

Careers

10 Ways to Help You Score Funding

The following article summarizes one of the topic discussions held during the Committee for Professional Opportunities for Women (CPOW)-sponsored Career Roundtable Luncheon at the 54th Annual Meeting in San Francisco. During these sessions, graduate students, postdocs and early career attendees lunch with seasoned faculty and pick their brains about negotiating the tricky business of establishing a research career.

A popular topic was grant writing: how to get started, what to include in the proposal, who to ask for help with writing a first grant. Moderators offered some helpful advice, including ten things you can do to get that grant money.

1. **Have a good idea.** The first step to getting funding to do what you want to do is to know what you want to do. Convincing someone to give you money to do something you're passionate about is easier than asking for money because you have to. Your excitement and passion for your pet project will shine through in your proposal. You will also be more persistent about getting funding because you're anxious to get started on a project you can sink your teeth into.
2. **Do your research.** Generate plenty of preliminary data. Give your audience enough cold, hard facts to convince them that your project needs funding. Don't bog them down with science—the idea is to get funding, not to present a scientific treatise like the one you published in *Biophysical Jour-*

nal last month. If reviewers do ask for more data, provide it. No matter how innovative your work is, it won't gain funding if there isn't enough data to support it.

3. **Read up.** Read all sorts of grant proposals—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Note what elements about the proposals that got funding made them successful, and use the same tactics in your own proposal. Likewise, critique the failures to find out what specifically about them turned off their readers. Check your own proposal to make sure you've avoided all such methods. Ask your mentor to help you gain access to grants that were officially funded or not, or check some out on your own—NIH or any university are great places to start looking.
4. **Know your audience.** Know what resources are available to you before you even start writing. Sending proposals to places likely to fund is more efficient than sending proposals out everywhere under the sun. The only way to know which places are looking to fund your type of proposal is to investigate. A targeted approach can only help your case. You may just find the perfect match.
5. **Clarity is key.** Express your idea straightforwardly. Don't make your readers untangle the science to figure out what your project is. Grant proposals are designed to get you money, not to list every nuance of the science. Explain the science sufficiently to portray the general idea and why you believe the project should be funded, but err on the side of simplicity. The people reading your grant proposal read dozens of proposals a day, so make sure yours is clear and to the point.

6. **Write piece by piece.** Tackle a page a day, and the grant proposal will magically become more manageable. Spend time proofreading. Tighten the writing for clarity and readability. Tailor the layout so it becomes not only aesthetically pleasing but also structured for navigational ease.
7. **Avoid stupid mistakes.** Grant readers don't want to read proposals littered with misspellings and badly composed sentences. Mistakes like these can make the difference between a good grant and a funded grant. To make sure yours is the latter, ask your proofreaders to comb your work for these small but powerful errors.
8. **Enlist proofreaders.** Get both your labmates and your advisors to read your proposal; the diverse perspectives will give you more meaty feedback to approach revisions on multiple levels. Comments from your peers will be different than comments from your mentors, but no less valuable. Your proofreaders should be people you trust, since the goal is to get honest, constructive criticism. Friends in other departments make perfect proofreaders.
9. **Do a good job.** Grant proposals aren't something you can dash off in a few minutes and expect money to appear on your doorstep. Each section of your proposal should be clearly thought through, clearly outlined, and clearly communicated. The best way to do this is to spend the time doing it.
10. **Practice makes perfect.** Write grant proposals at every level of your career, and write a lot of them. With each round of grant proposals you write, it will get easier. Reviewers are less strin-

gent with applicants earlier in their careers, so get started writing grants as a grad student. By the time you reach a faculty-level research career, you'll be a wiz at it, and you'll have funding under your belt to prove it. The more prolific you are with your grant proposals, the greater your chances of getting funding. The sooner you get going, the sooner you get the money to do what you want to do!

India Opportunities



The Early Careers Committee hosted a panel called *Biosciences in India: Directions, Challenges and Opportunities* at the 54th Annual Meeting to help shed light on common questions posed by postdocs from the US and Europe as they look at In-

dia as a possible destination for academic or industry careers, and to further illustrate collaborative research opportunities with India. Panelists *Jyotsna Dhawan* of the Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine, *Sudipta Maiti* of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, and *Mrinalini Puranik* of the National Centre for Biological Sciences emphasized India's burgeoning resources in the way of funding, facilities, and initiatives for young scientists.

For scientists at all stages of considering a career in India—from those thinking about it as a remote possibility to those weighing the pros and cons to those packing their bags for Mumbai—panelists recommended building relationships with faculty in India and keeping this communication open every step of the way. The faculty is approachable and very willing to answer questions. For more information, visit www.indiabio-science.org.