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Introduction

THIS BOOK is about grant writing skills. It focuses on helping scholars from every discipline learn to craft compelling grants for any funder.

That's because this book is about you. It's about developing your skills so that you lead research in your field. It's about gaining independence in your career and sharing incredible ideas. And this book is about making sure the best discoveries and insights in every field are heard.[1]*

Research is shaped by men who are white and older. Look at data from the National Institutes of Health, the largest funder of biomedical research in the world.[2] Men receive $39,000 more in first-time funding from the National Institutes of Health than do women.[3] White investigators are 10 percent more likely to receive funding than African American and Black investigators, and white investigators are 4 percent more likely to receive funding than Asian investigators.[4] The age at which people receive their first major grant has also steadily risen. In 1980, researchers were 36.1 years old when they received their first major grant. By 2016, the average age was 45.2 years.[5] Biases are not unique to the National Institutes of Health; they have been documented at funders around the world.[6–8] Funding goes to select portions of our talented workforce.

It's time to invest in the voices we are missing. Funding biases matter because grants are a gateway to influence. In 2020, the United States invested over $57.8 billion in funding at three agencies alone: the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Environmental Protection

*In 2020, I attended a training run by the OpEd Project. Its message about missing voices in op-eds was transformational. It made me realize that we are missing voices in the grant writing world for many of the same reasons that diverse voices are missing from op-eds. We need to hear from our missing voices. I drew great strength from the OpEd Project's message, and I hope this message gives you strength as well.

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Agency.[9–11] Every year in the United Kingdom, UK Research and Innovation invests £6 billion in science and research.[12] That's enormous buying power swaying research, policy, media attention, and support for our next generation of scholars.

There are many systemic and structural reasons why funding biases exist. *The Grant Writing Guide* addresses the piece of the puzzle you control: submitting your ideas. Women, scholars of color, and those at early career stages submit fewer grants than older white men.[13–16] Submitting less translates directly to less funding. As former basketball player Michael Jordan said, you miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take.[17]

This book is about taking your shots.

Equity and Access: Uncovering the Hidden Curriculum

When I moved to New England, I knew I had to get ready for cold winters. I bought a jacket that looks like a sleeping bag and snow boots that repel water.

And still I froze through my first winter. I figured that's what life is like in New England. But a year into living here, I said to my partner (who's from New England), "I wish my toes would thaw." He looked at me, perplexed. He said, "Why don't you put on your wool socks?"

I didn't have wool socks. I didn't know wool socks would make a difference. I never asked anyone how to keep my toes warm because I didn't know that was possible in this environment. And no one from New England thought to tell me about wool socks. To insiders, it's obvious that sock fabric makes a difference.

Being a scholar is like moving to New England. You prepare. You know the environment will be tough. But you may be missing inside knowledge that will make a difference in your survival (e.g., whether you are able to secure funding).

This inside knowledge is so expansive it has a name: the "hidden curriculum." The hidden curriculum of grant writing includes strategies that make it easier to secure funding (e.g., how to talk to a program officer or write to evaluation criteria).

The hidden curriculum is a barrier to your success. Because strategies are "hidden," you can only learn them by training with a seasoned mentor. Yet access to seasoned mentors is inequitably distributed across groups. Thus funding flows to insiders and their trainees. Among organizations that receive National Institutes of Health funding, the top 10 percent of organizations receive 70 percent of the research funding. The bottom half of organizations receives less than 5 percent of the research funding.[18]

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Luck of the draw in training and social privilege shouldn't determine who gets funded. All scholars should have access to grant writing strategies.

That's why I'm uncovering the hidden curriculum of grant writing in this book. I'm sharing everything I know as a tenured professor at a Research 1 university. I've had success in this process. I've been funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, just to name a few funders of my work. My research has been recognized with awards from the American Psychological Association and the American Psychological Foundation. And I've published over seventy peer reviewed articles. I understand parts of the hidden curriculum that may help you.

But sharing what I know isn't enough. I only know what helped me succeed. Additional strategies may help *you* succeed. To uncover these additional strategies, I interviewed a hundred experts. Experienced grantees, program officers, researchers, administrators, and writers in every phase of their careers contributed their knowledge.[†] They shared their best advice for navigating the grant writing environment.

They took the time to do this because we share the same dream. We believe in creating a world where talented researchers get the information they need to grow in their careers, advance our fields, and find solutions to our world's most challenging problems.

Confront Your Limiting Beliefs

Grant writing skills won't help you if you're holding onto limiting beliefs. Limiting beliefs are those that keep you from aiming high and putting in effort to get results you care about. Everyone has limiting beliefs. Let's challenge limiting beliefs that will get in the way of your success.

[†] Social science colleagues may be interested in my interview approach. While planning my interview strategy, it was important to me that this book represent diverse voices with a range of experiences. I reached out to colleagues and experts with these goals in mind. The interviews were approximately thirty minutes long, and took place via phone and Zoom (with one exception, where an interviewee emailed me their responses). I took notes during the interviews. When referring to interviewees in this book, I do not use people's full titles. I chose to do so because titles seemed likely to shift relative to this book's publication. I also felt titles could overshadow people's stories about choices that shaped their careers. Titles, however, are a crucial sign of respect. Thus I want to underscore that I have the utmost gratitude and respect for the people who shared their wisdom for this book. The interviewees are listed in the acknowledgments section.

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1. **Grants aren't worth the effort**. I felt this way when I started. There was too much to learn. All of that work probably wouldn't pay off because grants are so hard to get. I spent my time on papers instead because I knew how to write papers and get them published. That felt like a better use of my time. But consider this. The stakes are high for learning how to write a fundable grant. A survey of forty-seven hundred researchers worldwide found that 36 percent considered grant funding to be one of the most important factors in their career.[19] Another study examined tenure and promotion criteria in biomedical sciences. Among ninety-two randomly selected institutions worldwide, 67 percent listed securing grant funding as a key criterion for promotion and tenure.[20] Grant writing can shape your career.
2. **I don't need the money**. We've all worked for relatively low pay in the process of getting into graduate school or earning our degrees. We're used to running studies on zero to slim budgets. Maybe you're in a hard money or clinical position already. A grant isn't necessary to pay your salary. We're not talking about pocket change, though. At the National Institutes of Health, the median amount given to first-time awardees is $165,721 for men and $126,615 for women.[3] Imagine the opportunities this money could create for your work and the communities you serve. And consider the doors you could open for the next generation with a grant. About 20 percent of the positions funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health are for trainees.[21]
3. **They're not going to fund me**. I don't have enough expertise. I haven't published enough yet. I don't have a new enough idea. No one likes to fund scholars from my field. What would happen if you turn these limiting beliefs around and ask why *not* you? In 2017, the National Science Foundation directly supported over 350,000 people.[22] And about one in four awards from the National Science Foundation go to first-time awardees.[23] That's just one agency. There are many, many agencies and foundations out there that want to fund promising scholars. Everyone recognizes how important it is to fund and develop talented scholars in every field. Why shouldn't it be you?
4. **Grant training doesn't help unless it covers the exact type of grant I want**. Here's the secret. Grant writing skills let you call the shots. You choose where you pitch your ideas. You aren't tied to one agency or one type of grant. That's been true for me and my colleagues. It can be true for you too if you practice strategic skills.

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Grant writing is just a skill. You can learn how to write a fundable grant. Senior scholars get funded at higher rates than early career scholars.[24] That's partly because senior scholars have learned more grant writing skills than early career scholars. If you learn these same skills, you will be on a faster track to success.

How to Use This Book

It's hard work to learn how to write a grant. But if you're reading this, you already know that. You are ready to do the hard work. You just want to know where to invest your energy and time.

The Grant Writing Guide is your road map for learning how to write more fundable grants. Excellent books on grant writing already exist. This book is unique in two important ways. First, this book is written for scholars. I focus on guiding scholars from all disciplines. Likely that means you have or are earning a terminal degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, MD, or DSc). As scholars, we are trying to gain support for our ideas. This distinct goal shapes how scholars write grants.

Second, this book focuses on career choice and freedom. Instead of learning how to write one specific type of grant (e.g., an Australian Research Council grant), you will learn fundamental skills so you can choose which grants to write. (As an analogy, you won't learn one pattern for sewing a tweed jacket. You will learn the fundamentals of sewing so you can choose to make a tweed jacket, throw pillow, or more.)

In sum, this book concentrates on universal grant writing skills that will help you write better grants for any funder. Every chapter in this book revolves around developing specific grant writing skills. Each chapter describes motivating examples of scholars using a skill, an action plan for developing the skill, and exercises and cases showing how to use the skill. And each chapter ends with tips and responses to frequently asked questions. The chapters are organized around four tasks:

A. Develop an idea (chapters 1–4). How do you know what grants are available? How are grants funded? How do you generate ideas? How can you use grants to further your career goals? How do you pitch a grant idea?

B. Target a funder (chapters 5–8). How do you know if a funder will like your idea? What can you do to sound like you belong in the coveted group of "funded investigators"? How do you figure out what you need to write for a grant? How do you create a timeline for your grant writing? Why do you need reviewers to advocate for you?

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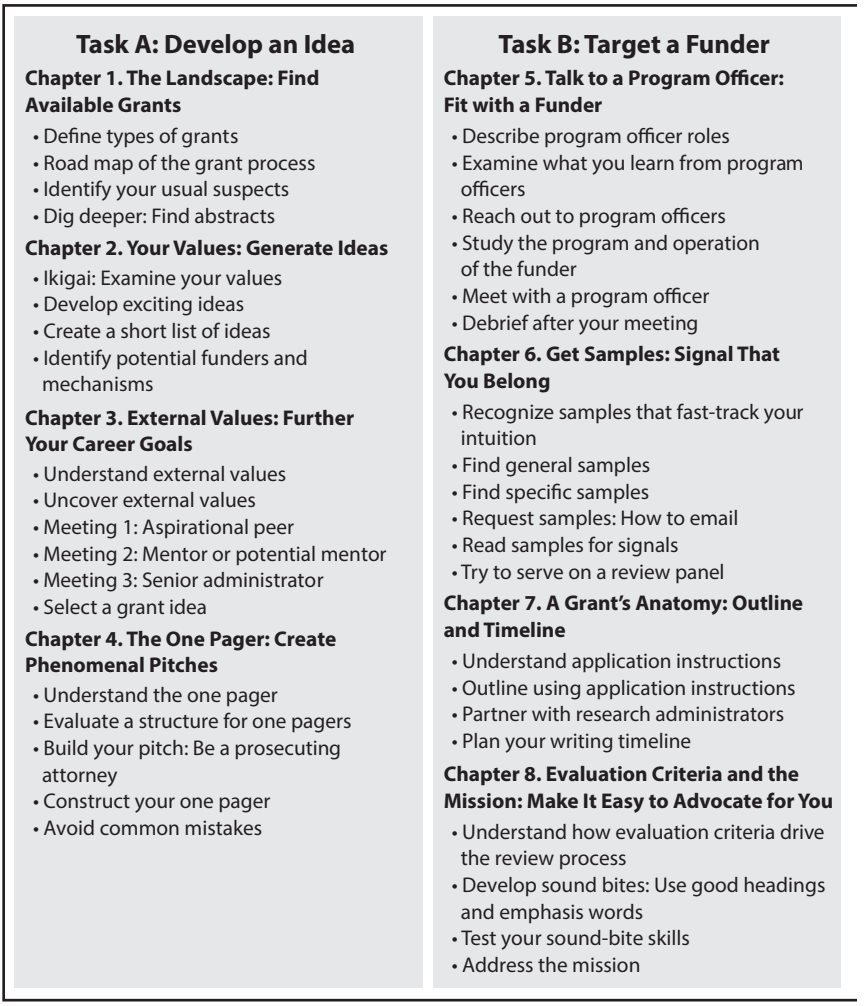

FIGURE 1. A Framework for Developing Grant Writing Skills

C. Draft your grant (chapters 9–12). What story does your grant need to tell? How do you design your research plan? How should you structure your grant? How can you strategically use figures in your grant?

D. Polish your grant (chapters 13–15). What style strategies make reviewers say, "This is a well-written grant." How do you convince reviewers to pick you and your team? What types of feedback help you polish a grant?

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Task C: Draft Your Grant

Chapter 9. The Literature Review: Clear and Simple Communication

- Bust myths that create confusion
- Explain a mindset shift: From peer to guide
- Become a guide
- Understand literature reviews
- Evaluate a literature review template and sample
- Draft your literature review outline
- Refine your literature review outline

Chapter 10. Your Research Plan: Living up to the Hype

- Understand research plans
- Brainstorm your research plan
- Craft a project timeline
- Offense: Build your case
- Defense: Anticipate reviewer questions
- Craft your research plan

Chapter 11. Structure Your Draft: Consistency Is Comforting

- Describe the inverted pyramid approach
- Evaluate a sample that uses the inverted pyramid approach
- Flesh out your full proposal
- Avoid common mistakes
- Create consistency across your full grant

Chapter 12. Go Figure: Images That Deliver Value

- Understand ways to use figures
- Brainstorm how you want to use figures
- Create compelling figures

Task D: Polish Your Grant

Chapter 13. Style Strategies: Increase Readability

- Understand what makes grants readable
- Practice style strategies

Chapter 14. The Pick Me Factor: Sell Your Expertise and Team

- Understand how to excite reviewers
- Brainstorm what you bring to the table
- Build your dream team
- Reframe weaknesses
- Analyze a sample

Chapter 15. Critical Critiques: Identify Weaknesses

- Learn about red teams
- Form your red team
- Form a discussion circle
- Toss out weaknesses
- Pay attention to detail

Notice that we won't dive into a lot of writing until the last half of the book. This is intentional. The prep work you do before writing a grant is critical to your success. A significant idea (task A) and the right funder (task B) are the building blocks you need to draft and polish your next fundable grant (tasks C and D, respectively).

Your experience with grant writing will probably shape how you use this book. If you're new to grant writing, you may want to read the whole book first to understand the grant writing process. Then circle back to the beginning to dive into exercises. If you've submitted grants, use the book to strengthen your

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skills. The chapters are designed to sharpen your skills sequentially. But each chapter can stand alone if you want to jump ahead to specific skills. You may find it helpful to grab a colleague to share ideas with as you work through the book.

This book includes organizing tools to help you. A framework lists all the skills in this book (figure 1). It's a lot of information to look at now. Earmark the framework as a reference tool for later use. The end of this book includes a list of tips and frequently asked questions (organized by chapter), submission checklist, and glossary. All terms in the glossary are **bolded** the first time they appear in the book.

I hope this book empowers you to do the work you love. The job market is tight for scholars. Many people who are passionate about scholarship end up leaving their fields because they cannot find jobs. But grants create opportunities and open doors for you. At the end of the day, grant writing is a skill that can fund your dream work.

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