APPLYING FOR MSIPP GRANTS

How-To Guide

You're interested in applying for a grant but don't know how to approach the process. This guide will walk you through how to apply for a grant for the first time on Grants.gov and provides grant writing tips for a successful application.

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Step-by-Step Guide on Applying for MSIPP Grants

1. Identify a specific project you want to work on before writing the grant application. Your project should be:
   a. Actionable and goal oriented
   b. Written clearly, so the grant organization understands the objective.
2. Search for relevant grant opportunities.
   a. On Grants.gov, filter *Funding Opportunity Type* to "MSIPP"
   b. Sometimes it is worth viewing *Closed* opportunities, as they may open again in the future.
3. **READ THE DESCRIPTION!** Not because it's in all caps, but because the description will tell you a few important things.
   a. Purpose of the Funding Opportunity
   b. Key Objectives
   c. Eligibility requirements
4. Click on the **Related Documents** tab.
   a. Find the most recent/up to date FOA document.
5. Click on the **Package** tab.
   a. Click *preview* to view all the federal forms required to submit the grant application.
6. Click **Apply** and Create **Workspace**
7. Click on a form to begin working on it. The forms shown in **Workspace** are the ones we have already previewed in the **Package** tab, so you already have a head start on what information you need to gather. You can either:
   a. Download it as a PDF, edit and re-upload.
   b. Work on the forms directly on Grants.gov
8. Click on **Check Application** to check for mistakes.
9. Click on Sign and Submit **IF** you are the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR). If you are not, the AOR must sign and submit. Your Business/Accounting Office will have a list of approved AORs.

What to Know Before You Start Writing

Where to Find Instructions for Writing Your Application

Application forms are posted with each funding opportunity announcement. Use these instructions in conjunction with the guidance in the funding opportunity announcement to develop your application.

What Peer Reviewers Look For

Careful preparation and an understanding of how your application will be reviewed can help you build a solid application. During NNSA's Peer Review Process, we convene a panel of non-Federal partners to review your application. The following sections describe the criteria reviewers employ to evaluate applications. Read them carefully for helpful hints on the information and content you should include in the application to garner a favorable evaluation.

Overall Impact

Reviewers will provide an overall impact score to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved, in consideration of the following review criteria.

Scored Review Criteria

Reviewers will consider each of the criteria below in the determination of merit and give a separate score for each. An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major impact. For example, a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to advance a field.

Significance. Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Is there a strong premise for the project? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will knowledge, technical capability, and/or workforce development be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, or services that drive the NNSA?

Investigator(s). Are the PD/PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? If the project is collaborative, do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise; are their leadership approach, governance, and organizational structure appropriate for the project?

Innovation. Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research practices by using novel theoretical concepts, approaches, or methodologies? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies proposed?

Approach. Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented?

Environment. Will the institutional support, equipment, and other physical resources available to the investigators be adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the environment, subject populations, or collaborations?

Note that an application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major impact. For example, a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to advance a field.

Additional Review Considerations

As applicable for the project proposed, reviewers will consider each of the following items, but will not give scores for these items and should not consider them in providing an overall impact score.

- Prior success with Federal awards

Research Resources, Institutional Support and Available Expertise

Sufficient information must be included to demonstrate to reviewers the high quality of the PD/PI, the co-investigators, available research resources, and the institution and its support of the project.

Resources

Applicants should clearly state that they have the appropriate resources to conduct the research, such as adequate equipment and laboratory space. When possible, include letters of commitment for these resources.
- o Understand the level of resources needed to compete.
- o Conduct an organizational assessment.
- o Determine what resources and support your organization has and what additional support you'll need.
- o Consider whether the available equipment and facilities are adequate and whether the environment is conducive to the research.

Independence and Institutional Support

This is important for all investigators, particularly for new investigators or those early in their careers.
- o Provide evidence of appropriate experience and training to lead and manage the research project.
- o Letters of reference and institutional commitment are important.

Collaborators and Consultants

Determine the expertise needed for your research study team (individuals, collaborating organizations, resources, etc.). All work requires collaboration among the Nuclear Security Enterprise (NSE), and NNSA is dedicated to fostering such relationships.
- o Include letters of commitment in your application that clearly spell out the roles of the collaborators. The grant application should contain a signed letter from each collaborator to the applicant that lists the contribution he or she intends to make and his or her commitment to the work. These letters are often the primary assurance the reviewers have that this work will in fact be completed.
- o For consultants, letters should include rate/charge for consulting services.

Develop Your Budget

This step will be one of your most time-consuming in the writing process.
- o Know what type of budget will be required to submit with your application (found in your FOA).
- o Understand the various components of the budget, working with your institution's central grants office and department administrator.
- o Contact NNSA/MSIPP program officials regarding allowability and other budgetary questions.

Your Project Management Plan

The project management plan describes the proposed partnership, stating its significance and how it will be conducted. Remember, your application has two audiences: most reviewers who will probably be familiar with your techniques or field and a smaller number who will not be familiar.
- o All reviewers are important to you because each reviewer gets one vote.
    - o Write and organize your application so the primary reviewer can readily grasp and explain what you are proposing.
    - o Use language that stresses the significance of your proposed work.

Additional Elements Required in a Grant Application

The following elements need to be included in the grant application as appropriate. Unless stated, these elements do not influence the rating (priority score) of the application. However, the reviewers are asked to comment on the adequacy of the information provided for each element. Any concerns the reviewers identify may negatively affect and postpone the granting of an award.

- **Bibliography & References Cited**
  Provide a bibliography of any references cited. Each reference must include the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication; you can use "et al." convention in place of listing all authors in a citation), the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. Make sure that only bibliographic citations are included. Be especially careful to follow scholarly practices in providing citations for source materials relied upon when preparing any section of the application.

- **Consortium/Contractual Arrangements**
  Explain the programmatic, fiscal, and administrative arrangements to be made between the applicant organization and the consortium organization(s).

- **Consultants and Collaborators**
  Attach appropriate letters from all consultants and collaborators confirming their roles in the project. For consultants, letters should include rate/charge for consulting services.

- **Facilities & Other Resources**
  This information is used to assess the capability of the organizational resources available to perform the effort proposed. Identify the facilities to be used (Classrooms, Computer, Office, and Other). If appropriate, indicate their capacities, pertinent capabilities, relative proximity and extent of availability to the project. Describe only those resources that are directly applicable to the proposed work.

- **Page Limits**
  Follow the page limits specified for the attachments in your grant application, unless otherwise specified in the funding opportunity announcement (FOA).

Grant Application Writing Tips

You've planned, you've researched, you understand the application…now it's time to write. A well-written, well formatted application is the key to success. Remember the details when formatting attachments!

> **TIP #1: MAKE YOUR PROJECT'S GOALS REALISTIC**
> Don't propose more work than can be reasonably done during the proposed project period.

- Before you start writing the application, think about the budget and how it is related to your research plan. Remember that everything in the budget must be justified by the work you've proposed to do.

- Be realistic. Don't propose more work than can be reasonably done during the proposed project period. Ensure that the personnel have appropriate expertise and training. Make sure that the budget is reasonable and well-justified.

> **TIP #2: BE ORGANIZED AND LOGICAL**
> Why? Reviewers are accustomed to finding information in specific sections of the application. This creates an efficient evaluation process and saves reviewers from hunting for required information.

Start with an outline, following the suggested organization of the application. The thought process of the application should be easy to follow.

- Write clear headings. Bookmark major sections and utilize white space effectively.

- Use sub-headings, short paragraphs, and other techniques to make the application as easy to navigate as possible. Be specific and informative and avoid redundancies.

- Use diagrams, figures, and tables, and include appropriate legends. These should complement the text and be appropriately inserted. Make sure figures and labels are legible in the application.

- Use bullets and numbered lists for effective organization. Indents and bold print add readability. Bolding key concepts allows reviewers to scan the pages and retrieve information quickly.

> **TIP #3: WRITE IN CLEAR, CONCISE LANGUAGE**
> Why? A reviewer must often read 10-15 applications in detail, so your application has a better chance of being successful if it is easy-to-read and well-written.

- Write a clear topic sentence for each paragraph with one main point or idea.

- Make your points as direct as possible. Avoid jargon or excessive language.

- Write simple and clear sentences, keeping to about 20 words or less in each.

- Be consistent with terms, references and writing style. Spell out all acronyms on first reference.

- Use the active, rather than passive, voice. For example, write "We will develop a new curriculum" not "A new curriculum will be developed."

- If writing is not your forte, seek help!

TIP #4: SELL YOUR IDEA ON PAPER
Capture the reviewers' attention by making the case for why NNSA should fund your research!

- Include enough background information to enable an intelligent reader to understand your proposed work.

- Support your idea with collaborators who have expertise that benefits the project.

TIP #5: EDIT YOURSELF, BUT ALSO ENLIST HELP
You've most likely been looking at the same words, sentences, and paragraphs repeatedly! Allow someone with fresh eyes to read your content, check your punctuation, and give you feedback on whether the content flows.

- Have zero tolerance for typographical errors, misspellings, grammatical mistakes, or sloppy formatting. A sloppy or disorganized application may lead the reviewers to conclude that your research may be conducted in the same manner.

- **Remember the Details!**   There are format requirements, such as font size, margins, and spacing. Make sure you are familiar with them before submitting your application and label sections as directed.

TIP #6: SHARE FOR COMMENTS
You've most likely been looking at the same words over and over! Allow someone with fresh eyes read your content, check your punctuation, and give you feedback on whether the content flows.

- Request your colleagues or mentors review a first draft of your specific aims early in the process. This step can save lots of valuable time.

- Allow time for an internal review by collaborators, colleagues, mentors and make revisions/edits from that review. If possible, have both experts in your field and those who are less familiar with your project provide feedback.

- Ask those who are providing a review to use a critical eye and evaluate the application using the peer review criteria.

- Allow sufficient time to put the completed application aside, and then read it from a fresh vantage point yourself. Also, try proofreading by reading the application aloud.

- Conduct your own review based on the NNSA's peer review criteria. How would you rate your own application?

- Prior to submission, look over the entire grant application one final time. Remember, you want a convincing proposal that is also formatted according to the application guidelines, punctuation error-free, clear to read, and is to the point!