


Chapter 5

Setting Up Proposed Project (or Program) Budgets for Academic Grant Applications

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ABSTRACT

Virtually every discretionary (merit-based and competitive) grant application requires a budget, a listing of necessary moneys to achieve the designed work or work plan. Grant budgets have culminating aspects in the sense that they touch every relevant part of a grant application. To actualize anything costs money. Grant application budgets are also part of the “value proposition” inherent in a grant application. They are part of the competitive advantage of an elegant and viable grant, based on strategic budget design. Often, the grant funding agency’s directions and examples determine the parameters of a grant budget. In some cases, the budget is determined by formula or equation. In other cases, they are determine by real-world costs, directly. The min-max (floor-ceiling) sizes of the grant funding also determines both project scope and budget scope. So, too, the grant types—such as planning vs. implementation grants, and others. This chapter takes an up-to-date and applied approach to designing project- and program- budgets for academic grant applications.

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INTRODUCTION

A grant application essentially proposes value for value, research or work or problem-solving or programming...for grant funding. The proposed work is to be achieved (within a certain time period) (by a defined staff) (to certain standards) in order (to achieve particular desirable outcomes). A grant application follows a familiar form, even as there is variance in the structure based on the grant funder. The writing is both non-fictional and factual at the same time as it is somewhat aspirational. A grant application is technical writing that aspires to be persuasive. A grant application is a type of formal writing, often written in the third-person point-of-view. Its facts are falsifiable (able to be challenged and ascertained to be true or false). Its truth claims are built on logical structures and may be challenged, such as in terms of the anticipated outcomes. Grant proposals may be understood as being its own genre. Grants enable dialogic interactions between the grant producers and the recipients, the grant applicants and the grant funders (Tseng, 2011). Grants may be mandatory, stipulated by lawmakers and doled out by formula, or they may be discretionary, competitive, and merit-based. This work mostly focuses on the latter type.

One of the core elements in a grant application is the grant budget. The budget is a formal document that describes the applicant / applicant team's plan for achieving the proposed work. This proposed budget covers the anticipated costs of the proposed work: staffing, equipment, facilities, travel, and other aspects. It is a detailed financial plan that describes the estimated expenses. The budget may be set up as a data table or multiple ones. They may be set up as a textual narration, known as a "budget narration" or a "budget justification." The budget has to be sufficient for the work, but it has to also be economical and efficient, even frugal. Its elements have to be contemporaneously priced and competitively so. It cannot be padded.

There are different inputs to the budgeting: wages, equipment costs, setup costs, and others. There are direct costs related to the proposed work, and there are indirect costs [aka overhead, F&A (facilities and administrative) costs]. A budget may involve supplementary materials. For example, a rate card of charges by a bureaucratic unit may be relevant. There may be attestation documents about the health of an institution of higher education's (IHE) handling of funds.

This chapter explores some ways to structure project- or program-budgets for academic grants. This topic is little addressed in the academic research space, even as the grants space is fast-evolving and the demands are many. This work exists in a post-sugar high period with the U.S. past the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when large sums were made available to protect jobs and strive for a stable society in the midst of mass death (Hai-Jew, "Pursuing...", 2024) and residual social supports (Hai-Jew, "Re-stocking...", 2024). This work draws on a sparse research literature

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