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STRCUU Grant Sourcing, Proposal Development and Report Writing

Dates: 2 – 5 March 2026

Time: 1400-1800 EAT

<https://strcuu.org/grant-sourcing-proposal-development-and-report-writing>

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DAY 2 4rd March 2026

Topic 1: Common Pitfalls in Grant Sourcing and the Best Practices to Avoid them

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1.0 Introduction

- ❑ **Grant sourcing** involves identifying aligned funding opportunities from government, foundation, or corporate sources.
- ❑ **Grant sourcing** and **proposal development** are two highly interconnected, sequential stages in the grant lifecycle.
- ❑ **Grant sourcing** is the research-driven process of identifying potential funders, while **proposal development** is the act of crafting a compelling document to secure funds from those sources.

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- ❑ **The relationship** between **grant sourcing** and **proposal development** is **fundamental**: effective sourcing ensures the proposal is tailored to the right audience, while strong proposals are built upon insights gained during the research phase.
- ❑ **An excellent proposal** for **one funder** may not be excellent for **another funder** (or the **same funder** a different time, place or area of focus).
- ❑ **Common mistakes** in grant sourcing are frequently linked to poor, rushed, or poorly targeted **proposal development**, resulting in proposals that fail to resonate with funders, hence **rejection**.

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2.0 Competitiveness of Proposal Evaluation

- ❑ **Proposals are competitively evaluated** through a structured, objective process designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and the selection of the best-value solution.
- ❑ **Proposal evaluation process** involves assessing multiple, often competing, submissions against predetermined criteria to identify the proposal that best aligns with the issuer's goals, technical requirements, and budget

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- ❑ Managing a **large volume of proposals** often results in **high rejection rates**, frequently driven by intense competition, lack of alignment with funder priorities, and rigorous compliance standards.
- ❑ Typical **success rate** is around **10%** (1 in 10 applications), hence not all rejected proposals are bad.

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❑ Proposals are measured against specific, pre-defined criteria outlined in the Calls for proposals (CFPs) or Request for Proposals (RFP). These often include:

- ✓ **Technical Capability:** Technical approach, methodology, and innovation.
- ✓ **Experience & Past Performance:** Similar projects, references, and qualifications of the team.
- ✓ **Financial Proposal:** Total cost of ownership, including operating and maintenance costs.
- ✓ **Project Timeline:** Adherence to schedule and ability to meet deadlines.
- ✓ **Risk Management:** Identification of risks and mitigation strategies.
- ✓ **Sustainability:** Clear, feasible sustainability plan.

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- ❑ **There are many proposals that meet evaluation thresholds but are **still rejected** despite their merit due to very **high competition, some notable flaws**, and **availability of funds**.**
- ❑ **Evaluation reports** (on rejected proposals) may be used to improve such proposals for purposes of resubmission..... when next similar calls are open for submissions.
- ❑ **Whereas** as proposal rejection may not imply poor proposals, a **large number** of rejections occur due to **common mistakes or pitfalls** that may be avoided during proposal development.

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3.0 Common Pitfalls in Grant Sourcing or proposal Development

“Amid so much uncertainty, the pool of funding available to researchers could very well shrink. There is no time for typographical errors, shaky hypotheses, or incomplete data. Now, more than ever, your grant application needs to be impeccable. Unfortunately, that’s often easier said than done”.

Paraphrased from:

Kavita Bhalla (PhD), Director,

Scientific Review, Conquer Cancer, the ASCO Foundation

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- ❑ The following are the most common pitfalls in grant sourcing or proposal development
 - (a) Inadequate or poor funder research
 - (b) Ignoring call guidelines
 - (c) Weak project design and goals
 - (d) Poor budgets
 - (e) Being over ambitious
 - (f) Unconvincing project impact
 - (g) Lack of sustainability plan
 - (h) Missed deadlines

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(a) Inadequate Funder Research

- Applying to funders whose **goals do not align** with your project, leading to **high rejection rates**.
- Conduct a thorough research to **understand the funder**: What exactly does the funder want?
- Proposal**: Should appeal to the **funder FIRST**, then to you.

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(b) Ignoring Call Guidelines

- Failing to follow formatting, word counts, or submission instructions precisely can lead to outright rejection.
- Understand and follow the call guidelines; Read, and Read.
- Create a checklist that outlines all necessary components of a proposal and use it during proposal development.
- Adhere to specific key words like “Must”, “should”, “preferably”, e.t.c.
- The **call guidelines** have **crucial hints** regarding proposal structure, content and context.

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(c) Weak project design and goals

- ❑ Lack of clear goals and objectives; Lack of well-defined targets.
- ❑ Pursuit of solutions to non-existent, unimportant, or irrelevant problems: Convince the reviewers that the proposed research is very important and clearly explain why you want to do it.
- ❑ **The science falls short:** The proposal should be hypothesis-driven and based on preliminary findings from data with statistical rigour.

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(d) Poor budgets

- ❑ Poor budgets are those that are either too high, too low, or lack detailed justifications.
- ❑ Create realistic and comprehensive budgets; A weak budget can raise red flags for funders, who may question the organization's financial management capabilities.
- ❑ Common pitfalls include underestimating costs, failing to account for indirect expenses, or not providing sufficient justification for budget items.
- ❑ The Budget and technical narrative, particularly project activities or tasks, **MUST** speak to none another.
- ❑ Budgeting should go hand in hand with the project design and goals: a common problem is having individual members over budgeting activities that they will undertake (**The coordinator:** has to rationalize the budget)

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(e) Being over ambitious

- The project can only achieve specific objective within a short period of time; not everything in the subject area!
- “*Science is a marathon, not a sprint*” Kavita Bhalla.
- Promising do much with little funds is a red flag to a reviewer; Budget review in post-award phase are not allowed, particularly for projects on Lump Sum Model Grants .

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(f) Unconvincing project impact

- The envisioned project outcomes are viewed as weak, flimsy, or implausible.
- Lack of clear logical framework that connects activities through to impact; Activities, outputs and outcomes are unrelated – a collection of sentences and paragraphs.
- Lack of robust plan for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks

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(g) Lack of sustainability plan

- This gap often leads to the failure of projects to provide lasting benefits, particularly in community-based initiatives, as resources are wasted once initial support is withdrawn.
- What will happen at the end of the project lifespan?
- Will there be any return on investment (ROI), tangible or intangible?

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(h) Missed deadlines

- ❑ Timeliness is critical in grant sourcing, particularly when it comes to submitting proposals or reports.
- ❑ Missing deadlines can have serious repercussions, including disqualification from funding opportunities or damage to relationships with stakeholders.
- ❑ Many organizations fall into the trap of underestimating the time required for proposal preparation or failing to account for unforeseen delays in gathering necessary information.
- ❑ To avoid missed deadlines, researchers should implement effective project management strategies that include setting internal deadlines well ahead of external ones.

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Thank you

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