Navigating Private Sponsors

ILLINOIS COLLEGE OF EDUCATION GRANTS ACADEMY SEMINAR





FEBRUARY 2025

Who's that?? JESSICA VENABLE, PHD, GRANTS ACADEMY FACILITATOR



Jess Venable, PhD Partner, Thorn Run Partners

Jessica (Jess) Venable co-leads the firm's Grants Enterprise Strategy consulting practice, which assists clients in increasing the extramural funding base needed to support programs and services, research, outreach and engagement, partnerships, and the innovation ecosystem.

With more than 25 years' experience, she delivers a unique combination of solutionsfocused consulting services including strategic planning, government relations, public relations, grants enterprise development and capacity building, partner engagement, Team Science, program design, and grant proposal development.

Jessica also leads Thorn Run Partners' Grantsmanship Initiative. Successful grantsmanship requires a skillset that is built, continually developed, and adapts to evolving contexts. Using a "coaches" approach to learning, Jess helps grant writers self-discover solutions to proposal development, while challenging conventional thinking about research funding that create barriers across cultures and institutions.

Her client portfolio spans the higher education, non-profit, and local government sectors, for whom she has helped win more than \$700 million in competitive grant awards across the past decade alone.

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Writing a successful grant application is an art

Although the "science" is primarily being evaluated, presentation and respect for the requirements of the funding agency are key aspects that can make or break an application.

Source: Kraicer, J. (1997). The Art of Grantsmanship. https://www.hfsp.org/sites/default/files/webfm/Communications/The%20Art%20of%20Grantsmanship.pdf





Grantsmanship.

The art of acquiring peer-reviewed funding, secured through (for example) grants.

Grant Writing.

The **process** of crafting a proposal or grant application for submission to a funder.



Blah, blah, blah. Just tell me the rules for writing a grant and I'll do those things.

- Give me a template.
- Give me a checklist.
- What work?
- What doesn't work?
- Tell me what to write, and I'll write it.
- Why are you so annoying?



Blah, blah, blah. Just tell me the rules for writing a grant and I'll do those things.

My epiphany came when I realized that grant programs do not exist to make me successful, but rather **my job is to make those programs successful.**

Source: Porter, R. (2007). Why academics have a hard time writing good grant proposals. The Journal of Research Administration, 38, 161-167.



OMG, another training? On a Friday??

ALIGNING YOUR RESEARCH WITH NON-FEDERAL SPONSORS' PRIORITIES

- Identify types of foundations and their funding priorities relevant to education research
- Understand the key differences between foundation and federal funding
- Develop strategies to cultivate long-term funding relationships
- Apply effective grant writing techniques tailored to foundation audiences



Because grants don't just fall out of the sky...

Understanding funder priorities.



Extramural funding

HOW SPONSORS DEFINE "SIGNIFICANCE"





Key differences

FEDERAL VS FOUNDATION SPONSORS

National priorities and strategic plans

Structured, formal applications

Merit-based, peerreviewed evaluations

Longer timelines, detailed compliance requirements

Open solicitations with clear deadlines



Federal Government To advance the taxpayers' interests.

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Foundations To promote the mission of the organization, public good.

Mission-driven priorities Flexible application processes

Relationship-based (networking critical)

Shorter timelines, quicker decisions

Often invitation-only or LOI required



Key differences

FOUNDATIONS BY TYPE

| PRIVATE | FAMILY | CORPORATE | COMMUNITY |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---|
| Spencer | Annie E. Casey | Google | Chicago |
| Foundation | Foundation | AT&T Foundation | Community Trust |
| Carnegie Corp of | Walton Family | Boeing Charitable | Cleveland |
| New York | Foundation | | Foundation |
| Lumina Foundation | Kellogg Foundation | Trust | Silicon Valley Community Foundation |



Grantmaking priorities

HOW FOUNDATIONS DEFINE "SIGNIFICANCE"



Why foundations matter

THORN RUN PARTNERS

FY 2023 HIGHER ED R&D EXPENDITURES BY SOURCE OF FUNDS



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Why foundations matter

FUNDING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



Often support innovative, community-centered, and equity-focused research.



Provide seed funding for pilot projects or emerging research areas.





Foster partnerships with schools, communities, and policy organizations.

Opportunity for multi-year funding and unrestricted grants.



Because foundations are not ATMs...

Finding funding opportunities.



BAN

NUMP

Intentional grantseeking

PREPARE TO SEARCH



Keywords



Population, stakeholders



Methodology, Methods



Area(s) of Innovation



Anticipated Results

Impacts, Significance



Intentional grantseeking

START AT HOME

- Peers and colleagues
- Social media
- Affinity groups, professional associations
- Funding opportunities listservs, email lists
- Sponsor alerts, newsfeeds
- Grant Forward
- Foundation Directory Online, Instrumentl
- NPR

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Pursue Your Research Goals

A number of campus, Federal, State, private, and corporate sources provide funding to support the research enterprise at UIUC. The OVCRI can assist campus scholars in identifying and developing a strategy to pursue opportunities that will further their research goals. Be sure to subscribe to the Funding Opportunities email list and the campus Limited Submissions list.

C Subscribe to the OVCRI Limited Submissions List

Find Current Campus Opportunities

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REDEFINING THE A

Q

Intentional grantseeking

A BIG LIST OF THE USUAL SUSPECTS

| 3M Foundation | Empowering Minds Foundation |
|---|---|
| American Association of University Women Educational Found | dation The Ford Foundation |
| The American Educational Research Association | International Educational Research Foundation |
| The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation | Johnson & Johnson Corporate Giving Program |
| Annenberg Foundation | The NEA Foundation |
| Arthur Vining Davis Foundations | The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation |
| Association for Institutional Research | Russell Sage Foundation |
| Brady Educational Foundation | The Wallace Foundation |
| Comcast Foundation | William T. Grant Foundation |
| Source: Find Funding Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation (OVCRI), Funding – Educational Research, and Home Research | ch Funding |

Intentional grantseeking

THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS



Source: Find Funding | Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation (OVCRI), Funding – Educational Research, and Home | Research Funding



FOMO

But I want to know about all the other grants that nobody else knows about that haven't been announced yet.



Because not all money is the right money...

Assess your fit and readiness to apply.



Insert idea Mix with NOFO Extract funding



Determine if this is the right opportunity.

PRIORITIES & IMPACT ALIGNMENT





Understand how proposals are requested.

ANATOMY OF THE NOFO





Understand how proposals are requested.

THE NON-NOFO

Many Foundations offer **very limited guidance to applicants**. Review the websites and past funded grants to determine:

- What are the funder's goals and objectives? What is a fundable project?
- Am I eligible to apply? •-----
- How do I apply? Is this an opencall or invitation-only?

Preferences

Applications for grants are considered in the following areas:

Education

- Social Service
- Healthcare
- Civic and Cultural
- Environmental

The categories above are not intended to limit the interest of the Foundation from considering other worthwhile projects. In general, the Foundation guidelines are broad to give us flexibility in providing grants.

The majority of our grants are made in the U.S. However, like Dr. Scholl, we recognize the need for a global outlook. Non-U.S. grants are given to organizations where directors have knowledge of the grantee.

Limitations

The Foundation does not consider the following for funding:

- Organizations that do not have a valid IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter
- Organizations that cannot provide us with at least 3 years of financial activity
- Political organizations, political action committees, or individual campaigns whose primary purpose is to influence legislation
- Foundations that are themselves grantmaking bodies
- Grants for loans, operating deficit reductions, the liquidation of a debt or general support
- Grants to individuals
- Grants are rarely made to endowments or capital campaigns
- Event sponsorships including the purchase of tables, tickets or advertisements
- More than one request from the same organization

Procedures

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

To determine if you are eligible to apply for a grant through the Dr. Scholl Foundation, please refer to the <u>Preferences and Limitations</u> page on our website.

METHOD OF APPLICATION

The Dr. Scholl Foundation grant application cycle is between October 1 and March 1 of the following year. All applications must be submitted through the Dr. Scholl Foundation portal. We do not accept applications through any other method (e.g., mail, email, etc.). All application requests are acknowledged by email.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process contains two steps:

Step 1: Applicants may submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) through the Dr. Scholl Foundation portal beginning October 1. LOIs are reviewed on a rolling basis with a five business day turnaround.

Step 2: If an applicant's LOI is approved, they will be invited to submit a grant application which is due in the Dr. Scholl Foundation portal by March 1 at 4:00 p.m. CST. Applicants are encouraged to submit their applications as soon as possible after an LOI is approved.

FUNDING DECISIONS

All applicants are notified of funding decisions in October (one year from the opening of the grant cycle), and the grant awards are disbursed in November.

CURRENT APPLICATION TIMELINES:

- If you received money in Q4 2023 (2023 Grants), your 2023 Final Report is due on December 1, 2024.
- For those seeking to receive funding in Q4 2024 (2024 Grants), the application process is closed and applications are no longer being accepted.
- For those seeking to receive funding in Q4 2025

Determine if this is the right opportunity.

DECISION MATRIX

| Category | Question | Score |
|-------------|--|-------|
| Alignment | The grant opportunity aligns with my research, scholarly goals, and priorities. | |
| Eligibility | I, my organization, and my team is eligible to apply . | |
| Need | I can demonstrate a clear and compelling need for the proposed funding. | |
| Program | I have a well-thought-out program design or project that fits the grant's objectives. | |
| Support | I have buy-in from key stakeholders, partners, or community groups required? | |
| Capacity | I have access to resources (staff, space, tech) needed to implement the project. | |
| Budget | My budget is realistic and matches the grant's funding scope and guidelines. | |
| Experience | I have <mark>experience</mark> managing similar grants or projects. | |
| Compliance | I am prepared to meet all compliance, reporting, and accountability requirements. | |
| Timeline | I can realistically meet deadlines for submission, implementation, and reporting? | |

5 = Definitely YES; 0 = Definitely NO



Determine if this is the right opportunity.

MAKE AN HONEST ASSESSMENT



Certain categories may have greater importance based on the grant or organizational priorities. Apply weightings as necessary.



Break



Because relationships matter...

Build connections with the funder.



Review process

FEDERAL FUNDING





Review process

FOUNDATION FUNDING

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Engagement strategies

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOUNDATIONS



Follow institutional protocols



Request informational meeting



Send well-prepared inquiries



Follow up strategically, leverage networks



Engagement strategies

START AT HOME

- University may control foundation relationships, requiring you to work through internal channels.
- Collaborate with colleagues, leadership who have existing foundation relationships.
- Use past awardees as potential advisors or mentors.
- Engage on institutional initiatives that align with foundation interests.
- > STOP if the university says stop.



Phone: 217-265-5322 E-mail: <u>foundationrelations@illinois.edu</u>

Welcome to the Office of Foundation Relations!

The Office of Foundation Relations at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is a campus-wide resource for faculty and administrators seeking to advance relationships with national and selected regional private foundations. As each foundation is different, we are here to guide you through their processes and campus processes, as needed.

Mission

The Office of Foundation Relations (OFR), under the auspices of the Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement, is dedicated to securing support from private foundations for the institution's academic and public engagement programs. The office collaborates with faculty members, campus leaders, and staff to advance partnerships with foundation funders through communications, proposal development, stewardship and other activities.

Services

Gran

OFR offers a range of services across all colleges and units.

Our services include:

- Advising strategic approaches to private and corporate foundations
- Helping to convert ideas into fundable projects/programs
- Development of proposals and gift agreements
- Providing information on the history of the University's relationships with specific foundations
- Arranging campus visits and meetings with foundation representatives
- Targeted dissemination of Requests for Proposals (RFP's) across the units
- Researching sponsors to identify foundations that align with project goals
- Assessment of unit-specific foundation activities
- Working with communications staff across the units on news releases for foundation awards



Because it takes work to make others excited about your work...

Communicate significance and impact.



Write with the reviewers in mind

WRITING FOR PERSUASIVENESS

| SCHOLARLY WRITING | | | GRANT WRITING |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Reflects individual passion | Scholarly pursuit ◀ | Sponsor's goals | Adopts service attitude |
| Describes completed work | Past oriented ◀ | Future oriented | Describes planned work |
| Clear theory and thesis | Theme-centered ◀ | Project-centered | Clear objs, tasks, products |
| Explains to the reader | Expository ┥ | Persuasive | Sells to the reader |
| Tone is objective, dispassionate | Impersonal ┥ | Personal | Conveys excitement |
| Encourages verbosity | Lengthy ┥ | Constrained | Rewards brevity |
| Aimed at limited audience | Specialized lang. ┥ | Accessible lang. | Aims at broad audience |

Source: Porter, R. (2007). Why academics have a hard time writing good grant proposals. The Journal of Research Administration, 38, 161-167.



Structuring the argument

ALIGN WITH THE FOUNDATION'S MISSION

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| RI | ESOURCES, INPUTS | ACTIVITIES | | OUTCOMES (SHORT, MID, LONG) |
|----|--|---|---|---|
| • | Conditions, needs that drive the program | Processes and events to help the program achieved the desired | Tangible, measurable results of the resources and activities of the | Immediately observable, short-term changes resulting from the |
| • | Materials needed to create the program and | outcomes | program | outputs |
| | implement its activities | Represent the implementation the | | Mid- and long-term impacts of the changes |
| • | Materials needed to achieve intended | program | | |
| | outcomes | ······································ | | |
| | | PLANNED WORK | INTENDED RESULTS / | SPONSOR ALIGNMENT |

Structuring the LOI

PERSUASIVENESS FOR INITIAL SCREENING

| PROBLEM | PROJECT | OUTCOMES | BUDGET |
|--|--|---|---|
| Challenge or issue definition | Goals and objectivesMethods and | Anticipated outputs and deliverables | Estimated budget and funding allocation |
| Study justification: relevant data, gaps, or policy priorities | approach Significance | Benefits to target populations Contribution to | Timeline & key milestones |
| Alignment with foundation's priorities | | foundation's mission, areas of focus | |
| ~0.5 PAGE | ~2.5 F | PAGES | ~0.5 PAGE |



Structuring the narrative

MINE THE SOLICITATION FOR LANGUAGE

The American Council of Learned Societies is pleased to invite applications for **Digital Justice Development Grants**, which are made possible by the Mellon Foundation. Through both their content and methods, projects funded by ACLS Digital Justice Development Grants pursue the following activities:

- Critically engage with the interests and histories of people of color and other historically marginalized communities, including (but not limited to) Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities; people with disabilities; and queer, trans, and gender nonconforming people through the ethical use of digital tools and methods.
- Advance beyond the prototyping or proof-of-concept phase and articulate the next financial, technological, and intellectual phases of project development.
- Cultivate greater openness to new sources of knowledge and strategic approaches to content building and knowledge dissemination.
- Engage in capacity building efforts, including but not limited to: pedagogical projects that train students in digital humanities methods as a key feature of the project's content building practice; publicly engaged projects that develop new technological infrastructure with community partners; trans-institutional projects that connect scholars across academic and cultural heritage institutions.

This program addresses inequities in access to tools and support for digital work among scholars across various fields, those working with under-utilized or understudied source materials, and those in institutions with less support for digital projects. It promotes inclusion and sustainability by extending the opportunity to participate in the digital transformation of humanistic inquiry to a greater number of humanities scholars and

"Our project is **dedicated to** critically engaging with the interests and histories of [specific marginalized **community**], ensuring that their narratives are ethically represented through digital platforms. By collaborating closely with community members, we aim to co-create digital archives that honor and preserve their unique cultural heritage"

Source: ACLS Digital Justice Development Grants - ACLS



Structuring the narrative

MINE THE SOLICITATION FOR LANGUAGE

Peer reviewers in this program evaluate all eligible proposals on the following criteria:

- The project's critical engagement with the interests and histories of people of color and/or other historically marginalized communities through the ethical use of digital tools and methods.
- The feasibility of development, extension, and/or renewal plans, including (where appropriate) reflections on intentional sunsetting and data stewardship beyond the grant term.
- The proposal's analysis of the various technological, financial, and/or institutional supports (or lack thereof) and how grant funds might complement, or in some cases, completely underwrite, these gaps in support.
- The project's potential to bolster the ecosystem of digital scholarship within and/or outside the project's home institution, whether by (yet not limited to) its intellectual contributions, innovative use of existing technology, and/or networks of skills-building and sharing.
- The project's clarity with respect to how it will engage its longstanding or new primary audiences and/or beneficiaries.
- The strategic and intentional use of specific digital tools and methods, as well as the anticipated impact and clarity of the project's digital deliverables.

"Building upon our completed prototype, this project is poised to advance to full-scale implementation. We have developed comprehensive plans for technological enhancements, financial sustainability, and intellectual growth. Our strategy includes intentional sunsetting and robust data stewardship to ensure the project's longevity and relevance beyond the grant period."

Strong writing

WRITE LIKE YOU MEAN IT

• Be explicit.

- Write simply. Use strong, declarative verbs.
- Avoid jargon and define acronyms.

| Instead of | Use |
|----------------|-----|
| Ameliorate | |
| Commence | |
| Interface with | |
| Leverage | |
| Utilize | |
| Endeavor | |
| Explore | |

Strong presentation

WRITE LIKE YOU CARE ABOUT THE READER

The facets of this conflict can largely be classified using a well-established construct from the information sciences described as the "Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom" hierarchy or simply, the information hierarchy, originally articulated in the late 1980s [57]. The information hierarchy concept is both widely used and widely criticized by information scientists [58, 59], at least in part for the weakly articulated concept of 'wisdom' and the hierarchical nature of the elements [60, 61]. Indeed, the pinnacle of this hierarchy has been described in various forms, including wisdom, 'truth' and even 'enlightenment' [58]. Furthermore, conceptualization of the more basal levels of the information hierarchy are both modulated by epistemic belief and culture [62]. As this relates to scientific discovery, the path from data to knowledge is ultimately steeped in the constructs of its practitioners. It has long been asserted that although statistical, quantitative and computational methods are used to create a patina of objectivity in this hierarchy, each level of reasoning nevertheless incorporates at least some level of subjectivity, from decisions about how and what data to collect, what hypotheses or models to test, and how the results are ultimately interpreted [63, 64]. Although problematic in its original structure, the information hierarchy is a conceptually useful construct for reconciling difficult problems, especially where stepwise transparency of the decision-making process is vital. With explicit acknowledgement and transparency of the subjectivity throughout the information hierarchy, we can reimagine this construct as instead a knowledge creation cycle, with all components modulated by epistemic belief [58, 65, 66] (Figure 1). When data, information

Belief

Information

<u> べ ホ 山</u>

Figure 1: The Knowledge Creation Cycle is a re-

conceptualization we explicitly acknowledge the role

with each step of knowledge creation, from choosing

making predictions (Knowledge), to explanations of phenomena and making recommendations for

imagining of the Information Hierarchy. In this

that subjective decisions, conventions and culture

(i.e. existing belief) play into and create feedbacks

what to measure and how to measure it (Data).

(Information), to integration, interpretation, and

selecting models and analysis approaches

Knowledge

8 4 4

Data

Ø (~ \ III

actions (Belief).

and knowledge (and the transitions between these states) are explicitly and transparently acknowledged as outputs of processes, modulated by culture and belief, a more holistic and equitable understanding of complex problems can be realized [67].

The reality of data, methodological and analytical biases in qualitative research is widely acknowledged [68, 69], but the role of these personal frames of reference in the scientific knowledge produced has historically been less well-articulated in

quantitative research [roj. in ecology and evolutionary biology, lack of eproducibility in findings is often attributed to strong patial and temporal dependencies in the processes being measured. leading ecologists to advocate for 'metaresearch' approaches where generalities are sought beyond the site-level [71]. An increasing emphasis on computational reproducibility and increased reporting of analytical methods allows "reviewers and other readers to follow the decision-making processes of authors" and thus implicitly serves as a means of evaluating quantitative biases [72]. Yet, recent studies examining biases in analytical approaches in ecology have focused on deliberate misconduct or resource limitations preventing an experiment from being authentically repeated [73, 74], and few

explicitly examine the impact of subtle choices (such as when to begin a study) on analytical outputs [9]. Although some authors have gone so far as to claim that the majority of research findings are 'false' [75], proponents of the open science movement have offered open, reproducible practices, often heavily relying on technological applications as a panacea to weeding out 'false' results [76]. Within environmental sciences, increasing standardization, enhanced metadata and reproducible workflow documentation would certainly enhance our ability to bring multiple data sources together [77]. Yet, this framing of the reproducibility crisis falls into a familiar problem of scientific absolutism: truth is a specific thing that can be found if one applies the right tools. The 'open' extension of the scientific method can introduce, and in fact, exacerbate the inequities and biases of 'classical' science when not applied thoughtfully [79]. Even in sources advocating for large-scale data integration, authors acknowledge that

White space to give the eye a break

Figure 1 and action captions

Text formatting to emphasize key points



Now What?



Fun Fact

Non-Federal sponsors are not immune to trends in Federal funding.

Fun Fact

Some non-Federal funders don't care about the trends in Federal funding.



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W W W . T H O R N R U N . C O M



We look forward to working with you.