Grant Writing Tips: General guidelines with emphasis on SIRE grants

Grant writing is HARD but can be FUN and HELPFUL to the creative & scholarly PROCESS.

1. Consider your project.
   a. What is your research question? What hypothesis are you testing? What is your creative goal?
      i. Your central question, thesis, hypothesis, or creative goal should be CLEARLY stated and articulated in one sentence. If you cannot clearly state your central question, your ideas may need some refining before you write the grant.
   b. What do you need to complete your project? Time, office space, supplies, travel funds, exhibit space, participants, materials, or equipment?
   c. What’s your timeline? Is this a semester long project? Summer? Multi-year?

2. Consider the available grant opportunities (aka ‘calls for proposals’, ‘requests for applications’, etc).
   a. What is the goal or mission of the agency? To cure disease? To support undergraduate research? To support international exchange? Your proposal should directly address the funding agency’s goals.
   b. Does the agency offer what you need? Do they fund international travel, research stipends, or equipment purchases?
      i. Books are generally never allowed in a SIRE grant. You can try to make an argument, but committees will generally expect you to use the library’s resources.
      ii. International travel can definitely be funded with a SIRE grant, but must be clearly justified in your proposal.
      iii. Post-graduate research cannot be funded by SIRE, but may be appropriate for a Fulbright, NSF pre-doctoral award, or other grant.
   c. Do you have the right credentials?
      i. Some grants are only available to citizens of specific countries.
         1. Generally, NSF and other US federal grants are for US citizens only.
         2. SIRE grants are open to Emory students of all nationalities.
      ii. Some grants are only for undergraduates in particular schools or majors.
         1. SIRE grants are only for Emory COLLEGE students (not b-school, not nursing students)
         2. Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Fellows (MMUF) must major in one of a set of specific fields.
         3. Clare Boothe Luce (CBL) scholars must major in a physical science.
      iii. Some grants are only for students with specific personal characteristics.
         1. MMUF is only for underrepresented racial or ethnic minority students.
         2. CBL scholars must be women.
         3. SIRE grants are open to all Emory college students in all fields.
3. Consider the application requirements.
   a. Are there things that must be submitted by others?
      i. Letters of support often must go directly to the agency
         (SIREgrants@learnlink.emory.edu)
      ii. Transcripts often must be sent directly by your school to the agency (SIRE
          grants do NOT require you to submit transcripts, although we do review
          yours on OPUS.)
      iii. Make sure to order/request these items LONG BEFORE the deadline
      iv. Make sure that the senders know exactly WHERE and HOW to submit.
   b. Do you need special certifications?
      i. If you are working with humans, you should plan to run your study by the
         IRB in order to protect your subjects. (SIRE grants don’t require official
         review from IRB at the time of application but a letter is needed before
         funds can be distributed for projects involving humans.)
      ii. If you are working with animals, you should plan to take certification
          classes/modules and will need to show proof of completion and IACUC
          approval before funds can be released.
   c. How much room (how many pages) do you have to write the proposal? (SIRE
      grants are 3 pages, single-spaced, 12pt font- exclusive of budget, tables, graphs
      & references.)
   d. Other things to include? Timeline? Budget? (Since you are asking for money,
      most grants (like SIRE) will require a budget.)

4. Writing your proposal
   a. Consider your audience. Academics? Professionals in your discipline? In your
      subfield?
      i. A broad committee in the Arts, Social Science, Natural Sciences, or
         Humanities reviews SIRE grants.
      ii. SURE grants are reviewed by natural scientists with broad expertise.
      iii. Experts in your field review NSF pre-doctoral grants.
   b. The background or intro section of a SIRE grant
      i. Create context- What observations are influencing your idea? What
         theories are grounding your study? What are the relevant previous
         works? What is the historical perspective surrounding your question?
         1. There should be several citations of relevant and recent works.
         2. Readers of SIRE grants need to be oriented to the field overall, so
            some general background is important.
      ii. What’s the rationale for this project? How is your project novel? What
          does your study add to what is already known?
          1. The readers should see how & why your idea is novel, necessary
             and exciting.
          2. Readers should be left with a desire to know the answer, to
             experience the creative work, to help solve the problem you’ve
             described.
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- The methods section of a SIRE grant- how will you realize this project? What will you DO? HOW will you do it?
  i. Natural sciences-
    1. Do not include protocol-level details, but general techniques and rationale are important.
    2. Key reagents should be named and explained.
    3. Do not compare/contrast why specific methods were chosen unless that is important background information relating to the novelty of your work.
  ii. Social sciences –
    1. Are you planning to conduct archival research, or do you plan to conduct research using living human subjects? If the latter, is your method experimental, survey-based, or ethnographic? Describe your research methods and, when appropriate, your sampling design. Why have you chosen these particular techniques? What are the strengths and limitations of your design?
    2. Who will you interview and why? What will you ask them (include survey questions whenever possible)?
  iii. Humanities & Arts-
    1. Although ‘methods’ sometimes go unstated in the Humanities and Arts, in a GRANT you MUST explain your methods since your methods are intimately tied to your budget. When we read the budget, it must be clear WHY you need each item and how it fits into your work because you’ve explained your method.
      a. If you will use primary sources from an archive, what exactly will you look for? Do you know it is there? Show that you’ve done your homework and located the documents, talked to the administrators, received permissions from the institutions you are planning to visit, etc.
      b. If your method is mostly reading and analyzing, tell us about your theoretical perspective – how is what you’re doing different from what’s been done? Include a timeline of your goals.

5. Crafting your budget
   a. All items in the budget must be clearly justified by the rationale and description of your methods.
      i. If you budget for costumes, the role of the costumes in your work should be clearly defined. Are the costume requirements directly related to the performer’s movement? Is a particular design expertise necessary to create the costumes? Are there specific needs for props/lighting/sound
without which this piece cannot be fully developed? Also explain which items you can borrow, or tell us what you cannot borrow and why.

ii. If you are requesting equipment (cameras, filmmaking equipment, etc.), the committee needs to know why you are not borrowing the needed items. If you list requests for filmmaking equipment, each item needs to be explained in terms of its purpose and WHY you are requesting funds for this equipment. Don’t assume the committee will understand your technological and equipment needs.

iii. If you are requesting funds to pay for production assistance (crew, stage managers, dressers, etc.), you will need to make clear WHY each position is critical to facilitating your project.

iv. If you’d like to pay participants to be subjects in your research, it must be clear that you cannot expect to recruit enough eligible students without the money – for example, can you use the Psychology ‘credit’ pool?

v. If you budget for travel, we should clearly understand why you must travel to this place, how is this place critical to your work? What will you do there exactly – if you want us to pay for a week’s stay, what will you do each day? Could you do it in 2 days? Will you need a month? The time you need should be clearly justified by your description of the method you’ll use while there.

b. Quote estimates and cite your sources.

c. Tell us if you will be living with a friend, receiving help in-kind, etc. Being thorough in this regard shows us that you know the total cost and all the details to make your project happen. (If you don’t include housing because you’ll stay with a friend, we wonder if you’ve forgotten it.)

d. Tell us even if the project is over budget – for example many lab experiments cost much more than the SIRE $1500 max. Showing you actually understand all the costs shows maturity and a deep understanding of the project. HOWEVER, be sure to tell us the lab will cover costs over $1500 so that we know the project can happen even if we can only award you $1500.