

Proposal Preparation Strategies and Tips

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- **Start early—well in advance of application deadlines.**
- **In choosing a topic, think about the impact on the field and broader issues that your topic will address. Beware, however, of taking on a topic or project only because you think it fits program guidelines.**
- **Talk with colleagues, mentors, etc. about possible funding sources.**
- **Check funding sources, now usually on the internet, for possible grant support; create a grid of deadlines and materials needed.**
- **Read the guidelines. Follow them.**
- **Make sure to know and address the criteria for judging your application.**
- **For NEH individual grants (fellowships, faculty research awards, summer stipends, etc., you must register at grants.gov. Set a personal deadline at least two weeks before actual deadline). Submit at off-hours—before the deadline.**
- **Submit only what has been requested.**
- **Contact program staff with questions.**
- **Ask for sample proposals or check those provided with guidelines for some programs.**
- **Ask seasoned colleagues, preferably those who are not in your field, to read a draft application.**
- **Discuss ideas with others. Read outside your own discipline to help broaden your scope.**
- **Do preliminary work. Know the literature, issues, questions, and controversies in your area. Are scholars in other disciplines doing similar work?**
- **Demonstrate a topic's significance rather than making assertions about its significance.**
- **Discuss your project's strengths, but avoid hyperbole.**
- **Write clearly and concisely. *Avoid jargon.* Many proposals are not funded because the writing is abstract, unclear, or jargon laden. Define concepts and terminology.**
- **Discuss methods. If applicable, include selection criteria.**
- **Imagine your audience. Try to take yourself out of your mindset and think like an evaluator or a general reader.**
- **Avoid making unsubstantiated claims. Provide examples.**
- **Provide a realistic time line and work plan.**
- **Describe source materials. Where are they found? What can you expect from them?**
- **If you foresee potential problems, discuss how you will address them.**
- **If you are revising a dissertation, explain how the outcome proposed differs from the dissertation. Explain how the work plan relates to research accomplished for the dissertation.**
- **Proof read your work.**
- **For NEH fellowships and stipends, manage your referees.**
- **If you don't succeed, ask for feedback and try again.**