

# Establishing an Externally Funded Research Program

Deep thoughts by Jack Handy aka Ramu Ramachandran

## Funding opportunities:

- RSS feeds from granting agencies (NSF, NIH, DoE, DoD, USDA, ...)
- Grants.gov
- Genius/SMARTS Database (sign up at <http://www.infoed.org/GeniusSearch/genius.asp>)

## Contact Grant Program Officer for Proposal Success:

If you need some tips on how to prepare to contact a program officer, please e-mail me at [ramu@latech.edu](mailto:ramu@latech.edu).

## Resources for proposal preparation:

- Over time, I have collected many resources. Please contact me at [ramu@latech.edu](mailto:ramu@latech.edu).
- Check out the resources at <http://academicresearchgrants.com/home> including Lucy Deckard's "Research Development & Grant Writing" newsletter (by subscription).

## The writing process:

Highly personal – everyone has their writing style. (I cannot write a paper without at least drafting the abstract and the Intro first; many people write the Intro after the body is done, and the abstract is done at the very end.)

- Goal should be to produce a highly readable document. I have always benefitted from having someone else read my documents. Review by a second person can help you:
  - Identify statements that may be clear to you but not to anyone else ☺
  - Restructure the order of thoughts to make it more easy to follow
- Economy of words – pretend that words cost money. Don't buy a word unless you absolutely must.
- Spaces between paragraphs, figures and graphics on nearly every page, ...
- If the format permits, put highly specialized material (experimental protocols, analysis methods, ...) in separate section(s) and clearly identify them so that a non-expert can skim or skip.
- Send your proposal to a senior researcher you trust (your PhD advisor or postdoc mentor, for example) and ask for constructive feedback.

## Conformity to RFP, and general guidelines:

NSF and NIH are highly prescriptive. Proposal can be (and have been) returned without review for the smallest infraction (margins, font size, reference formatting, project summary, supplementary materials, completeness and accuracy of information provided ...)

## Use bad reviews to improve!

Bad reviews are not really; they contain within them suggestions as to why the reviewers didn't like your proposal. Put this feedback to good use when you revise.

I agree with Eric Guilbeau that if you get reasonably good reviews but no money, chances are that your topic is not among the highest priority for that funding agency. It is perfectly fine to call the program manager and discuss how you may revise your proposal so that it may have a better chance.

**Resilience!** Many successful researchers can tell you stories about all the rejections they suffered before getting their first proposal funded.