding director of the Center for Applied Research on Aging and Health, has led or collaborated on over \$25 million in funded projects, published widely in books and peer-reviewed journals, and serves on grant review panels. Dr. Lyons, Associate Dean of the Jefferson Colleges of Health Professions and of Graduate Studies, has likewise served on many advisory boards and review panels, and consults on research development. Therefore, both are appropriate sources of advice on grant writing and on tracking the national trends that affect success in the external funding arena.

The new edition builds on the grant-writing "how-tos" of previous editions. However, chapters have been re-organized to accommodate new and expanded information on budget development and management, cross-disciplinary and translational research, and post-award administration. Thus, this book is far more than a manual for achieving grant-writing success. Many of the issues addressed in other grant-writing publications, such as how to find an appropriate funder, details of the writing process, and crafting a budget appropriate to a funding request, are presented. In addition, the grant proposal development

process is framed as just one component in developing a successful academic career. The authors discuss the many functions, in addition to receiving funding, which are served in writing a grant proposal. The proposed model for a “Research Career Trajectory” takes the faculty member through a four-stage process (*novice*, *intermediate*, *advanced*, and *expert*) with appropriate levels of activities that might occur at each stage. For example, a *novice* will identify an area of research focus, refine that area at the *intermediate* stage; as an *advanced* researcher actively engage in broadening the research scope; and as an *expert* actively engage in a larger-scale program. Similarly, the *novice* might apply for small intramural research support for a pilot study; request funds at the *intermediate* level from professional associations or small foundations; submit proposals to larger foundations and small grants mechanisms in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as an *advanced* researcher; and finally seek large National Science Foundation (NSF) or NIH grants at the *expert* stage of his or her career.

The reader explores many aspects of the grants process through seven major sections. The first, “Getting Started”, presents the story of a new assistant professor who has a project she would like to initiate but for which there are few resources. The same thread is picked up at various stages throughout the book as this researcher finds an appropriate funding source and collaborators and develops a proposal. Because the target audience, health and human service professionals, often does not have training in basic grant-writing skills, the book proceeds in stepwise fashion. As part of “Getting Started” we learn how to fit grant writing into overall career goals, the process of becoming familiar with funders, how to determine if a particular grant program is right for the proposed research, and how to modify and expand an idea so that it is appropriate for a particular funding source.

Part 2 describes the writing process and includes the most frequently required sections of several different proposal types with tips on how to organize the writing process and avoid writer’s block. The reader is provided with a detailed blueprint for writing a concept paper and the importance of doing a needs assessment and pilot studies. Also covered in this section are such supportive elements as letters of support and formal written agreements between collaborators. Part 3 gives instruction on and examples of developing a budget and justification. Budgetary information on, for example, the use of a modular budget by the NIH, is provided.

Part 4 moves from an applied approach to grant writing to a more theoretical discussion of different models of proposal development. According to the authors, simple frameworks include the *individual* model (one researcher working alone) or a *consultative* arrangement (one junior faculty member mentored by one or more individuals who are more experienced or have specific skills required for the project). More complex models described are *cooperative* interactions, in which those from different disciplines or with different skill sets work on a common project, each applying their own discipline to one aspect of a problem. The *collaborative* model requires a more integrated team approach characterized by cooperative idea development and problem solving. Because funding agencies now encourage and are more likely to fund multidisciplinary projects, this section is very important to understanding how to put a team together and nurture that interaction.

Part 5 takes the reader back to the practical, with a discussion of what the grant writer needs to know about the institution’s rules pertaining to proposals and the electronic submission process. Part 6 focuses on the proposal review, including how different funders conduct the review process and whether and how to respond to a grant review. This section ends with an example of a proposal submission and its review. The book concludes with a section on grants management issues post-award.

Another strength of the book is the inclusion of text boxes that provide information on, for example, “Skills of Funded Veteran Researchers” (p. 27) and “Barriers to Conducting Funded Research” (p. 29).

The book is very easy to follow and gives basic information applicable not only to health and human services faculty but also to other disciplines. Although of some interest to those outside the academic setting, the information presented is most applicable to universities and their faculty. Likewise, although it may not be of much help to experienced researchers, it is a good resource for mentors who may not remember the grant submission learning curve they experienced early in their careers.

As a reader, I did identify a number of small editing errors; the book could have used one more round of proofing to locate disconnects between the text descriptors, summary text boxes, and figures. It is always difficult to decide on the appropriate order in which to present topics, especially in a major revision for a new edition. I also found that the more theoretical discussion of collaborative models broke up the stepwise description of proposal development. This section would be more appropriate in the initial "Getting Started" section or at the back as an appendix. There was also notable repetition of concepts throughout the book, with a description of the same points and skills across several chapters. Although distracting to a reader digesting the book from cover to cover, this is not necessarily a bad approach if the book is to be used as a reference for specific topics (e.g. how to write letters of support).

Several aspects of this book make it an excellent resource for research administrators. For those of us who conduct proposal development workshops, it provides a great framework for presenting important information to faculty members, and numerous places appropriate to inserting rules and resources for each individual organization. It also highlights the role of the university research administrator in many sections, with suggestions and/or recommendations to the reader to consult their university's research or sponsored programs office at numerous points in the proposal development process. By providing an overall description of how writing and submitting grant proposals fits with faculty members' many other career obligations, it provides a perspective on this group's professional life. In providing research administrators a chance to stand in faculty members' shoes, the authors help bridge the gap between the different professional cultures.

This book will be a valuable addition to the bookshelves of research administrators, health and human services professionals, junior faculty members from a variety of disciplines, and those who mentor early career researchers.

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