

Grants + Funding Roundtable (Social Sciences & Humanities)
IUB Preparing Future Faculty Conference January 22, 2026
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What are some of the most important “Do’s and Don’t’s” of grant writing?

Funding begets funding. Apply early and often!

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Grant applications is a specific GENRE of writing and it is a SKILL you can build. Plan ahead. Have a 6-month plan, a 1-year, 2-year, 3-year, 4-year plan that identifies funding opportunities you can apply for at various stages of your career.

Know that external funding often carries more currency or weight (prestige) than internal funding because external funding is generally more competitive. Apply for as much external funding as you can. This logic applies even within the campus setting. For instance, your home department would be considered “internal” compared to another campus entity (like CAHI College Arts and Humanities Institute or CRRES Center for Research on Race and Ethnicity in Society).

If you are interested in applying for a specific grant, ask (politely!) successful applicants for copies of their winning proposals. Be sure to thank them either way (yes or no). If you use someone’s application as a model and your proposal is successful, share the good news with them.

Get the inside scope: talk to people (faculty, mentors) who have reviewed proposals for funding competitions that you are interested in (for example: NSF, ACLS, etc). Do they have any tips they can pass along to you?

Allow ample time for multiple drafts, especially for the most competitive funding awards. Ask trusted others such as your dissertation advisors or advanced graduate students for feedback on proposal drafts. Try asking someone outside your field to test if your proposal makes sense to non-specialists.

Applying for funding DOES take significant time commitment. Rejection is part of the process. Sometimes it takes multiple attempts. (Try getting feedback from reviewers.)

Approach each application as a chance to refine and sharpen your ideas. Completing a proposal and hitting the submit button is a WIN, regardless of the outcome!

Where can I locate grants and other funding sources?

* [University of Illinois Fellowship Finder](#) [very comprehensive]

* [IUB Graduate School](#)

* [IUB GradGrants Center](#)

* [H-Net / H-Announce](#) [Humanities opportunities]

Take a Russian nesting doll approach: work “inside out” to locate funding opportunities at various levels. Start with your most immediate scholarly community (department), and then move outwards (school, campus, university-wide, disciplinary/professional societies, foundations, government entities, corporations) .

Be nosy! Who are the peers, colleagues, mentors, and role models that you admire? Study their websites, book/article acknowledgements, social media, etc. – figure out their funders, and find out if that funding opportunity exists.

In general, what are the major points every proposal should address?

Is your proposed project mission-aligned with the funder?

Know your audience and write to persuade them that your project is funding-worthy. Specialists? Generalists? Interdisciplinary? Academics? Policymakers?

SIGNIFICANCE, SIGNIFICANCE, SIGNIFICANCE

Frontload the important stuff: core problem, driving question, argument, significance
Answer the “so what” question: why your work matters, how it contributes to and ideally *rethinks* or *transforms* what we already know.

Use topic sentences to make significance claims (“My research rethinks X by doing Y”)
Gap-filling is NOT a persuasive argument for significance (ie, “Most research on cornhole focuses on college towns in the Midwest. My research fills a gap/lacunae in the literature by examining cornhole in non-college towns outside the Midwest.”)

Foreground YOUR brilliance, not others’ ideas. Be bold and declarative!

Minimize technical/theoretical/specialist jargon – aim for direct, clear prose to reach the “NPR listener” (someone educated and curious but not trained in your field).

Pare down filler/unnecessary details. Avoid over-description.

Weed out “clutter”: footnotes, citations, block quotes. Use pull quotes sparingly.

Justify their love. Why do you need this funding at this critical juncture? Make a compelling case for your project—why they should fund it. Be specific.