CONNECTING WITH FUNDERS

University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture– 10 June 2021
YOUR PRESENTER

MICHELLE FRANK, PhD
GRANTS CONSULTANT

Ph.D., Physiology
University of Wisconsin-Madison

TOTAL WINS
>$8M to small businesses & individual investigators

• Joined Hanover in 2019
• >8 years of grants consulting experience
• Started writing grants as a graduate student

SPECIALIZES IN

On a personal note...

- HIKING
- COOKING AND FOOD BLOGGING
- BREWING

NSF, NIH
A QUICK POLL
AGENDA

• First step: the pitch

• Connect with funders

• Q & A
There is a misconception among grantseekers that selling happens primarily at the proposal stage.

This misconception leads to innumerable failed proposals and frustrated grantseekers.

THE PITCH IS KEY!
Pitching saves time and effort and makes you more competitive.

- Many funders prefer to provide feedback well in advance of proposal submission.
- In most cases, you need to sell your project to the funder before you submit a proposal.

A full proposal should not be the first a funder hears of your project!
THE PITCH

CONCEPT PAPER

Develop a concept paper

Request a consultation phone call via email

Ask great questions & take notes!

Follow up
THE CONCEPT PAPER

WHAT IS A CONCEPT PAPER?

Summary of key elements of a funding request: the idea “in a nutshell”

• Written in the first person
• Explicitly related to the goals of the funder
• Written in a style appropriate to the funder
• Generally reflective of the structure of a full proposal
A short concept paper is a tool for pitching your project to funders.

- Targeting a major funder (e.g., a federal agency or large foundation): use funder’s structures and styles.
- Targeting smaller funders (e.g., foundations or corporate funders): short, impactful concept paper
  - serves as the basis for outreach and letters of inquiry (LOIs).
- Concept papers may range from 1-5 pages.

Remember that the concept paper is a starting point for conversation with funders.
A concept paper should follow any technical specifications provided by the funder.

If no specifications are provided, we recommend the following:

- 1-inch margins, single-spaced
- 11-point Arial
- 0.25 inch left indented, fully justified paragraphs
- Bold headings where appropriate
THE CONCEPT PAPER

WHAT IS A CONCEPT PAPER?

Formulate a project concept

• Purpose
• Gap to be addressed/innovation proposed
• Method of investigation
• Caveats/special conditions
• Applications or implications from successful completion
To introduce your project to smaller funders, be concise.

Key suggested components:

- Introduction
- Need for the Work
- Goals /Objectives/Aims/Research questions
- Methods
- Timeline
- Expected outcomes/benefits
- Budget/requested support
- Qualifications
- Contact information
A concept paper takes a different kind of writing from a grant proposal.

Tips for a successful concept paper:

• Highlight key areas that are likely to **capture a funder’s attention**.

• Focus on **need and impact**.

• Include **just enough detail** that the funder knows you are serious.

• **Balance selling and telling**: the ratio of selling to telling will be higher in a concept paper than in a final grant proposal.

• **Use emphasis** (bold, underline, italic) judiciously to bring the reader’s attention to key elements—funders often scan concept papers and letters of inquiry quickly!
1. **Introductory paragraph** – define the problem/critical need

2. **Proposed idea/solution paragraph** – provide objective(s) and rationale (who, what, why)

3. **Specific Aims listing** – brief (1 sentence) and identify “product” over “process” to meet the project’s objectives.

4. **Significance paragraph** – conclude with the novelty of the work, expectations, and anticipated impact

Organize bullet points in four categories that will become four paragraphs (1 page)

Sources: Colson (2009); Dresbeck (2013); Giddings (n.d.); Jelinski (n.d.); NIH (November 25, 2015); Univ. of Washington (n.d.)
1. **Overview** – brief statement of the problem or knowledge gap, with a description of the proposed activities, including a statement of the objectives and methods to be used.

2. **Intellectual Merit** – describe the potential of the proposed activity to advance knowledge.

3. **Broader Impacts** – describe the potential of the proposed activity to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.

Organize bullet points in three categories that will become three paragraphs (1 page)
Descriptive title of your project

1. Scientific rationale
2. Overall hypothesis or goal
3. Specific objectives – description of the goal(s) addressed by the project, including short, medium, and long-term objectives
4. Approach – description of the scope of systems and justification of components under investigation
5. Potential impact and expected outcomes – clear descriptions and justification of the methods for the integrated and transdisciplinary approach to be used to achieve the desired goal

THE WHITE PAPER AS A MODIFIED CONCEPT PAPER

STANDARD DOE WHITE PAPER CONTENT

1. Summary of the proposed research:
   • Problem
   • Proposed solution
   • Connection to DOE’s priorities

2. Proposed collaborators, co-investigators, and consultants with the institutions

3. Brief biographical information of the principal investigator(s)

4. Order-of-magnitude estimate of the proposed work’s total cost

White papers should be 1-3 pages.
THE QUAD CHART AS A MODIFIED CONCEPT PAPER

A QUAD CHART IS A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF A PROJECT.

• Typically a single Powerpoint slide divided into 4 parts.
• May include impactful graphics to quickly—yet effectively—communicate project concepts.
• Also may include links to additional information online.
• Generally accompanied by your biosketch and/or information about proposed participants in the project.
• Emailed to the program contact in lieu of the narrative white paper.

Quad charts are often more effective than narrative white papers.
THE QUAD CHART AS A MODIFIED CONCEPT PAPER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHY: Objective, Motivation</th>
<th>WHAT: Hypothesis or Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOW: Technical Approach</td>
<td>IMPACT: Expected Outcome, Payoff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quad chart examples: [https://www.chemistry.northwestern.edu/documents/graduate/Quad%20chart%20Examples.pptx](https://www.chemistry.northwestern.edu/documents/graduate/Quad%20chart%20Examples.pptx)
### Silver Shiny Baubles

**DESCRIPTION:** Large shiny silver balls are an expeditionary, scalable concept that provides a way for NECC to eliminate the enemy’s ability to rapidly retreat from various locations of interest.

**VALUE TO NAVAL WARRIOR:**
- Able to entice and mesmerize
- Distract from other more important issues
- Renders all other thought processes useless

### OBJECTIVES

- Freeze the enemy in his tracks as he gazes at the ball for hours, unaware of his surroundings
- Serve as a conversation piece that affords a gathering point for similar minded persons
- Delays said persons in a non-defensive posture at a known location until such time that it is convenient for coalition forces to neutralize any perceived threats

### VARIANTS

- Stainless Steel Garden Balls of various diameters
- Glass Gazing Balls
- Television, particularly shows like The Three Stooges or Married With Children
- Quicksand

**STO(s) Supported:** FS FPREP 1.2-1

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**NECC**

**Adaptive, Responsive, Expeditionary**

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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY**
A CONCEPT PAPER IS AN “ELEVATOR SPEECH”—SPARK THE FUNDER’S INTEREST!
CONNECT WITH FUNDERS
Build long-term relationships.
THE PITCH

CONCEPT PAPER

- Develop a concept paper
- Request a consultation phone call via email
- Ask great questions & take notes!
- Follow up
THE PITCH
CONNECT WITH FUNDERS

Connecting with a funder at the concept stage allows you to:

• Introduce yourself, your work, and your concept.
• Solicit feedback on project alignment and funder interest.
• Verify funder priorities and preferences.
• Build your reputation with the funding agency or organization.
• Develop a long-term relationship to facilitate future funding.

(Note that some funders prefer not to have contact before a formal proposal or letter of inquiry—always respect funder communication preferences.)
GREAT, BUT HOW DO I FIND THE RIGHT CONTACT?

This varies by agency!
Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) for Health Professional Schools and Graduate Schools (R15)

The purpose of the Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) for Health Professional Schools and Graduate Schools is to stimulate basic and clinical research in educational institutions that provide baccalaureate or advanced degrees for a significant number of the Nation’s research scientists, but that have not been major recipients of NIH support. REAP grants create opportunities for scientists and institutions otherwise unlikely to participate extensively in NIH research programs to contribute to the Nation’s biomedical and behavioral research effort. REAP grants are intended to support small-scale research projects proposed by faculty members of eligible, domestic institutions, to expose undergraduate and/or graduate students at health professional schools or graduate schools to meritorious research projects, and to strengthen the research environment of the applicant institution.

See the Training and Careers page for more information and funding opportunities.

https://grants.nih.gov/funding/searchguide/index.html#/
FINDING FUNDER CONTACT INFORMATION

Program pages

Computer and Information Science and Engineering (CISE) Research Initiation Initiative (CRII)

CONTACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy J. Epstein</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jepstein@nsf.gov">jepstein@nsf.gov</a></td>
<td>(703) 292-8338</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almeda Y. Chituchkova</td>
<td><a href="mailto:achituchkova@nsf.gov">achituchkova@nsf.gov</a></td>
<td>(703) 292-8910</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephraim P. Glinert</td>
<td><a href="mailto:eglinert@nsf.gov">eglinert@nsf.gov</a></td>
<td>(703) 292-8930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Sussman</td>
<td><a href="mailto:alasussman@nsf.gov">alasussman@nsf.gov</a></td>
<td>(703) 292-7583</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Solicitation 20-593

https://www.nsf.gov/about/research_areas.jsp
# CONNECTING WITH FUNDERS

## FINDING FUNDER CONTACT INFORMATION

### RFAs

**Table 1: Program Area Priority Contacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Area Priority</th>
<th>Program Area Priority Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development for Agricultural Literacy (PDAL) Grants</td>
<td>Dr. Carlos Ortiz, (202) 445-5594 or <a href="mailto:carlos.ortiz@usda.gov">carlos.ortiz@usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Workforce Training (AWT) Grants</td>
<td>Dr. Carlos Ortiz, (202) 445-5594 or <a href="mailto:carlos.ortiz@usda.gov">carlos.ortiz@usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Agricultural Non-formal Education (FANE)</td>
<td>Dr. Maurice Smith, Jr., <a href="mailto:maurice.smith2@usda.gov">maurice.smith2@usda.gov</a>; Dr. Suzanne Stluka, (816) 908-3305 or <a href="mailto:suzanne.stluka@usda.gov">suzanne.stluka@usda.gov</a>; Dr. Carlos Ortiz, (202) 445-5594 or <a href="mailto:carlos.ortiz@usda.gov">carlos.ortiz@usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Extension Experiences for Undergraduates (REEU)</td>
<td>Dr. Ray Ali, (816) 926-1453 or <a href="mailto:nifa-education@usda.gov">nifa-education@usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predoctoral Fellowships</td>
<td>Dr. Ray Ali, (816) 926-1453 or <a href="mailto:nifafellows@usda.gov">nifafellows@usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postdoctoral Fellowships</td>
<td>Dr. Ray Ali, (816) 926-1453 or <a href="mailto:nifafellows@usda.gov">nifafellows@usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Literacy and Workforce Development Evaluation</td>
<td>Dr. Carlos Ortiz, (202) 445-5594 or <a href="mailto:carlos.ortiz@usda.gov">carlos.ortiz@usda.gov</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[https://nifa.usda.gov/rfa-list](https://nifa.usda.gov/rfa-list)
CONNECTING WITH MISSION-DRIVEN AGENCIES

DOE and DOD
WHAT IS “MISSION-DRIVEN?”

A MISSION-DRIVEN AGENCY FUNDS RESEARCH IN SERVICE OF SPECIFIC APPLIED OBJECTIVES.

- The mission of the Department of Defense is to provide the military forces with what is needed to deter war and to protect the security of our country.
- DoD funds a wide variety of research projects
- Funding priorities change rapidly as agency needs change.

DOE and DOD are mission-driven funders.

Example: DOD
CONNECTING WITH FUNDERS

DOE AND DOD: STAFF-DRIVEN GRANTMAKING

Networking is an essential part of the DOE and DOD grantmaking process

- Identify personnel working in your area of interest.
- Network with colleagues funded by DOE or DOD.

https://www.energy.gov/offices
CONNECTING WITH FUNDERS

DOE AND DOD: STAFF-DRIVEN GRANTMAKING

Networking is an essential part of the DOE and DOD grantmaking process

• Identify personnel working in your area of interest.

• Network with colleagues funded by DOE or DOD.

• Attend DOE/DOD-sponsored conferences.

• Reach out directly to relevant staff members.

https://www.energy.gov/offices
Be aware of Differing Processes!

Upon the issuance of a FOA, EERE personnel are prohibited from communicating (in writing or otherwise) with applicants regarding the FOA except through the established question and answer process as described below.

Feedback on individual concepts will not be provided through Q&A.

—DOE, EERE (E-FOA-0002498)
CONNECTING WITH FUNDERS

DOD: KEY GRANTMAKING AGENCIES

• Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR)
• Army Research Laboratory / Army Research Office (ARL/ARO)
• Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP)
• Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)
• Office of Naval Research (ONR)

Identify personnel working in your area of interest

https://www.darpa.mil/
Our Process:

1. Most applications can begin with a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) that details the work and organization making the request. If using Fluxx, you will receive a request ID number via email.

2. Once reviewed, a program officer will work with your organization to refine the request to move it forward to the full proposal process, or communicate back that the LOI is not advancing and why.
REMEMBER: FOR MANY OPPORTUNITIES, IT IS NOT WORTH SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL IF YOU HAVE NOT FIRST CONNECTED WITH A PROGRAM OFFICER.
Email content tips:
- The program you are applying to
- The title of your proposal
- 1–3 sentences summarizing your request
- 4–6 sentences summarizing your proposed project
- 2–3 sentences with your background and info about your research program
- 1–2 concluding sentences thanking the PO, offering to send your concept paper, and providing your availability for a call
- Provide your full contact information

Keep your communication with the PO professional and respectful: remember, you are building your reputation.
Subject: Request for call to discuss XXX due on DATE

Dear Dr. X:

I am interested in submitting a proposal for program solicitation #XXX “Program Solicitation Title” and would like to schedule a call with you to discuss whether my research is appropriate for this opportunity. [If your request is urgent, indicate that here and explain why.]

[Briefly describe your proposed work and why you think it is a good fit.] If it would be helpful, I can provide a [brief concept paper / project summary] for you to review prior to our call. [If you have specific questions that you want the PO to consider, include them.]

[Provide possible days/times or indicate that you can be available at the PO’s convenience.]

Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Contact Information
• You’ll usually get a response within a week. Study it for tone as well as content.
  o Was the response enthusiastic?
  o Did the PO “get it”?
  o Are there questions you need to answer during the call?
  o Are there questions you need to ask during the call?
Always prepare questions before your meeting with the Program Officer.

Common questions:
• Is this project a good fit for this opportunity / your funding priorities?
• Are there other opportunities that would be a better fit?
• What are your recommendations for improving the fit / competitiveness?
• What other recommendations do you have?
• What are the most common causes for proposals being declined?
• What are the usual success rates for this program?
• What is your preferred method for me to contact you if I have additional questions?
REMEMBER TO SPEND AS MUCH TIME LISTENING AS TALKING: PROGRAM OFFICERS CAN PROVIDE VERY VALUABLE FEEDBACK AND GUIDANCE.
THE PITCH

CONCEPT PAPER

Develop a concept paper

Request a consultation phone call via email

Ask great questions & take notes!

Follow up
Always follow up!

- Follow up with an email thanking the PO for their time and summarizing the key points you took away from the call.
- In any future communication about this opportunity, reference your call.
- Use the subject line of your email to reflect the purpose and urgency of the request.
- Remember that Program Officers are very busy: make things easy for them with clear, specific, actionable communication and a courteous tone.
REMEMBER: GRANT FUNDING IS A HUMAN ENDEAVOR; TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU, BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PEOPLE INVOLVED.
RESOURCES

CONNECTING WITH FUNDERS

• UTIA Office of Sponsored Programs
  o https://utiasponsoredprograms.tennessee.edu/

• Contacting Staff at the NIH Institutes and Centers
  o https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/resources/contacting-nih-staff.htm

• The Anatomy of a Specific Aims Page

• NSF 101: 5 tips for working with an NSF Program Officer
Hanover Research supports UTIA faculty throughout the grant development process.

How Hanover works with the UTIA:

Content Director, Chris Gray is UTIA’s primary point of contact at Hanover and manages support for individual faculty projects. Hanover is available to provide UTIA faculty with proposal revision support on new proposals and resubmissions. Please contact Dr. Tim Rials or Jessica McCord to learn more about UTIA’s relationship with Hanover and the process for requesting support.
QUESTIONS?