Lab Management
Linda Jones
University of Arkansas—Fayetteville

No Money? Poppycock!

As lab directors, we often undertake exciting projects such as redesigning a lab, obtaining new equipment, or developing interactive multimedia modules. Unfortunately, more times than not, we do not have adequate funding in our university budgets to follow through on our projects. But even more unfortunate than that, some abandon thoughts of undertaking their proposed ideas altogether because they believe that they will never be able to obtain additional funds. Poppycock! There is money available. Write a grant!

"Grant writing is an art at which virtually anyone can succeed, given the tools and knowledge necessary to complete the task."

Admittedly, many of us experience anxiety upon hearing the words "write a grant," but fortunately, there is no need to worry. Grant writing is fun and educational and can be very rewarding if the grant is written correctly. Grant writing is an art at which virtually anyone can succeed, given the tools and knowledge necessary to complete the task. For guidance, simply follow these basic but important steps in the grant writing process and you will soon have successfully funded projects.

Take a Grant Writing Workshop

Perhaps the best starting point for anyone whose future plans require extra funding is a grant writing workshop. It does not have to be a workshop geared towards higher education or language learning in particular. I attended a community workshop designed to assist local non-profit organizations and businesses with grant writing. Though not specifically education oriented, this workshop proved to be very beneficial for me as well as other educators since it offered the basics sufficient for writing a successful grant.

Define Your Project

Before you begin to write your proposal, make sure that you have a solid idea in mind. For example, let us say that your department wishes to incorporate interactive videodisc technology into your language courses. In order to develop this project, strongly consider what you have done with this technology in the past and then decide what goals you wish

to attain and why you need funding to meet these goals. If you have used interactive videodisc technology successfully but on a limited basis and wish to expand this technology, you may now need to purchase additional equipment. The same scenario would hold true with the purchase of a new language lab or any other endeavor requiring extra funds. It is important to design a new project but you will want to relay to the grant reader what it is that you have previously accomplished and what the problem is that you now wish to resolve.

Find an Appropriate Funding Source

Funding is available at the college, university, local, state, regional and federal levels. Your local research and sponsored programs office should have a large file of funding agencies available for you. Libraries and even the Internet are also good resources for finding funding sources. Remember that grant agencies will fund projects based on many considerations. First and foremost is your proposal itself. But they also consider your geographical location, the enrollment at your university, the alumni, your statement of need, etc. Know your potential funding source before you select it; understand what the source is willing to fund and whether or not your proposal fits within the scope of its program.

Also, use their "key words," those words which they use to describe particular sections or ideas they are interested in, and, above all, communicate with the agency from the beginning until the end of the grant process.

Seek Support from your Colleagues

During the entire grant process involve other people, particularly those who will be affected by the proposed project. Don't leave them in the dark. Get their opinions and input early on since they will be committed to carrying out the goals of your project. Also, don't be afraid to ask for their assistance through letters of support. Equally important, get input from those who have successfully written grant proposals.

Do a Literature Search

Prove to the funding agency and to your colleagues that you are knowledgeable, thorough, and committed to your proposed project. Research what has been tried in the past and talk with colleagues who have approached a situation similar to yours.

Write the Proposal

Now time to move on to the actual grant writing process. Several important "golden rules" should be remembered as you write your proposal:

1) Keep the proposal simple, clear, and concise. Always remember that the funding agency may have absolutely nothing to do with language teaching or even technology for that matter. Therefore, never assume that they will understand a given concept. Carefully and simply define the problem to them as you write your grant and use their key words where possible to bring more familiarity to the proposal. And above all, leave out the fat! Avoid going on and on about your project; keep it simple and straightforward.

2) Make sure that the visual design of your grant is attractive to the eye. As simplistic as this may sound, good word processing skills such as aligning tabs, maintaining margins and font sizes are very important and show care and effort on your part in preparing your proposal.

3) Convince the funding agency that your project will be successful. Literally sell your product to the agency and always be positive. Also, always anticipate what the funding agency will want to know. Remember that you are inviting the funding agency to invest in your endeavor.

4) Be sure that your grant proposal flows logically from one section to the next. You will want your proposal to be "reader friendly."

Simple Steps in Grant Writing

Though many funding agencies often have their own designs in mind, the following outline is very useful for any grant proposal you write.

"Libraries and the Internet are good resources for finding funding sources."

1) Title page—Give the name of your proposal and identify yourself.

2) Project summary or abstract—Write a mini-condensed version of the proposal, approximately 150 words in length. This part should be written last. The abstract is usually read by individuals who determine where the proposal should be sent for consideration.

3) Table of contents—Prepare an outline of your grant.

4) Introduction—Introduce yourself to the funding source. Show them that your proposal fits into their funding guidelines. Include a fairly concise statement regarding the research topic or project you wish to complete and the strategies you will pursue. Also, let them know what it is about your project that makes it deserving of funds.

5) Statement of need—Convince the funding agency that there is a real need or problem and why. Including relevant research to date and a discussion of your previous accomplishments.

6) Description of project—State what you propose to do. In other words, list your project goals and objectives and what you hope to accomplish.

7) Project methodology—Describe how you plan to carry out your stated goals and objectives. Let the reader know how you plan to accomplish your project.

8) Implementation schedule—Give the agency an agenda, an outline of the steps you will take in your proposed project and the time span or dates for each event.

9) Project evaluation—Give the reader an indication of how you will evaluate the success of your project.

10) Project implications and relevance—Indicate who will be effected by this project and how much of an impact it will make on the individuals involved. Also indicate how your project results will be disseminated to others.

11) Conclusion—Here is your last chance, the final stretch. At this point you want to end on a powerful note. Strongly summarize your project and reinforce your beliefs in why it should be funded. Make it good!

12) Budget request and justification—Justify everything that you include in your budget. The agency wants to know what they are paying for and why.

13) Bibliography—List all relevant articles and books you consulted while preparing your grant.

14) Letters of support—Include letters from colleagues who fully support your proposed project and who may also become participants once the proposal is funded.

Grant writing is fun! In fact, it is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. You have all the different pieces you need in many different shapes. The goal is to place these pieces together in a logical manner to create a pleasing design. Therefore, you do not have to strictly follow the outline I have suggested, but all the pieces should be placed somewhere, somehow to create a successful proposal. Most importantly, believe in your project and convey your positive energies to the funding source.

Success is measured, of course, by whether you obtain the grant or not. However, remember that ase in baseball where a .300 batting average is very good, getting funded in three out of ten attempts also is very good. Keep trying!

Good luck! ■

Linda Jones is the Director of the Language Learning Center at the University of Arkansas—Fayetteville.