



MRFA Scholarship Series Session 2 - Notes

Grant Writing, An Insider Scoop on Where to Start

Panelists:

- Lynn Moorman, Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Jeella Acedo, Chemistry and Physics
- Khosro Salmani, Mathematics and Computing
- AnneMarie Dorland, Communications Studies

Moderator: Yvonne Kjørlien, Grants and Research Facilitator, Office of Research, Scholarship and Community Engagement (ORSCE)

Lynn Moorman, Earth and Environmental Sciences

What helps in grant writing

- Seeing what others have submitted in their grant proposals – it is helpful to get involved as a members of committees involved in evaluating research proposals. There are opportunities to serve in this capacity in internal applications and awards recognition processes.
- Can start with non-profits or organizations that provide grant for your discipline, Faculty and MRU internal grant evaluations

Tri-council funding tips:

- It is very competitive, and it is helpful to try to align your research with their funding priorities.
- You may sometimes have to apply multiple times for tri-council funding
- Make sure you are ready for these grants and that you can carve out the time for them as there is a lot of work required in the administration of these grants

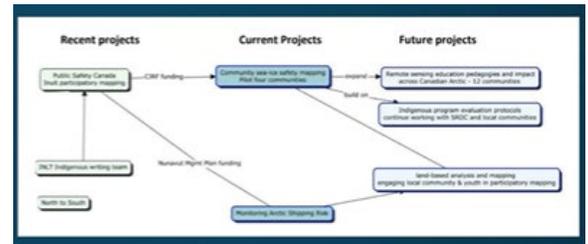
Be open to alternate sources of funding and speak about your research

- Getting funding from outside agencies and smaller internal grants can provide steps to accessing tri-council funding
- I received a 500,000\$ after having an offhand conversation with a friend in an airport which led to an introduction and I conveyed my research interests of digital mapping in the arctic and building capacity for the arctic: two weeks later I was in the arctic formulating my proposal for this 500k grant I received.

What is the core question: map it out – know where you are coming from and where you are going.

- Determine what the core question is of your research and if it does not align with those of Tri-council, an option is to look to other sources.

- Write down the criteria that is being asked for in the funding and then make the headings of your proposal to match it. Look at what the funding body values and highlight those things.
- Ensure that you craft a clear narrative that explains what you plan to do
- Consider what you will need for the research and where it will lead and what knowledge creation it may lead to
- Consider concept mapping and timelines – give yourself milestones for each project you have and consider all your work as a comprehensive program of research.



Jeella Acedo, Chemistry and Physics

- I am an early career researcher and I received an NSERC discovery grant and it came with a discovery launch supplement which is given to early career researchers (these are over a five year period). Early career is considered the first 5 years of an academic appointment
- I also received the faculty level research grant and the internal ORSCE grant
- I applied for these grants to support my scholarship pursuits. For my field and my research topic, the money available is very important for the research I am engaged in.



- I applied for the first time in 2019 and was unsuccessful and I applied the second time and received it
- Rejection is never easy but it is a stepping stone to our desired outcomes.
- When you are rejected focus on what you can do to improve as you prepare for the next application

Learning how to apply for grants:

- Take the time to have a solid understanding of the grant and of the evaluation process
- Attend the ORSCE workshops which cover topics of how to start a research program in an undergrad research context and how to apply for federal grants. This series of sessions provide a very helpful place to start
- GMU provided a workshop (overview below) which was offered online to provide advice on how to apply for NSERC grants which went into very particular detail on how to create your proposals. You need to use keywords strategically and have them pop up throughout your proposals.



My steps in a successful application:

- Engaged four volunteer research students who provided preliminary data for proposal
- Treated the grant application writing process as a full-time job
- Referred to my failed attempt and addressed the issues of the failed application
- Reviewed the criteria to consider how my application would be evaluated (referring to the grant merit review grid for evaluation guidelines)
- Revised as needed
- Attended grant writing workshops and incorporated lessons learned
- Compared my application to successful applications and compared to their sample proposals
- Had successful applicants review my application (sent it to 10 people for review who would look at it from a variety of perspectives)

Khosro Salmani, Mathematics and Computing

Reasons for applying for research grants

- I wanted to establish my research at MRU and I wanted to expand my research – I work in the field of security and privacy and in order to engage in this research I needed funding
- As soon as I had a really good idea for a research project a colleague encouraged me to apply for funding. So, I reached out to the ORSCE for support. Before going to SSHRC directly it was suggested that I apply to the IRGF fund which would give me experience in grant application writing. IRGF funds – internal funds – provide a good place to start before you apply for larger grants Internal grants can also provide support to hire research assistants. As a faculty member I do not have time to engage in research as I did have when I was a post-doc. With the ability to hire research assistants this provides support for your research and can also benefit your research assistant in their development.

A big mistake that I made: **Time Miscalculation**

My Grant Application Writing Process

- I did not know where to start at all but I started by talking to my colleagues and to ORSCE. When you do not know what you are looking for it can be difficult.
- Once I determined the grants I wanted to apply for I learned more about the grant agency by reviewing their websites and also, specifically, their youtube videos.
- I attended workshops about how to write grant proposals
- I reviewed applications which had been submitted in prior years
- I start brainstorming an application and adding to it extensively, prior to review and finalizing it.
- I then will send it out to peers to review and to subject experts.

AnneMarie Dorland, Communications Studies

Perspectives on Grant Writing

- I worked previously as an accounts director and project manager – grant writing to me is a client pitch and I can scope out client interests and boundaries before I submit my proposal

A walk through how we can ensure the odds are in our favour and how we can remain targeted:

- Never use your own money when you can spend someone else's
- Find ways to make your academic nerd fund happen!
- All of your projects should have a funding partner that can be attached and it can take a lot of work to find those partners

My opportunities

- I have been involved in both large and small scale grants and I have been engaged in three levels of funding partnerships including in the tricouncil space, in work through my dissertation and graduate work, internal funding at MRU in the IRGF and SoTL realms and this has funded smaller projects which have led to larger projects
- My projects feed directly into my classroom and teaching practice and also connect to my community. I focus on the community arm which for me is in social innovation in the local and provincial space. These areas may not have grants specifically but may have funding available for pilot projects that connect to their strategic development plans

Identifying grant opportunities

Stage 1 – Wayfinding

- How we find our ways around environments using context clues and move in the right direction as you go
- Identifying the idea that is fundable as you move forward

Stage 2 – Navigating

- Use specific markers of the grant application process to map out your trajectory
- Set expectations based on markers in terms of development of the proposal, to getting the grant, to moving forward with the grant.

Stage 3 – Writing the grant proposal

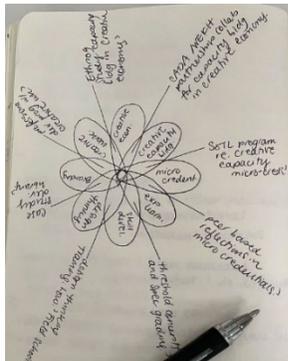
- Mapping the unknown in the grant application itself – note all the ideas that may be included, being ruthless in removing elements that should not be included, and map out the distance between the landmarks
- This is what leads to getting the grant itself.

Where does inspiration for grant ideas come from?

- I focus mostly on putting the cart before the horse – I decide I am going to apply for a grant and then create the application
- I learn from others and I sit on committees to learn more
- I grind out as much as possible and then bring it to life once I have the outcome in my mind



Step 1 – Daisy Map



I identify all the things that I am interested in the petals and then make connections between those things. Then I consider what in that map may be fundable. Then I could apply for a small internal grant and consider how I could use that to fund a research assistant to support work on this as it moved forward.

Sometimes it can be very forced and sometimes you can rearrange the petals to make connections

You need to ensure you limit the number of petals you use so that you can ensure that you are focusing on the most important topics

Step 2 – Matrix

(a two by two table/grid) I identify items in the top left where items are very difficult with low impact to the bottom right in terms of high impact and low commitment

This requires ruthless honesty and can help direct your focus to achievable and high impact goals.

Step 3 – is it fundable, feasible for financing

Is it fundable?

- I develop a short elevator pitch and then run it by colleagues
- Will someone pay for it?
- Can I demonstrate social utility for it?
- Will the grant provider be proud of it?

Is it feasible?

- Can I pull it off?
- Do I have the skills?
- Do I have the skills and time for it?

Is it something that would be financed?

- Is there real interest in it – do people really care and will they want to highlight it?

Step 4 – Pre-mortem (as opposed to post-mortem)

I map out all the potential causes for failure and then use that to ensure that I have addressed all of the possible causes for failure. If I do not address all the possible causes for failure – I do not apply

I need to answer a series of questions to ensure I am ready

- I can describe what I want to have accomplished
- I can justify why the funding source is a good match
- I can make the funding organization proud of their contribution
- I can make the scope of the project and outcomes explainable
- I have surfaced all possible connections to the community
- I have mirrored the funding agency's keywords at least 10 times
- I have ensured that my abstract hits all categories needed for the funding agency



When I get rejected:

I give myself time before looking at the rejection to get past the sadness so I can more objectively review and consider why my application was rejected

Yvonne Kjorlien, Grants and Research Facilitator, Office of Research, Scholarship and Community Engagement (ORSCE)

- There is a lot of time involved in grant applications, both in thinking and in writing.
- There is a creative element in determining what you want, if it is feasible and if funding agencies will really care
- Reviewers can tell if you care about your topic – if you do not care it is obvious. If you do not have an emotional investment in it then the funder will not care.
- Be aware of the funder criteria and highlight those
- Be aware of the deadlines and ensure you have enough time to make those deadlines
- Handling rejection is also a difficult step in this process. We need to know that the rejection is not a rejection of us it is a rejection of what we are putting out there. What you put out can always be improved and it is a journey. The rejection is not about you. So, putting away the rejection for a while is useful and engage your coping strategies to soften the blow of criticism.

Part 2 – Reflection on Grant Writing

Lynn Moorman

How your processes have developed over time?

- Had industry experience in creating proposals, and had strong mentors in my academic supervisors
- Clear proposals , goals, milestones, and budget outlines are helpful
- Mentoring is highly valuable: engaging your mentors and seeing how they develop their proposals
- Ensuring you create a narrative that your research fits in their priorities and provide points supporting your claim that your work is important. Being explicit and clear is very important
- Wording is important – be confident – use statements of “I will... “ not “I aim to ... “ Leave the evaluators with a sense that you are able to do what you set out to do
- We need to consider success of research from other points of view beyond our own perspective and consider various community perspectives in these considerations.

What would you tell your past self?

- Thank you for putting in the time and work – it was worth it. To have the opportunity to engage in your research and to inform your teaching with your research.

What may you change as you move forward?

- I may be more creative in the tools I use to hone in on my research question

How do you stay motivated?

- The idea that it helps my teaching is motivating. In certain fields you really need to stay up to date in the evolving methodologies and data sets.
- You fine tune your research questions and that makes your processes more efficient and clarifies the methodology you need to use to get the research results you are looking for.
- Being ready and prepared for sudden opportunities. If you are clear in your research direction and needs, it will help you ensure you are prepared when an opportunity comes along. Always keep an eye on the grants available and do not have fear of applying.

Jeella Acedo

How your processes have developed over time?

- I have learned a lot from mentors and from workshops I have attended and from collaborators
- From having sat on adjudication boards - I have learned to ensure that the way I submit proposals meets the evaluation criteria
- I learned to accept feedback from experts and non-experts
- I learned that some agencies will only fund half of the amount you request in your grant proposal.
 - *Note from moderator* – there are funders who will allow you to add in a buffer to your budget and there are some who do not. Reviewers will see if you have padded your

budget – if it is allowable then that is fine. But, if it is not allowable then you will be immediately disqualified.

- Specific considerations for research from an undergraduate institution:
 - There is a problem with continuity in our students when we are working with undergraduate students. I presented a clear recruitment plan where extensions could be provided for multiple semesters and provided for overlap between those senior and junior students to allow for peer-to-peer learning and transmission of learning
 - It is helpful in the undergraduate research context to identify other resources that are available though perhaps unconventional

What would you tell your past self?

- It is going to take time – have patience – remember that we are in a teaching focused institution

How do you stay motivated?

- Learn from my failures and seek inspiration from colleagues who are successful, seek funding from List A reassigned time to get more support, and rely on my general passion for motivation.

Khosro Salmani

How your processes have developed over time?

- Attended very helpful online workshops
- It was valuable to attend multiple types of workshops as you can identify the commonalities (those things that are very important in all grant writing) and other considerations that you may want to keep in mind.

What would you tell your past self?

- The more you know the better you will do, and the more you write the better it will be. You will progress and improve as you move forward.

How do you stay motivated?

- What keeps us motivated is a pretty personal consideration and it needs to be considered individually. For myself, the ability to engage in the research and its results are motivating, and if the grant is rejected then I am motivated to learn from the rejection.
 - Note from the moderator – it is important to remember that we are all together in this and we are not alone in these processes.

Annemarie Dorland

How your processes have developed over time?

- As researchers we need to ensure we clearly demonstrate an understanding of the assignment
- I use a rubric to evaluate myself before I send my proposals out to others to evaluate.

What have you learned?

- I need to think about how my work fits in the larger picture and how I can connect projects to other projects. I also think about why I am the one working on a project and why I am doing it independently or why am I working with others.
- I need to understand that I am part of an ecosystem of research. Outlining the development of collaborations is valuable and it can also gain you extra points in your grant proposal process.

What would you tell your past self?

- I do not think about my past self I think about my future self to ensure that I do not over commit or over burden myself.

How do you stay motivated?

- I make a sticky note to remind myself of what my goal is and to centre my efforts on something that is understandable and accessible. It reminds me of what I am working towards and helps to get over the hump of the difficult challenges we are facing in the moment.
- The process of writing the grant is the hard work but once it is done you will have a well thought out, insightful and impactful design that will support your future self in the work you have ahead and you are set up well for success.

Consideration of Indigenization in Grant Writing

It is important to address this consideration with respect to research that may involve Indigenous lands or peoples. A lot of the funding currently available is coming from western science based organizations but there is a shift to getting more Indigenous perspectives in many areas. This may lead to shifting the proposal to a narrative and the consideration of impact of research on Indigenous communities. More and more we will see these granting agencies respecting these processes and considering different ways we can share our stories and ideas.

You may need to consider other licenses and approvals you will need from the Indigenous communities as well and you cannot move forward without these relationships.

Tanya Stogre – (put on the spot to provide her comment/expertise)

Quoting Alice Kaquitts as a general guide - “Nothing about us without us”

- From day one you need to engage Indigenous perspectives to honour those relationships. You need to involve Indigenous communities to engage from the beginning and ask them what they want and what would be helpful for them and understand their perspective before you move forward.
- Also, as researchers we have to consider Indigenous ways of knowing and being. This is about really thinking and being reflective with collaborators to determine the best way forward. What Indigenous methodologies would be the best employed to move forward in a good direction. To do this you can let things unfold in a more natural and wholistic way that may be uncomfortable for western educated scholars and approaches to research.

Q and A Period

Q: How do you become a reviewer?

A: to serve on an adjudication committee you need to have been successful in a prior competition as a Principle investigator (or co-investigator potentially depending on the competition)

- For the grants that you apply to – you should start small and go big. Serve first on internal grant committees and then move to bigger committees. Apply for internal grants and leverage those for external grants
- Consider the field – look at possible non-profits as sources of funding and possible places to adjudicate

It is valuable to find out what works for you and it can be trial and error. There is a wealth of expertise in your colleagues and you can seek them out for support and advice. They are also going through this journey with you or that have been through it and they can help you.

Q: is it worth resubmitting a proposal that has been denied to the same granting agency

A: It is certainly work resubmitting

Comment: It is important to know your capacity but you need to consider submitting proposals that will seem feasible to granting agencies.

Important Reminders:

- Deadlines for IRGF is one week before the external funder deadline
- The deadline for Yvonne's feedback is three weeks prior
- sign up for the ORSCE Newsletter, let the centre know about your research news and keep an eye on it for announcements of available grants