

Grant Chat 5
Preparing Effective Tables (outcome tables, research timelines, etc.)
Monday, March 21, 2008

Present: Marcia Harrison, Maria Babiuc, Aley El-Shazley, Elmer Price, Wendy Trzyna, Anita Walz, Michael Norton, and Heidi Williams

This Grant Chat focused on effective tables within a grant proposal. Examples from successfully funded proposals were discussed. Below is the summary of ideas, suggestions, and experiences of the participants.

Types of Tables/Figures Presented:

Research timeline: presented specific aims and what would be accomplished for each year of the granting period for each specific aim (provided by Eric Blough, Biological Sciences). Column titles: Specific Aim, Year 1, Year 2, etc. Cell contents: Specific aims and the goals for each time period.

Outreach proposal timeline: the primary activities for students and educators were listed for the fall, spring, and summer of each year of the proposed project (provided by Tina Cartwright, Education). Column titles: Time period, Educators, Students. Cell contents: Time period and goals/activities for each type of audience by time period.

Evaluation table: listed the objectives with their associated evaluation method (provided by Tina Cartwright, Education). Column titles: Objectives, Evaluation Method. Cell contents: as described by column titles.

Overview and evaluation table: organized program approach by desired goals, and methods for assessing progress within the corresponding program goal (provided by Marcia Harrison, Biological Sciences). Column titles: Goals, Approach, Assessment Method. Cell contents: as described by column titles.

Logic model: organized as a flowchart for the program's activities and outcomes (provided by Tina Cartwright, Education). Illustrated connections between various aspects of the program, and how these aspects move from Year 1 to support goals for Year 2.

Questions and discussion points:

-When writing a grant, do you need to include potential outcomes such as expected publications or presentations? This depends on the granting agency and the type of grant. Theses might be important in undergraduate research or seed grant proposals. Certain grants require the dissemination of educational materials, etc.

-Is the table redundant of the narrative? One participant stated that they include basically the same information in both narratives and tables. However, a timeline in the form of a table can more easily show that you've clearly thought through the proposed activities. It is also easier for a reviewer to scan the table to be sure that all goals and procedures have been addressed.

-Timelines are best placed after the research methods in a proposal.

-Often, the summary, preliminary data, and research design are the first elements a reviewer looks at.

-Tables that explain different scenarios of the grant, or “staging the grant”, help reviewers determine the feasibility of the grant and the fundability. Such tables might document, for instance, where the investigator will do certain aspects of the work, or which collaborators have expertise in relevant areas.

-Figures need to stand alone; the reader should not have to refer to the text too much. A clear indication of whether or not you’ve used a table/figure successfully is whether the meaning can be deciphered within 30-45 seconds. It is important to remember that most grant proposal reviewers are not experts in the grant’s discipline the majority of the time. It can be useful to have a colleague outside your field review your figures.

-Make sure not to use acronyms that are not common for the field.

Other organizational tips:

-Organize the proposal headings, tables, and other material so that a reviewer can get a good sense of your proposal when skimming.

-Text boxes can be used to attract attention to specific aspects of the grant, such as benefits to students or to highlight important results from preliminary data.

-Bullets can be used to highlight major messages with minimal wording.

-Letters of support, included in an appendix, can be important in substantiating your proposal. However, some grants do not allow any material to be submitted in an appendix, while it is allowable and even essential for others, so be sure to check the guidelines of each grant for which you apply. Letters are especially important to establish working relationships with collaborators who are not listed as Co-PIs.

Next Grant Chat:

-The last Grant Chat of the semester, which will cover the development of year-long grant preparation calendars, is scheduled for April 25 at 2:00 pm in BBSC 102.