



SCHOLAR INITIATIVE – FULL TRANSCRIPT

GETTING YOUR FIRST GRANT

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Christopher Lemons: The handout will start with number ten. And Kelly and I are going to rotate these off. So number ten piece of advice is read the request for applications again, again, again and again. So one of the top tips for getting a grant is to make sure you actually provide the people reviewing the grant with the information that they asked for you to provide. It is one of the number one reasons that grants are rejected is because essential information that is in that Request for Proposals is not included or that your grant is not structured in such a way that the person reading it can actually tell that you addressed what was in the grant. So I think as a doc. student one of the things that you could do now to start getting ready is start thinking about potential funding sources, whether they be OSEP or IES, NIH, other sources, go ahead and just download the Request for Applications. Even if you may not be writing a grant this round, they're going to be very similar when you actually get to the point that you are writing those grants. So start getting familiar with the structure of those RFAs right now.

Kelley Regan: I have number nine on the slides, so it says find a successful model and copy. And what we've presented on each of these slides is a recommendation for what you can do to improve your skills, your grant writing skills as a doc. student and then it looks very different than when you're a junior faculty member. So on each of the slides you'll see sort of specific guidelines for each of those roles. By finding a successful model and copy it's not just as easy as it's presented there. There is certainly a caveat of confidentiality. So when you are asking a faculty member, an advisor, or even a colleague for a copy of any sort of material you want to make sure that you're not going to misuse that privilege. Now with that said it's still okay to ask, because they could always say no, which is fine and expect that, but then continue to ask for maybe copies of the grant or components of the grant even. When I was, when I finished my doctorate at George Mason I went to George Washington University then went back to George Mason and my position at the time was to just solely write grants. It was unique position. But I didn't know anything about grants at all. But what I was given was samples of what it looks like. And so looking at the grant I didn't worry about the content, what I looked at was how's the table of content formed? What is included in the appendices? What's the length of it? Where did they put this section? What makes sense in the flow? Even the headers, the technical type of writing, so becoming accustomed to that is learning. So if you have access to copies of grants. That's our number nine recommendation.

KR: Number eight, is obviously know your audience. Your audience when you're writing a grant is, you're requesting money for a project so your funder is your audience. So if you're asking IES or NIH or a State Department for funding then do your homework and you go online or you call individuals and you're asking them what's the purpose of your funding? What is your priority? What is your scope of that or the mission of that organization? IES, if you go on their site they will have a list of the abstracts of previously funded grants and you can read the abstract, you can look at the authors of the awardees, perhaps contact them. But you get a sense of who are they funding, what projects are they funding. Now they change every year obviously. But it gives you an idea of the audience. As junior faculty it's also recommended that you take on the opportunities, possibly to review for grants. That's a good learning opportunity. Many of the organizations are constantly looking for individuals to review submissions, applications. And that's probably the best way to learn before you review a grant, I mean, to write a grant is to review one. That's it.

CL: And one more point I would add in terms of knowing your audience is also realize the people who are reviewing your grants are very busy, oftentimes faculty members or other people in the community, so they're going to be reading your grant, probably on an airplane or in a hotel room when they're exhausted. So you need to format it in such a way that it's very easy for the reader by use of headings and following the RFA structure that they can find information that they want really quickly in your grant. I think that's really important to know.

CL: Number seven is probably a fairly obvious one. Actually have a good idea that's fundable. You can see the little bird, you can barely see him sitting on the island there, sitting for quite a while before a light bulb comes on. He actually realizes he can fly off of the island. But I think a good thing to be thinking about is what is something that you are going to propose in a grant that's novel, that I'll even use the word sexy, but interesting, something that whenever the reviewer's reading a pile of 15 things yours is the one that sticks out in their head, that when they go to dinner they say you know what was really interesting this person proposed to do, this unique or novel thing. And I think that's really important because doing kind of the same old business as usual isn't going to get you funded. And so you may be thinking well, how in the world do I come up with that idea? Read, read, read, read, read. One of the greatest things that you have right now, I know you all feel busy. How many of you feel really busy right now? It just gets worse. So one of the things that is really great for where you are right now is you actually are being given time to read. Read the literature deeply, widely and really think, spend some time thinking, and that's going to help you come up with a novel idea.

KR: Okay, number six is probably if I was sitting where you are I'd star it. The devil is in the details and before that I think we had another saying of do your homework, so to speak. To write a grant is a huge undertaking. I don't recommend it as a doc. student to do something like that, but our recommendation is to at least have some participation in that role. And many of you might be GRAs on a grant project currently, Graduate Research Assistants, so you have a sense, sort of, of a role on a grant. The number one probably thing that you could do as a doc. student is whatever university where you are now is find out what is the process that takes place at a university for submitting the grant. If you are PI, Principle

Investigator, or co-PI or sometimes even a faculty associate you're not the one to submit the button, you don't submit it to the organization. And I say that facetiously, but some of you might already know the process in your university, but when I was day one in my position, my first faculty position I had no idea how a grant worked. I didn't know if I was the one pressing the button to submit, I didn't know who I would talk to do that. Is it an isolated experience? No. So typically there are organizations in universities, the Office of Sponsored Programs, OSP. It might be called something different at your universities. But typically you have to figure out the navigation of the system. Who do you have to talk to, who develops the budgets, who does the subcontracting if you're subcontracting with another individual at a university. And for junior faculty we put here talk to project officers about your idea. So when you're looking at a grant proposal typically there's a contact person of a project officer that oversees that award, their number or their email. Even if you're not writing the grant call them up, propose the idea and gather some feedback that way.

CL: And I think adding to that another is if you can get ... right now how many of you have seen a budget to a grant at this point? That's pretty impressive, because I think a lot of times I think it's one of the biggest things that's neglected in doctoral training is how to build a budget. I found myself one of my very first grants that I worked on somehow they thought I should be in charge of the budget and I'm like oh, great you know it's \$2 million, I can totally do that. So I get an Excel spreadsheet and start cranking it out, you know, with the design that was proposed and I realized that our original design would have cost \$5 million. So I had to kind of go back to the other team and say we can't actually do any of that, that's too expensive. And I think that's something that you could get some experience asking your advisor to see budgets. I think that's real useful.

CL: So number five, go little, then go big. See little bitty Satan hell on wheels, the early years. But the idea here is that what grant reviewers are often looking for is is there something on your CV that shows that you had an idea and followed through with it. So if there are any funds available at your institution to do like a small grant for your dissertation or something like that, that is an incredibly important thing to do, because you can, even if it's only a thousand or two thousand dollars if on your CV it shows I applied for this grant, I had an idea somebody thought was good enough to give me a thousand dollars, then I followed through and did a presentation on that study or published an article on that study. That's already beginning work that later grant reviewers will look at your resume and say this person has at least followed through on a project. And you can also do that once you become faculty, oftentimes like the University of Pittsburgh has a couple of small grants for beginning faculty. One is \$3,000 and one is \$16,000. And those are really nice ways to get started so that whenever you kind of start playing with the big boys that you have some demonstration that I've done this kind of stuff before. And I think that's really important.

KR: Okay, number four says partner with experienced grant awardees. And there's two roles for this. As a doc. student you're probably not going to participate as a PI, co-PI, or even a faculty associate, your role is probably more graduate research assistant. There's other opportunities though that you could have, many of you are probably have leadership positions, roles if you're a part time doc. student, for example, if you were an acting

principal or if you have some leadership advocacy role in the community, many people who are composing their grants are often looking for members to serve as advisory boards or as consultants or some sort of, providing some expertise to a grant project. So the only way that faculty who are writing these grants together are going to know that is for you to advocate these are my expertise, these are my skills, this is how I can contribute. So your role then might be to provide a letter of support for a grant project. Your role then would be talking to the individuals that are developing this idea and just learning about their idea and how do I serve as an associate to this grant? For junior faculty of course it's about networking, it's about networking when you're a doc. student too. But you're going to always be considering who has the same ideas as I do? And networking and keeping contact with those individuals not just at your university but extend beyond your university so that you can develop potentially an idea to collaboratively write a grant together as a junior faculty member, as a co-PI. I also wanted to add too that just coming to discussions such as this is helpful hopefully. And they have, the funders, the sources of funders come to many of the national organizations that you've attended, you've probably gone to sessions at CEC or AERA that are conducted by organizations like IES, like OSEP that provide information about their RFAs, what they're looking for, past awardees and that sort of thing. The foundations also present, like Spencer Foundation. So you can just become more knowledgeable about those funding sources, how competitive they are. So you can construct ... their timelines is another thing that's important. When do their RFAs come out?

- CL: Number three, take time and proofread. This one probably seems a bit obvious. I like the little graphic of the movie theater, the Pirates knocked up Shrek. It's probably not exactly what they were hoping to get out there on the movie board. But the notion here is that grant writing takes a lot of time and you cannot do it last minute. And it takes a lot of time to coordinate all the people and have a final document that's ready to run through the two or three week process to get it out of your university. And so a lot of times people find themselves in the position of not having enough time to proofread. Well, when it goes to get reviewed by the grantees they have a lot of decent things to choose from and sloppiness and turning in a poorly written non-proofread grant lowers the chances that they're going to fund you, because I mean really if you can't get a 25 page document correct, why are we going to give you a couple million dollars? Like if you're going to mess this up, what else are you going to mess up? So it's attention to detail often gets you more points.
- CL: Number two, let others read, but it's your grant, follow your heart. So this one I think is really important, particularly as a junior faculty member when you're coming in you know you have an idea and you're going to partner with colleagues who are probably more experienced than you. Listen to their advice, but if it's your grant and you're the PI, you're the one in charge and everyone else is providing you advice but follow your heart. You might have a really interesting idea that someone might not have a lot of faith in, but if it's your grant you're the one who gets to decide what happens on it.
- KR: And then the number one tip that we had is try, try again, and then try again. I have more misses than funded projects. Celia was very nice in the introduction. But what was not in there is all the attempts of getting funding and that were rejected. The good news is that

unfunded grants when you're a junior faculty, they count. That's an effort. It's still your idea that you have passion behind. And so when you're developing it, you put everything into it and then it's not awarded, it's still in annual reviews; we still report it, how much it was. And then our goal is to revise and submit somewhere else or to the same competition. But that's effort. So continue, try, try again, and you learn by doing, obviously, that's the obvious one to submit your first grant and just learn from that process.