Submitting A Grant Proposal©

by Maria Carlson
Director, Center for Russian and East European Studies
The University of Kansas

Copyright © 1998 by The University of Kansas. All rights reserved. Any sale or redistribution of this information beyond your organization without the written consent of The University of Kansas is strictly prohibited.

This introduction to grant development in the humanities is written for University of Kansas faculty members and graduate students at the beginning of their professional research careers.

SCHOLARS AND THE GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS

Grant proposals come in two major varieties, individual and institutional. Although the benefit of institutional grants to the institution is more conspicuous, individual grants also pay institutional as well as personal dividends. Since you teach at a university and conduct your research in an institutional context, the benefits and risks of individual grant proposal writing are the provenance of the institution as well. When you take a leave or a half-salary sabbatical supported by a grant or fellowship, the institution has the use of the released money for other appointments or for "shrinkage" obligations. Your institution benefits from all grant funding, even from small travel or research grants in which no overhead or shrinkage is returned to the institution. Such small grants are necessary steps toward larger projects and more serious awards. Frequently the institution will match funding or assist with benefits or other incentives; you should negotiate this with your dean. After all, in competing for grants, you contribute to the institution's prestige and help to make it the kind of institution where you want to be employed.

Individual grant and fellowship proposals are submitted in pursuit of a discrete research project (a monograph, an exhibit, a database, a creative endeavor) to be realized by one or two individuals. They usually involve a simple budget to support research—including freeing you from teaching and service duties, providing travel to collections or conferences, and replacing your salary while you are on leave from the institution). Not every faculty member will need or want to submit institutional grant proposals, but most will consider individual grant proposals at some point in their professional lives, especially if they want to stretch themselves intellectually, reach beyond the resources of the institution, advance more quickly in their profession, or short-circuit the daily academic grind to solve a special research problem.

Institutional grant proposals are submitted for large or lengthy projects that may involve one or more of the following: multiple faculty members; long term research; institutional, faculty, and student development; research assistance; curriculum; special seminars or conferences; foreign and domestic travel; international faculty and student exchange; research equipment; facilities; publications; etc. Such proposals involve relatively complex budgeting, accounting, and reporting procedures and are run by and through the institution. Administering them can be frustrating, but the rewards are great, since they allow you and your colleagues to do special projects, undertake travel, or acquire equipment that could never be funded by the institution alone.

THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF GRANT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Grant-seeking does carry some risks, but it also carries many benefits for the individual, the institution, and the profession. **Risks** include investment of time, thought, and effort that you may not recoup, the stress of having your work closely examined and judged by others, and the fear that the review panel may reject your proposal. **Benefits** include entrance into the "national conversation" in your discipline and in the humanities in general, clarification of a project, intelligent feedback on the merits of your research proposal, and practice and experience in writing and submitting grant proposals.

It is perfectly natural to worry that you might not be able to write a successful proposal. Most scholars (like most human beings) fear rejection or failure, worry about competition, or are concerned about being embarrassed if other faculty apply for and receive awards and they do not. Such fears can be paralyzing, but to personalize the grant proposal submission process in this way is to do the process itself a disservice. Peer review provides a major service to the field and the vast majority of reviewers take their work very, very seriously and fulfill it conscientiously. The reviewers are not judging you or your academic career; they are judging only the proposed research project. Do not let your fears or worries prevent you from competing for resources.

The more practice you have in writing proposals and competing for awards, the more skilled and confident you become and the more likely you are to compete successfully for additional grants. Grant application is cumulative. The more successful you are, the more successful you are likely to be in future submissions. In between the successes, it is perfectly natural to experience occasional setbacks. Like language proficiency, dexterity with computers, or a good tennis serve, grant proposal writing involves the development of a particular set of skills and their regular practice. In deciding to submit a proposal, you must weigh and balance these and other risks and benefits against your larger career goals and life-time research plan. Whether or not your proposal is funded, certain benefits of grant proposal submission remain:

- In writing the grant proposal, you take the time to conceptualize and outline your project, making it more real and more realizable. Feedback from colleagues during the proposal-writing process can be strategically useful and intellectually invigorating. In the process, you must confront the question of the validity of your research, its value to the discipline, and its contribution to the larger collective human enterprise of learning. This process helps you to clarify the nature and importance of your project and usually leads to an improved understanding of the research you are about to undertake. As an intellectual exercise, the process forces you to lay out the steps of the project concretely and to evaluate its feasibility realistically. Even if the project is not ultimately funded, your personal research plan will have been advanced.

- In submitting the grant proposal, you initiate a process that results in the evaluation of the merit and feasibility of your project by a peer review panel. At the national level, such panels frequently consist of the best and most respected scholars in your field. At the institutional level, such panels are composed of respected and prominent faculty members. Regardless of whether a review panel judges your proposal positively or negatively, the result is usually informative: affirmation inevitably affirms, while rejection, properly received, encourages useful reconceptualization. In many of the social sciences, for example,

faculty members who are considering a problem in a fundamentally new way are actively encouraged to use the grant-seeking process as a litmus test for the validity and merit of their ideas and methodology. This is true in many of the humanities disciplines as well.

- Many departments consider, applying for and receiving grants to be prestigious and career-enhancing. Even unfunded proposals, the submission of which indicates your willingness to compete in your field, will serve you well at tenure and promotion time.

When you receive the grant, the benefits are great:

- You have received national and/or institutional recognition for your project.
- Your work has been affirmed by your profession, and your prestige in the discipline (as well as the prestige of your institution) has been enhanced.
- Grants such as the NEH, the Guggenheim, the Fulbright, and others on the national level (or, on the local level, the General Research Fund award, the Kemper Intra-university Professorship, and the Hall Center Research Fellowship) give you time off to pursue a special teaching or research project intensively when you are intellectually ready to do so; they free you from other institutional and academic obligations and make it unnecessary for you to wait for a sabbatical in order to initiate a major research project.
- If you have planned a sabbatical, an individual research grant can significantly extend the duration of that sabbatical. This might allow you to complete a ground-breaking project. Scholars frequently find that after one semester of full-time work on a major project, their ideas have taken shape but the real writing process has only begun. A second semester of intense work might well allow you to complete writing while your ideas are fresh and dynamic. If you look at the careers of outstanding scholars, you often find that a fellowship-supported year produced a major work that profoundly influenced their field. If you begin by limiting your time to write, you may end by limiting your work.
- Another benefit of receiving a major grant is the opportunity to leave campus to work abroad or at a research center (such as the National Humanities Center, the Wilson Center, Stanford, etc.). Such centers have excellent research and support facilities; they take you away from local pressures and connect you with interesting colleagues.
- Finally, successful grant writing gives you a profile that allows you to advance in professional organizations and national academic organizations, if that is part of your career goal. These are significant benefits.

Even if you do not receive the grant, the benefits are worth your efforts:

If your proposal is rejected, you should request the anonymous reviewers' comments from the granting agency. These comments are often helpful, for they give either sound advice for the improvement of the project or compelling reasons for its abandonment. The peer evaluation process should not be taken personally. It provides valuable feedback on where your work stands in the estimation of the profession. When your proposal is rejected, do not despair: 100% of grant applicants fail at some time. Successful applicants are successful because they learn

from their failures, revise their proposals, and resubmit them. If your proposal comes back unfunded, take a deep breath and consider your options:

- Revise, rewrite, and resubmit your proposal in the next round. An unfunded proposal, when recast after thoughtful consideration of reviewer comments, is often successful in a subsequent competition; in fact, 50% of all funded grants are revised resubmissions of proposals that were not funded the first time.

- Submit the same or a revised proposal to a different granting agency. Just as there are different directions in any discipline and different scholarly points of view, so are there different philosophies among the granting agencies. A proposal may garner a positive review at one agency and a negative review at another. Thus, although a negative review may indicate that you need to rethink your project, it may also indicate that you submitted the project to the wrong agency and need to submit it elsewhere.

- After reading the reviewers' comments and discussing the outcome with a faculty mentor or colleague, go back to the drawing board and fundamentally rethink your project or develop a new one.

THE "THEOLOGY" OF GRANT PROPOSAL WRITING

The proposal concept is essentially up to you, but you do not have to write the narrative alone in a cave in the desert. You can discuss your concept with colleagues or ask them to read your drafts, and then incorporate their best suggestions. From the reviewer's point of view, the vast majority of proposals appear alike in their averageness, their narrow focus, and their self-absorption. Very few of them are actually **inspired, creative, well-written, and compelling.** The ones that capture the imagination of the reviewers always get funded.

START EARLY to give yourself plenty of time for the writing and reviewing process

After you have 1) decided to submit a grant proposal for a particular research project, 2) selected the granting agencies that fund your type of research (the Humanities Grant Development Office will help you with this), and 3) acquainted yourself with the deadlines for the grants for which you plan to apply, then: 4) request the necessary forms from the granting agency; 5) study the directions carefully and contact the program officer or agency personnel if you have questions; and 6) give yourself enough time to develop your concept properly and to write and revise a compelling narrative.

Successful grant writers think months and even years ahead of the deadlines. Fortunately, the best-known granting agencies have set deadlines that do not vary much from year to year, allowing you to plan your submissions. Most (but not all) deadlines are in late summer and early fall. Granting agencies that offer funding for short term travel or travel to collections or conferences may have multiple deadlines or may accept applications without deadline.

Work on that proposal; do not write it the night before you mail it. Give yourself time to sit on it, time to discuss it with colleagues, and time for someone to read it critically for you. Your ***real***

colleagues will not praise your drafts to the heavens; they will point out the paucity of your concept, the weaknesses of your narrative, and the beggarliness of your style; then they will make concrete and useful suggestions for improvement. Be grateful to them. Adopt their good suggestions and answer ***their*** objections adequately, and you will have anticipated and dealt with the objections of the panel. The Humanities Grant Development Office can elicit reviews from its Humanities Proposal Review Bureau if you complete your first draft at least three weeks in advance of the application deadline.

Be certain to state clearly (both at the beginning and at the end of your narrative) the impact your research will have **beyond** your immediate field (many applicants forget to do this, and it is a major criterion for many agencies). Your research is supposed to be a "contribution to knowledge" in the broadest sense. Narrow, esoteric, navel-gazing proposals rarely succeed.

You are a trained scholar; before you write, do your research. Find out about the granting agency. Identify and talk to colleagues who have put in successful proposals and who have themselves served on evaluation panels for the agency to which you plan to apply. Find out why they think their proposals were accepted (aside from the fact that they had a great project and knew how to write their way out of a paper bag); ask those who have served on panels how the panel approached its task and what irritated or pleased the panelists.

The proposal, in addition to being a major contribution to study in your field, should be a good piece of propaganda and a worthy marketing tool for your idea. Do not invest your selfhood in the intellectual subtleties of your topic, but give some thought to what elements will make the committee want to fund your proposal. You can be repentant later.

Consider in some detail what the granting agency is looking for. Perhaps you will need to consider modifying minor aspects of your individual proposal to make it more appealing to the review committee; you can "reconfigure" back to your original concept later, when you are actually funded. Regarding individual research proposals, the officers of the granting agency are usually so grateful that you completed something, anything at all, that they easily accept the fact that your project "grew," "diversified," or underwent "radical metamorphosis" during its realization. Beware, however, that although such flexibility may be true for granting agencies awarding individual research grants in the humanities and some social sciences (such as NEH, IREX, Guggenheim, SSRC, and others); institutional proposals are locked in and provide little in the way of flexibility. Commit only to what you are willing and capable of doing.

Think of the proposal as a **specific literary genre** with its own immutable, canonical rules, set by the granting agency. The granting agency is seeking indications of creativity and innovation in your scholarly project, **not** in your proposal style or structure. **Follow all directions for the writing of the proposal to the letter.** (And remember to **justify** your methodology, not just describe it.)

FRANK ADVICE
ON WRITING RESEARCH GRANT PROPOSALS IN THE HUMANITIES

- **READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY.**
- **FOLLOW ALL INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LETTER.**
- **DO NOT IMPROVISE OR IGNORE INSTRUCTIONS.**

Give **all** requested information for every category in the request for proposal. **Do not** make your review panelists look for information or, even worse, **guess** about your intentions. A reviewer is paid to be suspicious; if you force him or her to guess, the reviewer will almost **never** guess to your advantage because reviewers automatically assume you are trying to hide *something,* and this may be it. **There is no "benefit of the doubt" in proposal review.** Your task is to make things as easy as possible for the reviewer, to lead him or her (seemingly effortlessly) in the direction you have selected. The hard fact is that the more difficult you make it for the reviewer to find information and wade through your proposal, the lower your proposal will rank.

Type all forms; **never hand write forms** unless you are filling out the application in the African bush or during a Polar expedition (and if that is the case, make it clear, although at least one reviewer is certain to point out that you really are being unnecessarily pretentious).

In the proposal and the other documents that comprise your application, be certain to **address carefully each and every one of the basic criteria the granting agency mandates, taking into consideration that your reviewers are instructed to look specifically for those criteria.** Make it easy for your reviewer to respond within the defined categories, and he or she will be easy on you. Provide ready answers to the questions the reviewers ask themselves. Do not make reviewers work any harder than they have to. (See the attached "Typical Review Panel Criteria;" these are developed from the four NEH review categories, but they are relevant for almost every grant competition in the humanities.)

Proofread very carefully. One typo and the spectre of inattention to scholarly detail raises its ugly head. Run your ***Spellcheck*** and ***Grammatik*** programs. Apply the "second (and even third) pair of eyes" rule before sending off anything. Double-check that you have included all materials requested in the proper order, number of copies, etc. If you are disqualified on a technicality, what does that say about your general ability to do serious research? The bottom line for writing any grant proposal, to any agency, on any topic: **Develop a good concept, then write with the ABCs:**

- **A**ccuracy
- **B**revity
- **C**larity

As you prepare your application, follow directions as closely as possible. Structure your narrative and appended materials to address each and every one of the points mentioned in the general submission instructions, preferably in the order they are given. To help you remember the various things the review panel will be looking for, consider "Typical Review Panel Criteria" before you draft.

ABSTRACT or SUMMARY

Refine, refine, **refine** the abstract or executive summary. This description should present the contours of your project and show how it is original and novel (and therefore worthy of funding); many proposals are discarded because the reviewer makes a quick judgment that the project is conventional, routine, or not ground-breaking. Many reviewers subconsciously allow that conceptual statement (the first thing they see after your name, discipline, and institution) to guide their reading of your proposal. If they initially buy your concept, they will find excuses for an occasional weakness in the proposal; if they decide that the "description of project" is sloppy, the best proposal in the world will probably not reverse their initial negative impression.

THE PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Make the first and last paragraphs of the proposal narrative real "killers." A reviewer with 70 proposals to read in three days may be completely focused only during the beginning and end of your narrative.

Pay attention to **presentation.** Divide the narrative into sections. Break the monotony of the page with white space between sections and spaces between paragraphs. You do not want your reader to be overwhelmed by text and start skimming your proposal. Make your reviewer grateful for some eye relief (the average reviewer may look at 60-80 proposals; after a while, they all look and sound the same). If you have a handle on your concept and an understanding of your project, you can present a tight narrative with no extraneous material and a reviewer-friendly presentation.

Many reviewers claim that serif fonts (Times, Times New Roman) are easier to read than sans-serif (Arial, Helvetica), that it is easier to read single-spaced, right-margin-unjustified text than double-spaced or right-margin-justified (assuming that the instructions give you options). If you choose single-spaced text, remember to set a reasonable line height. **Do not** go smaller than 12-point; **do not** cheat on margins, spacing, or pitch—reviewers are very sensitive to being abused.

Pay special attention to the relationship between the **informational** and **aesthetic** structure of each page. If, for example, the agency requests five categories of information, make each category a separate part of your narrative, with its own bold-face heading. This breaks down the big task of writing the narrative into five shorter (and easier for you) tasks. Discuss each category in the order the categories are listed in the request for proposal (some redundancy is inevitable). The categories will probably appear in this order on the reviewers' check sheets, and you will have assisted the over-taxed reviewers in getting through your proposal quickly and efficiently. Within the narrative, outline and make points graphically.

You may want to **stress the most important points** by putting them in **boldface,** but do not overdo it.

If you implement these structural suggestions, the review panel will know (without having to leaf aimlessly through your proposal, looking for information) that you have addressed all of the required criteria; for this the reviewers will be grateful. The headings will make it easy for them

to find specific information if they need to refer back to a detail in your proposal. The reviewers will have the impression that you are well-organized, knowledgeable, and in complete control of your topic and your proposal.

Do use most or all of the space allotted for the proposal, for there is always one suspicious reviewer who will wonder out loud whether you might not have enough to say about your subject. **Never exceed stipulated proposal narrative length**.
In the body of the proposal, **do NOT** do the following:

- **Do NOT** talk about yourself or your scholarly or personal tribulations (how hard you work, how much you deserve this, how you got two years out of a one year grant just so you could finish your fieldwork in Bangladesh yes, applicants really do this and it sounds eccentric and hysterical).

- Under no circumstances should you whine.

- **Do NOT** try to evoke sympathy.

- Use, but **do NOT overuse** the pronoun I (the proposal will sound too self-absorbed).

- **Do NOT** get cute (i.e., do not be coy, coquettish, vulgar, whimsical, or resort to bad jokes).

- Avoid arrogance at all costs, no matter how spectacular you know your own achievements to be. **Do NOT** enter into a confrontational ego-war with other scholars in your field. Your reviewer is probably a senior scholar and leader in your field and acquainted with those you critique; do not give him or her an opportunity to deal with your attitude by lowering the ranking of your proposal.

- **Do NOT** give the reviewer the opportunity to write you off as self-absorbed, vain, and unprofessional. With so many proposals to judge, it is tempting for reviewers to find academic and professional weaknesses in your work that justify any personal prejudices or antipathies; do not give them this opening. Instead, transmit an enthusiastic, professional (but not pedantic), collegial persona through style and tone, not through irrelevant details, ad hominem tactics, or self-aggrandizing claims.

- **Do NOT use jargon.** It is safe to assume that most of the reviewers on the panel evaluating your proposal are 1) not in your immediate specialty (and possibly not even in your field or discipline), and 2) not necessarily sympathetic to your methodology. Assume an intelligent and broadly educated reviewer, but **define and explain** every term or concept you think even one reviewer might not know.

Keep sentences straightforward and fairly short (they are easier and faster to read; your reviewer will be as grateful as you want him to be). Proposal language should be neither stream-of-consciousness nor turgid academese. Create the illusion of dynamism: avoid passive constructions unless absolutely necessary. Keep it simple, remembering all the while that

"simple" does not mean "simplistic." True simplicity is difficult to achieve, because true simplicity comes only from a complete understanding of your topic, on the micro (analytical) and macro (synthetic) levels. It is diabolically easy to become inextricably enmeshed in what you think is "sophisticated" scholarly prose, but which your reviewer knows to be jargon and pedantry. And remember that the reviewer is always right. It is easy to lose logical continuity while trying to sound like an "experienced" scholar; it is very difficult to be simple. If your reviewers get lost in your arcane grammar, effete vocabulary, or bizarre constructions, your proposal loses points.

ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

As you write, keep asking yourself, ***"Who* is my audience?"** Do your research about the constitution of review panels at the granting agency to which you have chosen to apply. Most program officers will answer your questions about the general configuration of such panels (although identity of reviewers is confidential). Note that, although program officers will often answer direct questions, they will almost never volunteer information, so have your list of questions ready.

An NEH review panel, for example, consists of five scholars representing different points of view and methodologies. If your proposal is in English, French, Spanish, Classics, Philosophy, or another mainline humanities discipline, it will be read by reviewers from your field. If your proposal is interdisciplinary or comparative, or in Germanic, Slavic, Asian, Oriental, or Middle Eastern Studies, or ancient civilizations, it will probably go to the "Etc. Panel," where the background of the panelists could be any configuration of the named disciplines. Be aware that a proposal that fails one year may well succeed the next, as the panel members change. Most reviewers serve 3 year terms, however, so review panels usually have at least one repeating member who will have a long memory.

If your proposal fails one year, and you plan to resubmit the following year, it will be to your great advantage to **request reviewer's comments** (which are frequently full of very good advice) **and revise your proposal in accordance with them.** In spite of changing reviewers, results tend to be remarkably consistent. Second submissions that show thoughtful consideration of the previous year's panel's comments are often funded.

Panelists are chosen from around the country, from small schools and big schools. Some of them are very famous. Almost 100% of them will have held one or more major grants: this is an exclusive club. Their methodologies and prejudices will be all over the map, but their intentions will be good.

As you write, pretend that you have two reviewers who must reach a consensus on your proposal: one is a specialist in your field who is not in your camp and is contemptuous of your methodology, the other has recently arrived from Mars and has never heard of your topic. Make them both ***want*** to support you. Be lucid, simple, straightforward, and compelling. Address the possible objections of the one and the lack of basic, vital information of the other. Irritate neither.

Most review panels are meticulously fair and professional; nevertheless, the results will depend to some extent on the personalities of the reviewers and the "chemistry" of the panel. Excellent proposals do get funded, since the majority of reviewers easily identify them as excellent and recommend funding with only minimal discussion. Really bad or sloppy proposals are also easy to identify and are quickly removed from competition. The battles in committee are fought over the vast middle. This fact makes it imperative that, in addition to promoting an excellent concept, you do everything you can to give yourself every possible psychological edge, no matter how small, with the panel.

Attention to detail, ease of reading, nice font, aesthetics of presentation, organization, and sincere concern for your reviewer really pay in grant proposal writing. If you get into the "Fund" category by only a hair, you are no less funded. To give yourself that edge, always bear in mind that **the reviewer is not your friend, but he will become your enemy only if you make him one.** So pay attention to the mechanical, visual, and presentation aspects of your proposal and consider their possible impact on the reviewer.

TYPICAL REVIEW PANEL CRITERIA: Individual Research Grants in the Humanities

1. **Quality or promise of quality of applicant's work as teacher, scholar, or interpreter of the field.** Questions the reviewers ask themselves:

   - Is there a symbiotic relation between the applicant's research work and teaching?
   - Does the application show depth of knowledge?
   - Can the applicant communicate complex information?
   - Is the project innovative?
   - Is it part of a larger, coherent research plan, or a wild hare?
   - Does it go beyond a mechanical rewrite of the dissertation?
   - Is the applicant able to place his work in the context of a larger body of humanistic knowledge?
   - Are the applicant's publications significant for his or her professional level? What kind of recommendations does the applicant have, and from whom?
   - Are the recommendations more informative than the proposal?
   - Do the recommendations go beyond encomium to understanding of and genuine support for the project?

2. **Significance of contribution that the proposed project will make to the discipline and to knowledge in general.** Questions the reviewers ask themselves:

   - Will this contribution redefine or expand the field?
   - Will the project have repercussions in other fields?
   - What impact will the project make on knowledge in general (if any)?
   - Has the applicant considered broader applications in the case of highly specific topics?
   - Is it: original? new concept? new approach? seminal? fundamental? merely fashionable? rehashing of previous publications? half-baked? striking insight? eccentric point of view?
   - Does the project soar above "competent" and "solid"?
   - Is there a spark? Is there a natural audience?

- Is it important?
- So what?

3. **Conception, definition, organization, description of project.** Questions the reviewers ask themselves:

- Is this really a project appropriate to the agency or discipline?
- Is the project a request for support to engage in preliminary research, or for support to analyze and write up the project? At what stage in the project is the applicant?
- Is the project concisely conceived? Has the applicant "incubated" it long enough to be able to summarize a large and complex topic effectively?
- Is the narrative fuzzy? Does it reveal sloppy thinking?
- Does the proposal involve the reviewer and demonstrate the author's enthusiasm? Is the applicant convincing?
- Is the applicant literate?
- Is the proposal well-written and appealing? Informative without being esoteric?
- Is the proposal superficial? mechanical? Mature? Considered? Lucid? Sophisticated?
- Does the applicant's argument show control of logic and ability to organize material?
- Is there a clear theoretical and methodological framework? Is the particular methodology justified?
- Does the applicant include a relevant bibliography (and not just a list of obvious books and articles)?
- Is enough contextual information provided for the educated non-specialist? Does the applicant use theoretical words without defining them?
- Is concrete information (dates, titles, relevant facts) provided when necessary? Are the facts correct?
- Is the project trying to do too much or too little? Is it unrealistically over-ambitious?
- Is the physical presentation (type font, layout, etc.) impressive and professional?
- Does the applicant try to cheat on page limit or layout rules by using tiny, scalable font, avoiding double spacing by using space-and-a-half, ignoring margin rules? Is the content impressive enough to overlook this, or is the applicant merely unable to express himself or herself succinctly?
- Does the applicant condescend to the reviewer?
- Is there a sub rosa agenda inconsistent with research in the field?

4. **Likelihood of completion.** Questions the reviewers ask themselves:

- Can the applicant reasonably finish the set task within the allocated time frame?
- Does the proposal represent work in progress, new project, old project?
- What is the applicant's track record for completing other projects?

Initial Rating:
E—Excellent; definitely deserves support
V—Very Good; worthy of further consideration for funding
S—Some merit, but not recommended
N—Not recommended

IDENTIFYING REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the eyes of the reviewers, your recommendations do two things:

- evaluate your proposal, and
- reveal your standing or potential standing in the profession.

Pick your references carefully. Every other applicant will have "excellent" and "superlative" recommendations. Make sure that your referees can write a "strong" letter (be up front; ask them directly). If your referees say they do not know you well enough to write for you, stop right there. **Push them no further,** they will not give you the kind of recommendation you seek. Find someone else who is enthusiastic, preferably someone who will write not an undiscriminating encomium (this does more harm than good), but an understanding and positive evaluation of your work. Avoid having all of your recommendations come from the institution from which you received your degree or where you are currently teaching. If you are a junior scholar, discuss selection of referees with an experienced faculty member or mentor. Some reviewers consider recommendations from dissertation advisors to be "sweetheart letters" and of less weight than the other reviews. If you are able to muster referees from three different institutions, so much the better. The ideal referee is a scholar with no institutional ties to you who knows your work well.

Be up front: involve your referees in your application, give them a copy of your draft narrative, talk with them about your project, state which specific buttons you need pushed, and outline (preferably in a short memo or letter) what you think are your strengths. Most referees will be glad of the additional ammunition and your letter is more likely to say what you need it to say.

Occasionally, the recommendations are more intelligent, thoughtful, and thorough than the proposal. If your referee knows and explains your topic to the panel better than you do, your proposal will not be funded. Try not to pick assistant professors who are your friends or relatives (yes, applicants really do this and it remains a small, small world—someone on the panel is sure to point out any irregularities and then everyone says, "Oh." And your proposal is dead).

Do not select famous scholars who are unfamiliar with you or your work, although your advisor introduced you once at a conference and you think their name will impress the panelists. You will get the *"I really don't know this person or his/her work and I haven't a clue why he/she asked me, unless it is because I am famous and he/she wants to take advantage of my name"* type of recommendation (yes, they do write them just that way).

Finally, **do NOT** request recommendations from known eccentrics or problematical personalities in your field (why give your reviewer the opportunity to punish you when he or she really wants to punish your referee?).

Even if you do not plan to submit a grant proposal in the immediate future, start cultivating colleagues in your field from other institutions now. Intelligent, thoughtful, and supportive evaluators of your research do not occur naturally; you must develop them. You can begin by sending reprints of your work to colleagues who showed interest in your presentations or conference papers, asking for their advice on your research, working to bring them to campus for special lectures, and getting to know their work. The vast majority of mid- and end-career

scholars are delighted to mentor junior faculty in their own field, but you need to show some networking initiative first.

THE CURRICULUM VITAE

The reviewer usually examines your CV immediately after your "description of project"; that is when he or she mentally decides who you are professionally: in addition to your research achievements and spectacular credentials (and all applicants have spectacular credentials), are you also a collegial citizen of the university? Are you professional? Do you take your teaching seriously? Are you well-rounded? Are you broadly or narrowly educated? Are you disciplinary or interdisciplinary? What are your languages? The CV should reveal a professional persona appropriate to the granting agency and the type of award.

In most submissions, you will have only two pages for your Curriculum Vitae. Since you are creating a particular image (through inclusion and exclusion of facts about your career and through the order, manner, and format in which you choose to present information), preparing an appropriate CV for your proposal is an art and requires some thought. On your 2-page CV (use **all** of the pages allotted), find some way to provide (in addition to standard information on education, employment, honors/awards, and publications) some information on **courses taught or teaching interests, languages spoken, and some indication, however brief, of professional service.**

Find something that will make your image stand out from the others. Junior scholars particularly forget to do this; the best senior scholars neglect to do this. You do want to portray yourself as a whole professional person, successful in research, teaching, and service (as well as in any other categories stipulated by the grant profile). With computers, it is easy to tailor a CV to a specific project; take the time to do it well.

Senior scholars with extensive CVs should feel free to abbreviate: Author of 22 articles; following are relevant to project (then give complete citations only for titles relevant to this research project); Author of 37 book reviews in major journals, including This Journal, That Journal, and The Other Journal (do not give any specifics except the journal names where your reviews appeared).

If the instructions specifically ask you to indicate your teaching interests (as NEH does), your failure to do so will lead the reviewer to assume that you are either uninterested in teaching or unable to follow instructions (in either event, you just lost points). Tie both your teaching and research interests in to the project at hand, both in the CV and in your narrative. If you abbreviate your CV, somehow establish the link between your proposed project and your larger research plan and teaching agenda in your proposal. Regardless of the agency to which you are submitting a proposal, it never hurts to demonstrate that you are an "integrated" scholar.