Proposals that work

Barbara Crutchley

Director

Research Services

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Learn from everyone

- Find a mentor
  - Not necessarily in your area
- Find models
  - But don't rigidly follow
- Plan for the long run
- ORS, Program Officer, Review Cmtee member

SPEND TIME ON THE APPLICATION

➢ A good application will make your research better

➢ Not just a way to get money

➢ Start early

➢ Rewrite

➢ Get feedback

Get to know the agency

- Invest time to understand
  - Get to know them
    - Web site
    - Mission statement
    - Personal interactions
  - Review for them
- Long term process
  - Knowledge
  - Relationships

Show you can do it

➢ Pilot data must already be done
  - – no fishing expeditions!

➢ Detail competencies (research profile)

➢ History of success (even minor success)

Follow directions

➤ Read application guidelines carefully

➤ Read them again … and again

➤ TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY

You want to be treated fairly…

- Font size, margins, page numbers

- Break guidelines at your peril
  - At the least, you will irritate the reviewers
  - At worst, excluded from competition

Pre submission review

➢ Critical appraisal
- By colleagues
- By a successful applicant
- By your fiercest critic

➢ Use a highlighter

➢ Get it done early enough to use feedback

The review:

➢ Consider the following

The Competition

➢ Volume affects the handling of your proposal!

➢ Success Rates tend to be from 20- 30% (applications greatly out-number the awards possible)

➢ Reviewers are VOLUNTEERS

Understanding the Competition

➢ Success rates will affect how your proposal is reviewed

➢ how do you demonstrate 'belonging' as an applicant?

➢ how closely do you fit the applicant profile?

➢ how good are your written communication skills?

Avoid Assessment of Risk

- don't make the mistake of derailing your success through lack of preparedness
- Don't apply too soon -- literature searches are done with small seed grants, not with regular funding. Asking for funds to do a search shows that you're two steps behind the competition in getting research results out to the various audiences

Past, Present and Future

➢ all proposals for research funding must show:

- success in past efforts

- current preparedness to undertake research

- a good understanding of what needs to be done for success under this funding

What is a "track record"?

A blend of demonstrated experience in attaining research goals and significant output

- The reader finds this in: the personal data (publications in respected journals, awards from other funding sources, etc); a solid budget linked back to the activities; and in a strong methodology presentation which will provide data address the objectives and goals

Be straightforward and honest

- Explain any interruptions in your career
  - Medical or family issues but indicate that you are back on the research track
- Realistically but positively describe accomplishments
- Never exaggerate

Program of Research

➢ Proposals with lower ratings are often not discussed at the funding meeting:

"The proposed program of research is generally consistent with the standards of the field but is not particularly innovative, or may be problematic in one or more respects. The probability of significant advances is fair."

AVOID AMBIGUITIES

➤ Fuzzy objectives do not help your case.
  - Don't give a generality

➤ Instead provide a specific reference to your planned research and give the reader an idea of how successful you hope to be.

Budget Justification

Be Reasonable!

➢ Don't overestimate your costs – a padded budget can easily irritate the reviewer.

➢ Don't underestimate the costs– the knowledgeable reviewer will think that you have too little understanding of the necessary costs.

Budget…

➢ Personnel: HQP are expected, but your involvement is necessary too

➢ Consultants: only if you can demonstrate that the project will fail without them and the task can't be undertaken by a collaborator

➢ Equipment: Why necessary? Why that model? Why not shared?

➢ Travel: Conferences MUST be

logical for the project and at

appropriate points
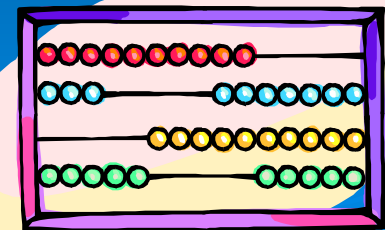
The Decision: 3 Stacks

Who is your audience?

The reviewer is a Volunteer !

➢ Researcher, knowledgeable who may not be in your specific area

➢ May review 20-40 proposals & provide reports

Make it easy for your reviewer to give you a positive review

Addressing 'required information'

➢ Every agency has a set format for application – follow it to the letter; it's to your advantage

➢ their assessment requires you to provide specific information: provide it in the order requested

Understanding the Audience

➢ know what the reviewers are looking for

- get their checklist/assessment sheet

➢ learn about their experience

- talk to past committee members or successful applicants

➢ empathise, show respect for the process

- provide information accordingly

Write clearly

➤ Clear writing shows you are thinking clearly

➤ Sloppy writing can be enough to lose a proposal

➤ Educated audience who won't necessarily know your area
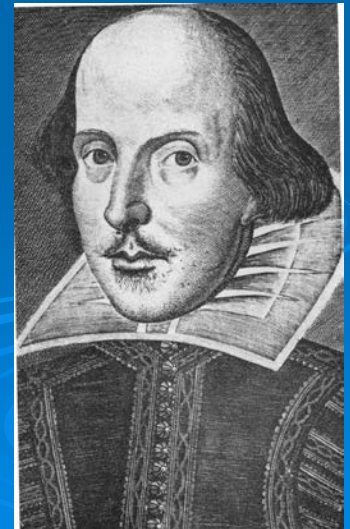
Persuasive Proposal Writing

➢ Value isn't what *you* think it is.

It's what *they* perceive it to be.

➢ Successful grant writers understand the sponsor's values and express that view in the proposal.

Reading Styles & Writing Tips

- Skim Reading

- Search Reading

- Critical Reading

- White space
- Headings
- Ragged right margins

- Bold type
- Table of contents
- Appendixes

- Transitions
- Type size & style
- Line spacing

Making the review EASY

➢ know what it means to read (and choose between) 50 documents

➢ understand how hard it is to find information when there's only 2 minutes to find it

➢ Use subheadings, white space, clear fonts and anything to make information easy to find

Informing the reader

➢ few readers are in your specific field – more likely they have been chosen as generalists.

➢ write for a sophisticated reader, expert in another field.

➢ without being condescending explain why information you've provided is significant.
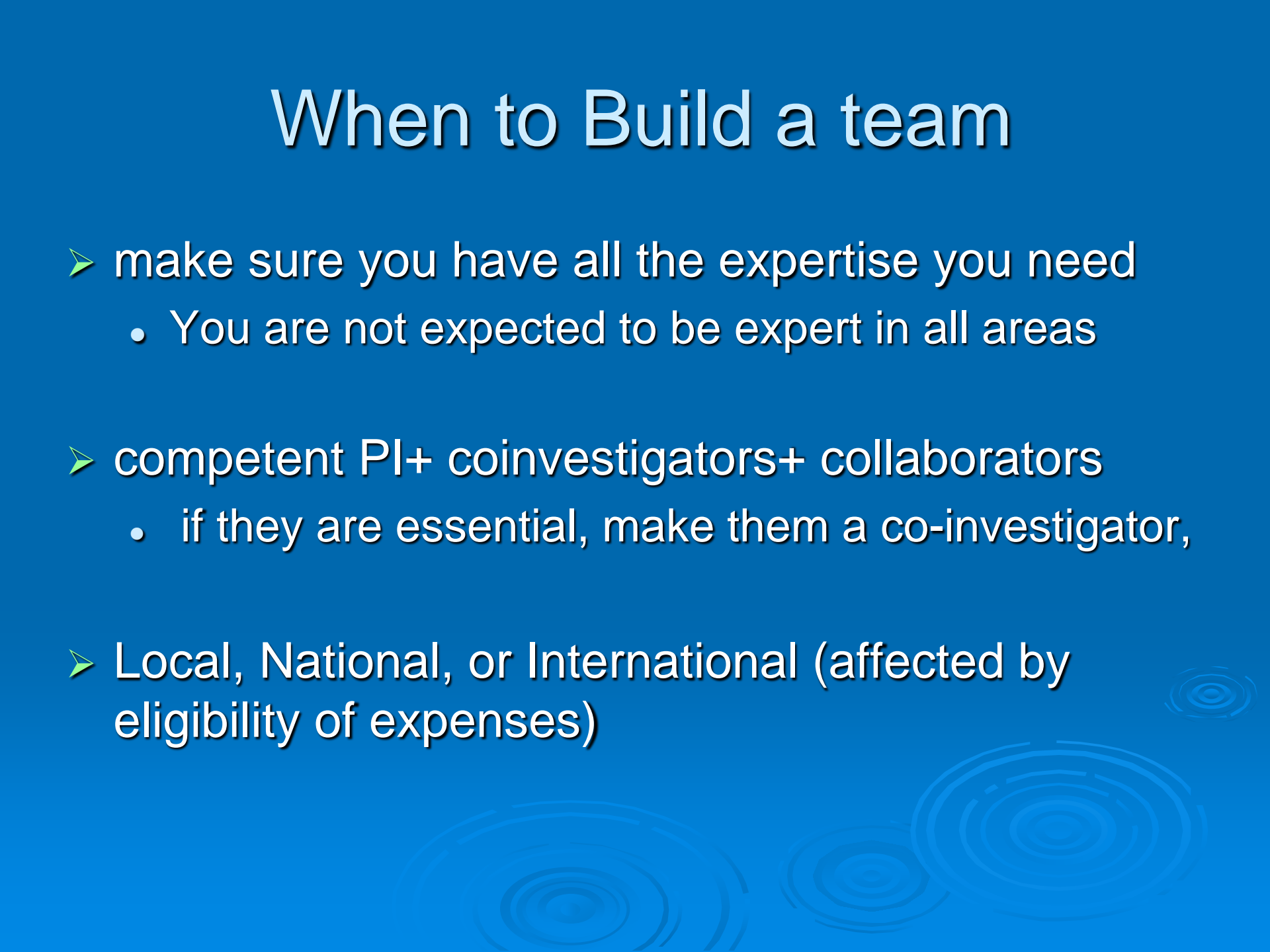
Informing… cont'd

You cannot expect that a non-expert will understand that you're using the most accepted methodology in the field by simple citation. Explicitly provide this information.

Ensure good methodology!

➢ Applications that fail, often fail on methodology

➢ Use best methods possible at every step
  - Subject selection, Measures, Manipulation, Statistics

➢ If less than ideal, justify your choice in detail

➢ Explain method
  If methods are unusual, detail them (papers!)

When to Build a team

➢ make sure you have all the expertise you need
  - You are not expected to be expert in all areas

➢ competent PI+ coinvestigators+ collaborators
  - if they are essential, make them a co-investigator,

➢ Local, National, or International (affected by eligibility of expenses)

What do the committee comments mean?

➢ Many factors apply to the way you are given comments on that competition's results

➢ Sometimes you have to come back to them

➢ Sometimes you can get additional information

Don't get discouraged

- Most applicants are rejected more than once
  - No matter how good your proposal is chance is a factor
- Use feedback wisely
- Be persistent