Making Proposal Writing an Affirming Adventure for Faculty: Inspiring Innovation

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No institution can survive exclusively on tuition dollars. Endowed funds, gifts from donors, and monies from outside agencies are crucial to support the academy. Faculty often must also seek monies outside of the institution to support high-quality research, curricular development, and assessment. Writing a successful grant proposal is a powerfully affirming experience for faculty. Receiving a grant provides recognition of the quality of the work, the resources needed to carry out the project, and the motivation to complete and disseminate the project. Yet many faculty in the sciences and mathematics never submit a single grant proposal. This chapter will address some reasons this is true and give examples of ways to overcome the barriers.

Unsuccessful grant writing can be very discouraging. Grant writing takes tremendous amounts of time, which, if the grant is not funded, often appears to be unappreciated by the institution. For grant proposals to be competitive and successful, the preparation of proposals by faculty must be regarded as a positive developmental experience rather than an onerous obligation to satisfy some institutional expectation. Thus, proposal development and writing must be undertaken within the context of a supportive community of scholars and administrators and be recognized by administrators (including department chairs and campus tenure and promotion committees) as scholarship, whether or not funding is approved. Hope College and Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC), while different types of institutions, have both managed to make proposal writing part of their culture. This has been accomplished with little support from the development office, with full teaching loads, and without a formal requirement that faculty must write grants. What it does take is a supportive administration that empowers the faculty to pursue their dreams.

Hope College is a distinguished liberal arts college in western Michigan enrolling 3,000 students. Hope is one of only 10 undergraduate institutions with an NSF Award for Integration of Research and Education and the only undergraduate institution in the nation with six active NSF Research Experiences for Undergraduates Site Awards. About 36% of all students enrolling at Hope College have an interest in science and mathematics, and 32% of all graduating students major in these disciplines. Immediately upon graduation, 22% of science/mathematics majors enter graduate school. There are 30 tenured and 18 tenure-track faculty in the sciences and mathematics. The typical workload is 12 credits/semester, where contact hours equal faculty credit hours for both lecture and lab. Science division faculty currently have 19 active NSF grants totaling $3,586,250.

TAMU-CC is a Hispanic-serving urban university on the South Texas Gulf Coast enrolling 8,100 students (38% Hispanic, 60% women). TAMU-CC was ranked the top public regional university in Texas by *U.S. News and World Report* in its 1998, 1999, and 2001 editions of *America's Best Colleges.* The College of Science and Technology was recognized in 2001 by Minority Access, Inc., as a National Role Model Institution in recognition of its success in recruiting, retaining, and graduating minority student researchers and in 2003 by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board as a STAR Award recipient for its exceptional contribution of *College's Pathways to Success in Science* toward *Closing the Gaps: A Texas State Initiative.* There are 136 faculty members in the College of Science and Technology, including adjuncts. The typical workload is 12 workload credits/semester, where a lecture typically counts as 3 credits and a 2-hour lab typically counts as 1.3 credits. There are 65 active grants totaling $17 million among the faculty.

Both institutions have found ways to overcome many of the commonly identified barriers to proposal writing. More importantly, both institutions have been able to do so in spite of the fact that neither is rich in resources or release-time for faculty.

Participants in our session at the CCLI conference were asked to identify barriers to proposal writing. When asked why faculty do not write grants, one typically hears, "I would if only..." The most common "if only..." items include (listed in order of priority) the following:

- **Time:** If only I had more time—time for developing ideas, writing proposals, and implementing projects.
- **Isolation**: If only I were not so isolated. I have no or few collaborators and no knowledge of the types of programs and sources available for funding.
- **Support:** If only my institution affirmed rather than discouraged grant-writing efforts. It is frustrating to have an idea and then have the administration discourage it because of perceived difficulties in providing matching funds. It is frustrating to be told that the space necessary to carry out the project just isn't available. It is frustrating to spend all of the time and energy necessary to write a good grant proposal, only to have it turned down and then receive no recognition for my efforts.
- **Help:** If only there was someone who could help me learn how to write a good proposal and help me see how to take a good idea that works well at my institution and turn it into an idea that has national impact and therefore is competitive for funding.
- **Recognition:** If only my institution recognized the grant monies I receive. I realize the amount of monies may be small, yet they are still important to my work as a faculty member and should be acknowledged rather than dismissed.

The remainder of this chapter will look at each of these barriers and discuss how Hope College and TAMU-CC have found ways to overcome them. At the end, we will give suggestions of how to implement these ideas at your institution.

Time

As at almost all colleges and universities, faculty at Hope College and TAMU-CC work long hours. Writing grants is something accomplished in addition to (not in spite of) teaching and research. Yet, many faculty find the time to do

it. Part of the reason is that faculty are willing to "suck it up." Knowing that their efforts will be recognized even if the grant is unfunded encourages faculty to put in the necessary extra hours. However, there are ways that the institution helps faculty find this time. For example, faculty are often given fewer preparations (albeit not fewer courses) and/or no new preparations in a semester when a grant proposal is due. Faculty start writing proposals in the summer, particularly for grants due in the fall semester. Grant proposals that support a group of faculty are often written as a group, with a designated lead author. To find time to carry out the project once it is funded, faculty typically write in monies to hire part-time instructors. These part-time monies allow faculty to buy out one or two courses per year. Matching release time may also be granted during the academic year, allowing available salaries to be used in the summer by the faculty member. Both Hope College and TAMU-CC have internal endowed faculty research funds. These funds provide small amounts of money that can be used for planning grants or initial stages of the work.

Isolation

Hope College and TAMU-CC deal with the problem of isolation by encouraging faculty to network both on and off campus. Internal travel funds for one national or regional conference per faculty member are provided, and faculty members are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity. The Dean of the Science Division at Hope College, Jim Gentile, provides money once a month for lunch for all interested faculty. This allows faculty to come together and discuss mutual concerns and interests, some of which then develop into grant proposals. For example, the science division at Hope spent almost two years discussing a new general education program. These informal discussions resulted in two NSF grants that funded four new general education courses. Dean Gentile has also incorporated the responsibility of publicizing funding opportunities into the job description of one of his staff. This individual is charged with going to conferences, becoming part of listservs, and reading websites to remain current on funding opportunities in mathematics and science. She then distributes this information to potentially interested faculty. At TAMU-CC, grant opportunities are publicized through a variety of listservs posted by administrators and faculty. Administrators and/or

faculty have brought together groups who might be interested in particular initiatives to encourage submissions and provide support.

Support

Both Hope College and TAMU-CC have a culture of grantmanship that begins with the dean. Dean Gentile and Dean Marinez are themselves active grant writers. They understand the amount of effort it takes to write a proposal and let faculty know that it is appreciated. As with the faculty, proposal writing takes place in addition to (not in spite of) their other job responsibilities. By bringing in monies for the science division, the deans are supplementing institutional monies, thereby making it easier to find ways to provide matching funds, extra travel monies, or extra student research stipends. Dean Gentile at Hope College often writes grants to help provide equipment or new faculty startup funds. This allows faculty to request only part of the monies necessary for expensive equipment in their own proposals. Hope College also has several endowed faculty development and student research funds, often given in memory of a long-term faculty member. These endowed funds typically provide the "seed money" to start a project, increasing the probability of a successful proposal. TAMU-CC has benefited from a Texas A&M system-wide partnership facilitated by the TEES (Texas Engineering Experiment Station), which has supported working groups who identify needs and develop grants. TEES provides not only grant-writing support but also assistance during startup, particularly for large grants.

Both Hope College and TAMU-CC have a history of allowing faculty a great deal of freedom. The culture is one of encouragement to pursue dreams, with the understanding that it is the individual faculty member who must provide the bulk of the work to make that dream happen. Rather than an atmosphere of "we can't," there is an atmosphere of "why not" or "let's find a way." This culture again begins with the dean, carries down to the department chairs, and is a part of the faculty ethos. While this means that there are often multiple directions and initiatives within a single department, it also means that faculty are happy pursuing ideas that they own. There is little to no sense of being forced to write grants to give reality to someone else's vision. Rather, faculty are willing to write grants because this helps provide the resources to make their own dreams come true.

This ethos is conveyed at the on-campus interview when hiring new faculty. A culture of grant writing must begin at hiring, be modeled by the existing faculty, and supported by the dean.

Help with Grant Writing

Faculty at both Hope College and TAMU-CC are hired with the expectation of grant writing and involving undergraduates in research. New faculty, mid-career faculty, and senior faculty write grants, providing a culture of grantmanship across the division. As with the dean, chairs of departments are active grant writers. This both provides a role model and makes it easier to evaluate grant-writing activities. Note, however, that neither Hope College nor TAMU-CC has a grants writer in the development or research office. The support that is provided comes from the office of the dean, the chairs of the departments, and the community of faculty within the division. At TAMU-CC, the recent addition of a Vice President for Research has expanded the administrative support system, especially with respect to budgeting. The TEES has provided the TAMU-CC College of Science and Technology grant-writing support for major initiatives, which has stimulated overall grant writing.

Help with grant writing at Hope College and TAMU-CC comes primarily from networking both externally and internally. Discussions that take place at conferences or in the departmental hallways often lead to future funding ideas. Hope College and TAMU-CC have the tradition of sending more than one faculty member and, where appropriate, undergraduate students to the same conference. Hearing new ideas and being able to immediately discuss them with another faculty member from the same institution increases the likelihood that this idea will mature into a grant proposal. This sense of community and culture of grant writing also makes it easier for faculty who are writing their first grant proposal. There is always someone "just down the hall" who is willing to critique a proposal or help with FastLane. This includes faculty outside of one's own department. In fact, it is often more valuable to have someone unfamiliar with the project read the proposal because they are better able to critique the clarity of the writing. Faculty throughout the college make their grant proposals and reviews available to others. This is true of both funded and unfunded proposals. Reading someone's unfunded proposal and reviews often

provides the right information to make one's own submission more successful. TAMU-CC also has a tradition of establishing partnerships with other system universities and other universities in the state and outside of Texas to provide both faculty networking opportunities and student experiences.

Recognition

Hope College and TAMU-CC provide recognition of grant-writing activities, even if the grant is not funded. Both institutions count grant writing as an appropriate scholarly activity that is recognized in yearly evaluation as well as tenure and promotion decisions. Again, this recognition does not depend on actually receiving the grant. Such an atmosphere encourages grant writing because there is not a sense of wasted time for those that are not funded. This recognition is also visibly supported in other ways. The dean at Hope College provides gift certificates to a local restaurant for everyone who submits a proposal. TAMU-CC has a "best scholar of the year" award that recognizes grant writing as a valuable part of scholarship.

How to Get Started if You Are an Administrator

Establishing a culture of grant writing starts with the administration, particularly the individual most directly responsible for the sciences. The first step begins with writing grants yourself. Doing so gives you an understanding of and basis for evaluating the effort involved, allows you to serve as a role model for the faculty, and provides necessary seed money to support faculty and institutional projects.

The second step is to discuss grant writing with the chairs, existing faculty, and new faculty hires. Make sure that faculty understand that this is an activity that is supported and expected.

The third step is to encourage faculty ideas. Cultivate an atmosphere of "let's see what we can do" rather than "I don't see how that can happen" when faculty bring you good ideas. Make sure that you work with faculty, neither against them nor without them. You need to encourage while not becoming trapped into finding ways to provide the work for the faculty member. Be both realistic and creative when finding ways to provide resources. Even though you probably can't provide everything the faculty member wants, you can

often provide enough to adequately support the project if it is funded. Be willing to provide release time as part of the grant. Look at funding from regional sources, or facilities underused by other parts of the campus, or collaborations with other institutions or companies as ways to find the resources needed.

The fourth step is to provide support for grant writing from your office. Ideally, this is someone who reports to your office, who has an understanding of the types of scholarship and projects taking place in your science and mathematics departments, and who goes to conferences and participates in listservs to discover grant-writing opportunities. Selectively advertising opportunities to potentially interested individuals is more effective than mass emails that send the information out to all faculty. The key thing is that the individual knows the needs and the faculty to more directly encourage submissions. This individual should also keep copies of proposals submitted and the reviews, regardless of whether they are funded. These can then be made available to faculty who are just beginning to write proposals.

The fifth step is to provide public recognition for grant writing. Faculty like to be appreciated and are much more likely to write proposals if they know this activity is valued. This can be done, for example, by distributing information on the number of grants submitted per department to the faculty and higher administration, or by providing a small token of appreciation such as dinner at a local restaurant, or by having a "grant writing" celebration. Just announcing the accomplishments in a weekly or monthly electronic newsletter and offering congratulations goes a long way.

How to Get Started if You Are a Faculty Member

Having a supportive administration is a huge asset. However, even if this is not true at your institution, there are still ways to make grant writing successful for yourself and/or your department. The first step is to dream—to have a vision. What do you want to accomplish in terms of scholarship? How does that fit into your personal, departmental, and institutional goals? What are ways to connect your vision to your current research or teaching or service activities?

The second step is to network. Go to conferences, look for workshops on grant writing, and talk to faculty in your own department and others. Many disciplinary conferences

include grant-writing workshops as do organizations such as the Council for Undergraduate Research.

The third step is to be aggressive in seeking help for grant writing. Look for sources for funding that are possibilities for your project. Talk to people in your development office or research office. Find people who are doing similar activities (but perhaps in a different discipline) and see where they received funding. These may be people at your institution or someone you met at a conference or someone you found on the Internet. Once you've identified people, send them an email or, if they are local, take them to lunch. Ask for copies of their proposal and seek advice.

The fourth and most important step is to just do it. None of us have enough time or resources to accomplish everything we wish. What gets done is what we spend the time and energy doing. If you don't get funded, resubmit. Most proposals are eventually funded. Persistence often pays.

All institutions can establish a culture of grant writing. It does not happen overnight. But both HOPE and TAMU-CC had a vision of what could be accomplished and were not deterred by the barriers they encountered. They both started out small and persisted. While aggressive leadership is a key ingredient, faculty can start the process and demonstrate to the administration why they should support their efforts. It is possible to cultivate a culture of grantmanship at your institution as long as you start where you are, move forward, and persist. Success does breed success.