

How to Become a Better Grant Writer

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About Me

- ▶ PhD in Clinical Psychology
- ▶ Former academic researcher who partnered with community-based agencies
- ▶ Awarded multiple federal grants
- ▶ Served on review panels for NIH and SAMHSA
- ▶ Involved with several groups funded by foundations
- ▶ Professional writer

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Objectives

- ▶ After completing this program, you will be able to:
 - ✓ Evaluate your competitiveness for a particular grant
 - ✓ Identify the key priorities that must be addressed in a grant application
 - ✓ Clearly articulate the clinical and programmatic strengths of your agency and the idea you want to seek funding for
 - ✓ Identify how those strengths match the objectives of the potential funder
 - ✓ Identify common mistakes when writing grants and how to avoid them

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Disclaimer!

- ▶ This seminar is about *writing* grants
- ▶ How to *find* grants to apply for is beyond the scope of this talk

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Disclaimer!

- ▶ Places to start
 - ▶ Federal grants (searchable databases)
 - ▶ <https://www.grants.gov/search-grants.html>
 - ▶ <https://beta.sam.gov/search?index=cfdg>
- ▶ Foundations
 - ▶ <https://www.cof.org/community-foundation-locator>
 - ▶ <https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/> (\$\$)

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Why Write a Grant?

- ▶ What are your reasons?
- ▶ Examples
 - ▶ Add a new program
 - ▶ Test an innovative idea and evaluate how well it works
 - ▶ Expand an existing program to reach a new population
 - ▶ Expand staff for an existing program
 - ▶ Buy specialty equipment

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Grant Funding is Increasingly Essential

- ▶ Public support for social work, mental health, and social services generally has been declining
- ▶ Many social workers and social service professionals will be asked to help with grant writing during their careers
- ▶ Many social workers and other graduate-level professionals get basic instruction in grant writing, BUT
- ▶ To be competitive, social workers and other social service professionals need to elevate their skills
- ▶ AND, the delivery of innovative services often requires grant support to get started and evaluated

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Before You Start Writing

WOULD YOU BE COMPETITIVE FOR THIS GRANT?

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Understand Your Audience: NIH

- ▶ National Institutes of Health
 - ▶ 27 institutes and centers
 - ▶ National Institute of Mental Health
 - ▶ National Institute of Drug Abuse
 - ▶ National Institute on Aging
 - ▶ "NIH's mission is to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability."
 - ▶ <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/mission-goals>
- ▶ High quality research is the goal

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Understand Your Audience: SAMHSA

- ▶ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) Education
 - ▶ "SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities. SAMHSA's work is guided by scientific research and evidence-based practices developed by this research."
 - ▶ <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa-at-a-glance.pdf>
- ▶ Goal is generally to fund the expansion/availability of evidence-based treatments

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Understand Your Audience: Education

- ▶ Department of Education
 - ▶ "ED's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access."
 - ▶ <https://www.ed.gov/programs-search/nonprofit-organizations>
- ▶ Generally focused on research and dissemination of evidence-based practices

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Understand Your Audience: NEH

- ▶ National Endowment for the Humanities
 - ▶ "NEH was founded in 1965 "to promote progress and scholarship in the humanities." NEH accomplishes this mission by supporting research in the humanities, nurturing the nation's humanities infrastructure, and expanding the reach of the humanities to all Americans."
 - ▶ <https://www.neh.gov/information/first-time-applicants>
 - ▶ <https://www.neh.gov/grants/match-your-project>
- ▶ Primary goal is to support humanities research and education, preservation, and public programs
- ▶ Most awarded go to institutions such as museums and individual researchers

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Understand Your Audience: Federal Grants

- ▶ Generally have stronger data collection and documentation requirements
- ▶ Will usually require longer/more detailed reports
- ▶ Will usually require more frequent reporting
- ▶ May require regular conference calls or attendance at grantee meetings
- ▶ May offer more money (incl some for overhead)
- ▶ May also offer support for multiple years
- ▶ May offer more training/technical assistance for applicants

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Understand Your Audience: Foundations

- ▶ Diverse and Abundant
 - ▶ Some fund projects anywhere in US
 - ▶ Some only fund agencies based in specific locations
 - ▶ Most have a very narrow content focus
- ▶ What you get
 - ▶ Less money
 - ▶ Shorter time periods
 - ▶ Little to no money for overhead expenses

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Understand Your Audience Foundations

- ▶ What is the agency's mission?
- ▶ What are the backgrounds of people on their board?
- ▶ What have they funded in the past?
 - ▶ Look for project abstracts
- ▶ What are the backgrounds of reviewers?

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Case Study 1

A FEDERAL AGENCY: NIH

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NIDA: Mission

- ▶ The mission of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is to advance science on the causes and consequences of drug use and addiction and to apply that knowledge to improve individual and public health. In this regard, NIDA addresses the most fundamental and essential questions about drug abuse— from detecting and responding to emerging drug abuse trends and understanding how drugs work in the brain and body, to developing and testing new approaches to treatment and prevention. NIDA also supports research training, career development, public education, public-private partnerships, and research dissemination efforts.
- ▶ <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/nih-almanac/national-institute-drug-abuse-nida>

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NIDA: What They Fund

- ▶ Elucidation of mechanisms underlying complex morbidities of SUD and other mental illnesses in people living with HIV/AIDS (R01 Clinical Trial Optional)
- ▶ RFA-DA-21-012
 - ▶ <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/foa-files/RFA-DA-21-012.html>
- ▶ Research Objectives: The goal of this funding opportunity is to stimulate innovative research on multimorbidity mechanisms underlying SUD-psychiatric multimorbidities in PLWHIV. For the purposes of this funding opportunity, the term "multimorbidity mechanisms" is defined as factors or processes underlying concurrent and inter-related dysfunctions across multiple biological and behavioral systems.

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NIDA: Who Reviews Grants

- ▶ HEALTH DISPARITIES AND EQUITY PROMOTION STUDY SECTION
 - ▶ February 26-27, 2020
 - ▶ <https://public.era.nih.gov/pubrouter/preRoshIndex.era?AGENCY=DA&CID=103828>
- ▶ Who is on this panel?
 - ▶ 36 Members
 - ▶ 34 are faculty at a university
 - ▶ 2 work at research institutes

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Case Study 2

A FEDERAL AGENCY: SAMHSA

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SAMHSA: Mission

- ▶ SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.
 - ▶ <https://www.samhsa.gov/about-us/who-we-are>
- ▶ List of grant opportunities for FY2021
 - ▶ <https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grant-announcements-2021>

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SAMHSA: What They Fund

- ▶ Resiliency in Communities After Stress and Trauma
- ▶ SM-21-012
 - ▶ <https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grant-announcements/SM-21-012>
 - ▶ Objectives: The purpose of this program is to assist high-risk youth and families and promote resilience and equity in communities that have recently faced civil unrest through implementation of evidence-based, violence prevention, and community youth engagement programs, as well as linkages to trauma-informed behavioral health services. The goal of the ReCAST Program is for local community entities to work together in ways that lead to improved behavioral health, empowered community residents, reductions in trauma, and sustained community change.

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SAMHSA: Who Reviews Grants

- ▶ Multiple levels of review
 - ▶ <https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grant-review-process>
- ▶ Applications screened for compliance
- ▶ Peer reviewers rate quality of application using a standardized form
- ▶ Grants requesting >\$150,000/year must also be reviewed by SAMHSA's National Advisory Council (votes to accept or reject results of peer review)

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Case Study 3

A FOUNDATION

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Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH): Mission

- ▶ "Our mission: to eliminate underlying causes of health inequities, transform systems, and enable individuals and communities to thrive."
- ▶ "Missouri Foundation for Health is a resource for the region, working with communities and nonprofits to generate and accelerate positive changes in health. As a catalyst for change, MFH improves the health of Missourians through partnership, experience, knowledge, and funding. The Foundation takes a multifaceted approach to health issues, understanding that programs, policy, and collaboration all play a role in creating lasting impact."

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MFH: Board of Directors

- ▶ 13 people
 - ▶ 7 Men and 6 women
 - ▶ Racially/ethnically diverse
- ▶ Occupations:
 - ▶ Administrators (Healthcare, university, non-profits)
 - ▶ Government
 - ▶ Public health
 - ▶ Mental health
 - ▶ Advocacy

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MFH: Grants

- Further the grantee's exempt purposes and programs.
- Most of the target population to be served must be located within the [MFH service area](#).
- Applicants must be registered to conduct business and in good standing with the state of Missouri.
- Eligible organizations:
 - Organizations granted tax-exempt status under provisions of Sections 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Service Code.
 - State or local government agencies, including educational institutions, and branches of the federal government serving Missouri.
- <https://mfh.org/the-foundation/grantees/funding-guidelines/>

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MFH: Contracted Services

- Benefit MFH's grantees or strategy directly.
- Examples:
 - Hiring consultants to provide technical assistance to grantees
 - Hiring evaluation assistance
 - Individuals, nonprofit organizations, and corporations are eligible to apply to a Request for Contracted Service Proposals.
- <https://mfh.org/the-foundation/grantees/funding-guidelines/>

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MFH: Who Reviews Grants

- ▶ Usually a mix of paid staff and invited, external experts
- ▶ Not easy to find list of previous reviewers but check annual reports
 - ▶ Annual reports also list grants awarded in that year
- ▶ Board of Directors must approve

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Should I apply for this grant?

- ▶ Create a checklist of the major requirements
 - ▶ Can your agency meet all of them?
- ▶ How much new material will you have to write?
- ▶ Who will write each section?
- ▶ How much time do you have to write the application?

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Make a plan

- ▶ Outline the basics of the work you'd like to do
- ▶ Compare it to the guidelines
 - ▶ Is it consistent with what the program funding objectives?
 - ▶ Is it innovative?
 - ▶ Is this new to you or something you have experience with?
- ▶ Assign specific people to complete specific parts of the application
 - ▶ Give deadlines and stick to them
 - ▶ Aim for having everything completed 2 weeks before the deadline

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Deconstructing a Grant

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All Grant Writing is....

- ▶ Persuasion

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Abstract/Summary

- ▶ A summary of the problem and your approach to solving it
 - ▶ Follow word limits precisely
- ▶ Important details to include:
 - ▶ Why you are the best ones to solve the problem
 - ▶ An overview of how you will do the work
 - ▶ Why you picked that approach
 - ▶ Key staff positions
 - ▶ How you will know if your program is successful

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Abstract Sample

- ▶ "This project is being initiated to develop and pilot test a new, peer-led HIV risk reduction intervention for homeless men staying in emergency shelters. Homeless men who are identified as opinion leaders will be trained to use a stages of change-based intervention to assist other homeless men to reduce their risk for HIV. This comprehensive HIV risk reduction program will include individual and group counseling sessions. We propose to pilot test the intervention in five phases over the course of three years. Following completion of all phases of field testing, we will compile a detailed treatment manual that will be used in a later clinical trial."

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Introduction

- ▶ Your job:
 - ▶ Show that your purpose aligns with the purpose of the grant
 - ▶ Demonstrate the need for your proposed project
 - ▶ Show that you understand the problem
 - ▶ Describe attempts to solve it/what services have already been tried
 - ▶ Describe where those attempts have fallen short
 - ▶ Offer an alternative solution that you think will work better

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Example: Justifying Need

- ▶ "We estimate that there are 30,000 people who would benefit from this program in our service area."
- ▶ Our service area encompasses twenty square miles in which 900,000 people live. Based on our preliminary work (see above) we estimate that 10% would meet eligibility criteria for this project. Of the 90,000 eligible to receive services, our preliminary work suggests that two-thirds are already receiving services. We therefore estimate that 30,000 in our service area would be eligible for this program."
- ▶ Go deeper: describe the clinical/demographic/social/health characteristics of those 30,000 people

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Project Plan

- ▶ Key components to describe:
 - ▶ Who are you going to serve?
 - ▶ What are you proposing to do?
 - ▶ How will you train/ensure staff are prepared to deliver these services?
 - ▶ When will people be enrolled and served?
 - ▶ Where will services be provided?
 - ▶ How will you provide services/evaluate their effectiveness?
- ▶ Detail, detail, detail

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Example: Describe Training Sessions

- ▶ "We will train staff on de-escalation techniques."
- ▶ "Each staff member will attend three one-hour sessions on de-escalation techniques. The classes will be taught by Dr. Chadwick Helper, director of the Clinical Psychology program at State University. (See Appendix A for Dr. Helper's letter of support.) Dr. Helper has been teaching de-escalation techniques to mental health professionals for 20 years. The first session provides an overview of theories of escalation and de-escalation. In the second session, staff will watch films of professional mental health workers de-escalating tense situations and will discuss the specific skills they used. In the third session, each staff member will practice de-escalation skills and receive feedback on their efforts."

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Example: Describe Programmatic Activities

- ▶ "Participants will receive a Cognitive-Behavioral Intervention aimed at reducing severity of depression."
- ▶ "Participants will receive six, 50-minute sessions of a Cognitive-Behavioral Intervention aimed at reducing severity of depression. Session 1 will assess symptom severity and previous attempts to reduce symptoms of depression. Session 2 will introduce a worksheet for documenting dysfunctional thinking patterns that contribute to feelings of depression; participants will be asked to complete the worksheet before the next session. In Session 3, we will review the worksheet and help the participant identify strategies to counteract the dysfunctional thoughts."

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Evaluating Your Success

- ▶ If an evaluation component is required, describe:
 - ▶ Who is responsible for designing evaluation protocol, collecting data, and analyzing it
 - ▶ Process or programmatic measures
 - ▶ Measures of who you serve, how often, wait times, etc.
 - ▶ Outcome measures
 - ▶ Measures of what you are trying to achieve, such as reduced drug use, reduced anxiety, improved management of chronic health conditions

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Example: Describe Evaluation Activities

- ▶ "All persons who receive services will be asked to complete a brief survey after they finish the program."
- ▶ "All persons who receive services will complete a survey at the start of the program. The survey will include the AUDIT (a brief assessment of drug and alcohol use), the DEPR (a brief assessment of current symptoms of depression), 1 question about their current housing situation, and the NETWORK assessment of the strength of current social relationships. Participants will complete the same surveys after they finish the program six months later. Surveys will be self-completed but we will provide assistance for any individual who cannot complete it on their own."

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Research Evaluation Components

- ▶ Much more detail required
- ▶ For each assessment tool:
 - ▶ Name, who developed it
 - ▶ Reliability and Validity
 - ▶ When administered (baseline, then every 3 months)
 - ▶ How administered (interview, self-completed, computer-assisted)
- ▶ Data collection plan
 - ▶ Sample selection, reducing attrition, power analysis
- ▶ Data analysis plan
 - ▶ Written by statistician

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Example: Describe a Measurement Tool

- ▶ "HIV knowledge and beliefs will be assessed with the Knowledge about Preventing AIDS scale (Koopman & Reid, 1998). This scale consists of 45 true-false items and 8 items in which the participant is asked to choose the safer behavior of two alternatives. The AIDS knowledge items loaded on three factors: medical/scientific knowledge (23 items, alpha = 0.71), myths of HIV transmission (9 items, alpha = 0.72), and knowledge of high risk and prevention behaviors (13 items, alpha = 0.68)."

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Example: Data Analysis Plan

- ▶ "We will conduct a 3 (study condition) x 4 (follow-up interval) repeated measures ANOVA to examine intervention effects on sexual risk and substance use. Given the sample size, however, effect sizes will also be calculated and are considered more important to our overall goals than hypothesis testing. We will use Cohen's (1992) guidelines to categorize effect sizes. For examples, for a one-way ANOVA, small, medium, and large effect sizes are defined as $f = .10$, $.25$, and $.4$, respectively."

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Financial Plan

- ▶ Key components:
 - ▶ Detail and justify every expense
 - ▶ Explain your rationale for how you came up with each number
 - ▶ Make sure that every part of your project that has a cost shows up in the budget
 - ▶ For example: training sessions, consultants, food/beverages for group therapy

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Example: Budget/Financial Plan

- ▶ "Principal Investigator, Dean Klinkenberg, Ph.D., will be responsible for the overall development, implementation, and completion of the STOP project. He will lead a research team composed of the project director, staff from the Good Samaritan shelter, and the consultants in order to closely monitor the implementation of the intervention. He will also co-lead the focus groups in Year 1 and will have primary responsibility for writing the project's final report. He will devote .25 FTE throughout the three years of the project."
- ▶ Include detail for all staff, contractors, consultants, equipment, supplies, travel, etc.
- ▶ Explain why you couldn't be successful without these items
- ▶ Make your FTE estimates realistic

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Consultants

- ▶ Reasons you may want to add consultants:
 - ▶ To plug holes in skills/expertise
 - ▶ For example, supervising staff delivering a new intervention
 - ▶ Training staff
 - ▶ Designing evaluation tools
- ▶ Don't forget to get a letter of support for each consultant
 - ▶ Draft and send

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Tips and Reminders

19 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR GRANTS

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1. Network

- ▶ Get to know program staff at foundations
 - ▶ Attend public meetings
 - ▶ Introduce yourself (politely)
 - ▶ Respect boundaries
- ▶ Call program officers
 - ▶ Often listed in grant announcements
- ▶ What to ask:
 - ▶ Questions about the process/deadlines
- ▶ What not to ask:
 - ▶ Evaluation of your proposal

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2. Follow the Instructions

- ▶ Can't overstate the importance of this
- ▶ Carefully follow:
 - ▶ Page or Word limits (overall and by section)
 - ▶ Formatting instructions
 - ▶ Deadlines
 - ▶ Content that must be addressed
 - ▶ Required documents in appendix

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3. Give Yourself Time

- ▶ Writing a grant is time consuming
- ▶ Plan on finishing a rough draft 2 weeks before the deadline
- ▶ Get it reviewed by someone who wasn't involved in the process

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4. Clearly Define Writing Roles

- ▶ Usually more than 1 person is involved
- ▶ Be clear about who is responsible for what and when
- ▶ If you have multiple people writing different sections:
 - ▶ Design a process for sharing works in progress (maybe use Google Docs)
- ▶ Assign an "editor"

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5. Think Like a Reviewer

- ▶ What are the weaknesses in your proposal?
- ▶ Look for unanswered questions or missing details
 - ▶ What have you done to address them?
 - ▶ How seriously do they threaten your ability to be successful?
- ▶ Be a harsh/skeptical critic of your own proposal

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6. Tell a Good Story

- ▶ Name your program and use that name repeatedly
- ▶ Restate the purpose of your program throughout the application
- ▶ Emphasize your experience in multiple places (abstract, intro, program plan, budget)

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7. Be Specific

- ▶ Instead of:
 - ▶ "We have a lot of experience with this population,"
- ▶ Say:
 - ▶ "We have been delivering direct services to homeless families for twelve years."
- ▶ Instead of:
 - ▶ "Participants will be enrolled in the program for one year."
- ▶ Say:
 - ▶ "Each participant will meet with a licensed clinical social worker for one hour once a month for 12 months. At each meeting..."

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12. Acronyms

- ▶ "The STOPNOW program uses the DDCEA approach to reach our the HPLWH population living in our target MSA."
- ▶ Use sparingly
- ▶ Stick to well-known acronyms
- ▶ Too many applicants create acronyms as a way to save space
 - ▶ Can be confusing to reviewers

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13. Avoid Jargon

- ▶ Many reviewers won't share your professional background
- ▶ Some reviewers may not even be in your field of expertise
- ▶ Skip jargon and technical terms as much as possible
- ▶ Write as if your audience isn't an expert in your field

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14. Sustainability/Program Continuation

- ▶ Is your program intended to run for a specific time only or to continue indefinitely?
- ▶ If you hope it will continue after the grant ends, describe a plan for its continuation, including how you will try to fund it
- ▶ If the program isn't expected to continue, why not?

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15. Appendices

- ▶ An appendix is for supplemental information as requested by the granting agency
- ▶ Don't bury important information in appendices
- ▶ Don't try to use it to get around page/word limits
- ▶ In some cases, reviewers may not see the appendices or are not allowed to factor them into scores/reviews

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16. Become a Reviewer

- ▶ Look for opportunities to review grants
 - ▶ SAMHSA
 - ▶ <https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/review/grant-review-opportunities>
 - ▶ Some foundations

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17. Resubmit

- ▶ Submit a revised application if it's allowed
- ▶ Read reviews carefully
 - ▶ Look for patterns
 - ▶ Find a way to respond to every critique

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18. Getting Help

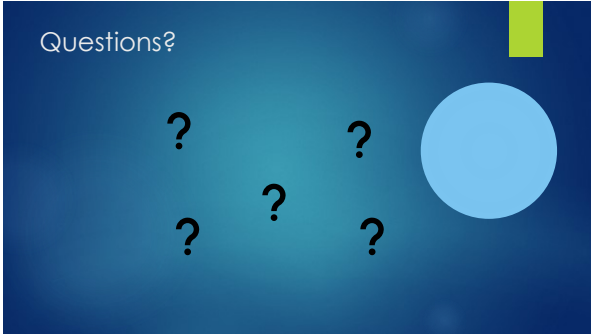
- ▶ If you hire a grant writer:
 - ▶ What is their experience in your specific content area?
 - ▶ Clearly define the roles (who will be responsible for writing what?)
 - ▶ What is the revision process going to be like?
 - ▶ How are you paying? (Hourly? Package price?)
- ▶ Writing Tools
 - ▶ Pro Writing Aid (\$)

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19. Reviewers are Human

- ▶ If you annoy them, they will rate your application lower
- ▶ Make it easy for them to find the required bits of information
- ▶ Avoid jargon and acronyms
- ▶ Write clearly and cleanly

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