

SUCCESSFUL PROPOSAL WRITING IN THE HUMANITIES

iINAS – May 9, 2014



The grant environment



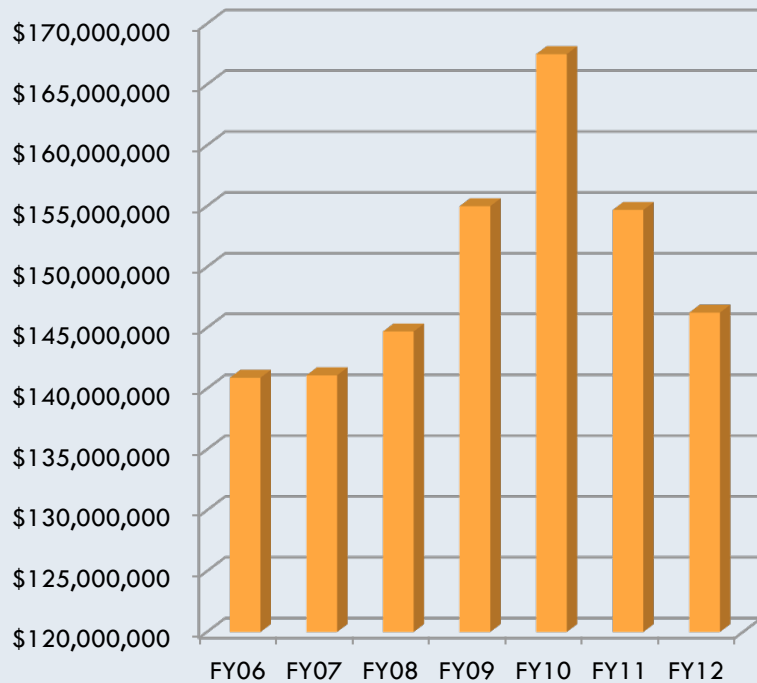
If only. . . .



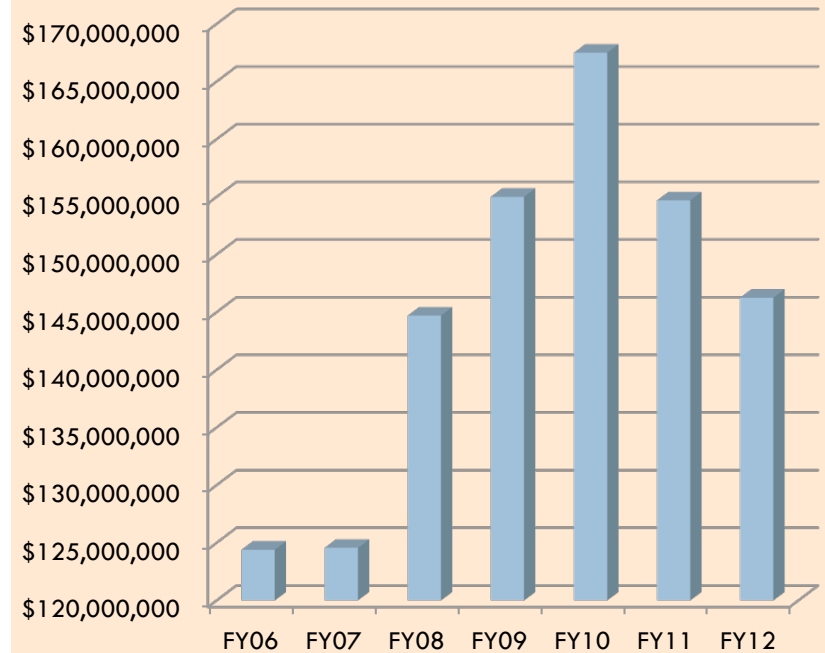
The competition for external funding is fierce. . . .

Budget trends in federal agencies

NEH Budget Appropriations History



NEA Budget Appropriations History



Funding statistics for NEH

- Demand for support far exceeds funding available
 - ▣ NEH FY 2010
 - Received 5,205 grant applications
 - Awarded ~832 grants
 - Funding rate of 16.6%
- National Humanities Alliance,
“NEH FY 2012 Issue Brief,”
www.nhalliance.org
- You’ re already ahead of the competition.



A horizontal bar at the top of the slide, divided into an orange section on the left and a blue section on the right.

Identify funding opportunities

Funding sources for the humanities

Federal Funding



- Department of Justice
- Institute of Museum & Library Services
- National Archives & Records Administration
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- National Science Foundation

Foundation Funding



- Philanthropy News Digest RFP Bulletin
- American Council of Learned Societies
- Social Science Research Council

Where else can I find funding?

- Search a wide range of funding sources
 - ▣ Internal funding
 - ▣ Professional organizations
 - ▣ Institute of International Education (IIE)
 - Program Finder
 - Field of study
 - Program location
 - Participant type
 - Participant country/territory

Clarify the need for funding

- To provide salary support or replacement
- To support a graduate student assistant
- To travel to archives or libraries to examine sources
- To attend a conference or other professional event
- To plan or host a workshop or speaker series

Ensure eligibility

- Individual eligibility
 - Citizenship status
 - Career stage
 - Research field
 - Under-represented status
- Institutional eligibility
 - Non-profit status: 501(c)(3)

Identify an appropriate sponsor

- Articulate the topic, purpose, and scope of your proposed research project
- Remain open-minded as you search
- Search for funding opportunities regularly
- Sign up for funding alerts



Download the instructions

- Be aware that instructions may come in multiple parts
 - Program solicitation
 - Sponsor proposal guidelines
 - Ancillary materials
 - FAQs
 - Bibliography
 - Sample applications



Rule #1

Read the instructions!



Really, read the instructions!

Analyze the instructions

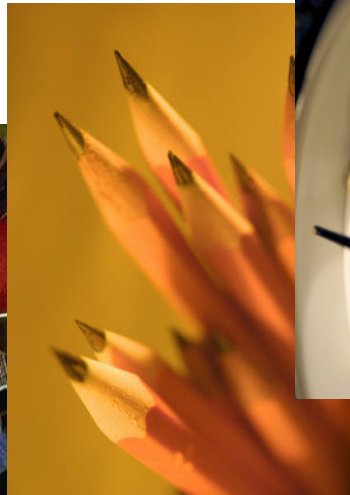
- Goals and objectives of sponsor and/or program
- Eligibility requirements
- Type of funding mechanism supported
- Anticipated award amount and duration
- Required application components
 - Letters of intent, preliminary proposals (if required)
 - Personal and institutional information
 - Proposal proper
 - Ancillary sections
 - References cited
 - Letters of reference / recommendation
- Review process and review criteria
- Due dates
- Contact numbers



Understand what makes a proposal successful

What makes a proposal successful?

- ❑ Superb idea
- ❑ Strong fit between your idea and the agency's mission
- ❑ Thoughtful and meticulous grantsmanship
- ❑ Ample work time
- ❑ A little bit of luck



Idea

- Must be new, fresh, and innovative
- Must be significant
- Must fill a gap in what is known about the topic
- Must move your field of research forward

Fit between idea and agency's mission

- Learn everything you can about the agency
 - ▣ Mission, strategic plan, and investment priorities
 - ▣ Organizational structure and culture
 - ▣ Recently funded awards

- Obtain information from a variety of sources
 - ▣ Read the agency web site
 - ▣ Talk with colleagues and program manager
 - ▣ Volunteer to serve on a review panel

Grantsmanship – Typical proposal components

- Title
- Project summary
- **Research plan/
project narrative**
 - Context
 - Need
 - Rationale
 - Objectives
 - Background
 - Literature review
 - Preliminary work
- Expected outcomes
- Qualifications
- Project schedule
- References
- Biographical sketch
- **Budget**
- Budget justification

Grantsmanship – Project proposal

- Research plan/project narrative
 - ▣ Objective 1, 2, 3 . . .
 - Restate objective
 - Elaborate on need and rationale for objective
 - Note preliminary work, if appropriate
 - Describe approach for pursuing objective
 - Indicate alternative strategies, if appropriate
 - Explain expected outcomes and benefits



Grantsmanship – Book proposal

- Research plan/project narrative
 - ▣ Provide the context
 - ▣ State the problem
 - ▣ Identify the gap that needs to be filled
 - Literature review
 - ▣ Describe the solution: Your book!
 - Tentative book title
 - Book topic
 - Audience
 - Approach
 - Theoretical, etc.
 - Preliminary work

Grantsmanship – Book proposal

□ Book structure

■ Parts

■ Chapters

- Tentative chapter titles
- Short description of chapter
- Status of chapter
 - Outlined? Rough draft? Polished draft?
- Qualifications
 - Productive scholarship to date
 - Internal seed funding
 - Presented as a conference paper, journal article
- Schedule for writing manuscript
- Potential publishers
- Expected outcomes, benefits to target audience

Grantsmanship –

Writing strategies: Think about the big picture

- Provide the context
- Identify the problem (e.g., gap in knowledge)
- Explain the purpose and rationale for the proposed work
- Develop independent, stand-alone objectives
- Demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the literature
- Delineate a focused and rational research strategy, approach
- Provide the appropriate quantity and quality of preliminary work
- Propose a reasonable amount of work for the award period
- Identify expected outcomes and future directions
- Describe alternative approaches, if appropriate
- Include a thoughtful schedule of work with key milestones
- Highlight your qualifications to carry out the project
- Provide a reasonable budget

Grantsmanship –

Writing techniques: Attend to the details

- Include all required sections in the required order
- Organize the material logically
- Use parallel structure from one section to the next
- Discuss important items first
- Incorporate logical paragraph breaks
- Open paragraphs with clear topic sentences
- Ensure clarity
- Explicitly connect one idea to the next
- Write with energy
- Use declarative sentences
- Use active voice and precise verbs
- Avoid the use of jargon
- Define potentially unfamiliar terms
- Spell out acronyms and abbreviations
- Employ appropriate style and usage
- Use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- Vet, edit, proofread, and spell-check the application

Grantsmanship – Page design

- Create a visually pleasing page design
 - ▣ Ensure that page design is reviewer-friendly
 - ▣ Observe page limitations
 - For whole proposal
 - For individual sections
 - ▣ Observe margin requirements
 - ▣ Observe font and point size requirements
 - ▣ Incorporate headings and subheadings
 - ▣ Incorporate ample white space
 - ▣ Use graphics to draw attention to and illustrate key points

Grantsmanship – Formatting

- Place graphics as close to the text they are meant to illustrate as possible
- Refer to graphics in the text
- Number and title all graphics
- Prepare a caption for all graphics
- Label axes and data points, as needed
- Provide a legend, as needed
- Make graphics large enough to be useful

Grantsmanship – The budget

□ Budget

- ▣ Adhere to agency and program requirements
- ▣ Request what you need to complete the project
- ▣ Base budget on real costs
 - Remember that reviewers know what things cost
 - Factor in both direct and indirect costs
 - Factor in cost escalations for multi-year projects ($\sim 3\%$)



Grantsmanship – The budget justification

- A strong budget justification can help prevent your requested funding amount from being cut
 - ▣ Provide a clear, appropriately detailed, and persuasive explanation of why each budget request is needed
 - ▣ Organize the budget justification according to the budget categories listed on the budget spreadsheet
 - ▣ Ensure that the budget numbers mentioned in the project description, the budget, and the budget justification are consistent

Time

Prepare

- Refine topic
- Find funding opportunity
- Download application form
- Read instructions
- Gather background info
- Talk with program officer



Write

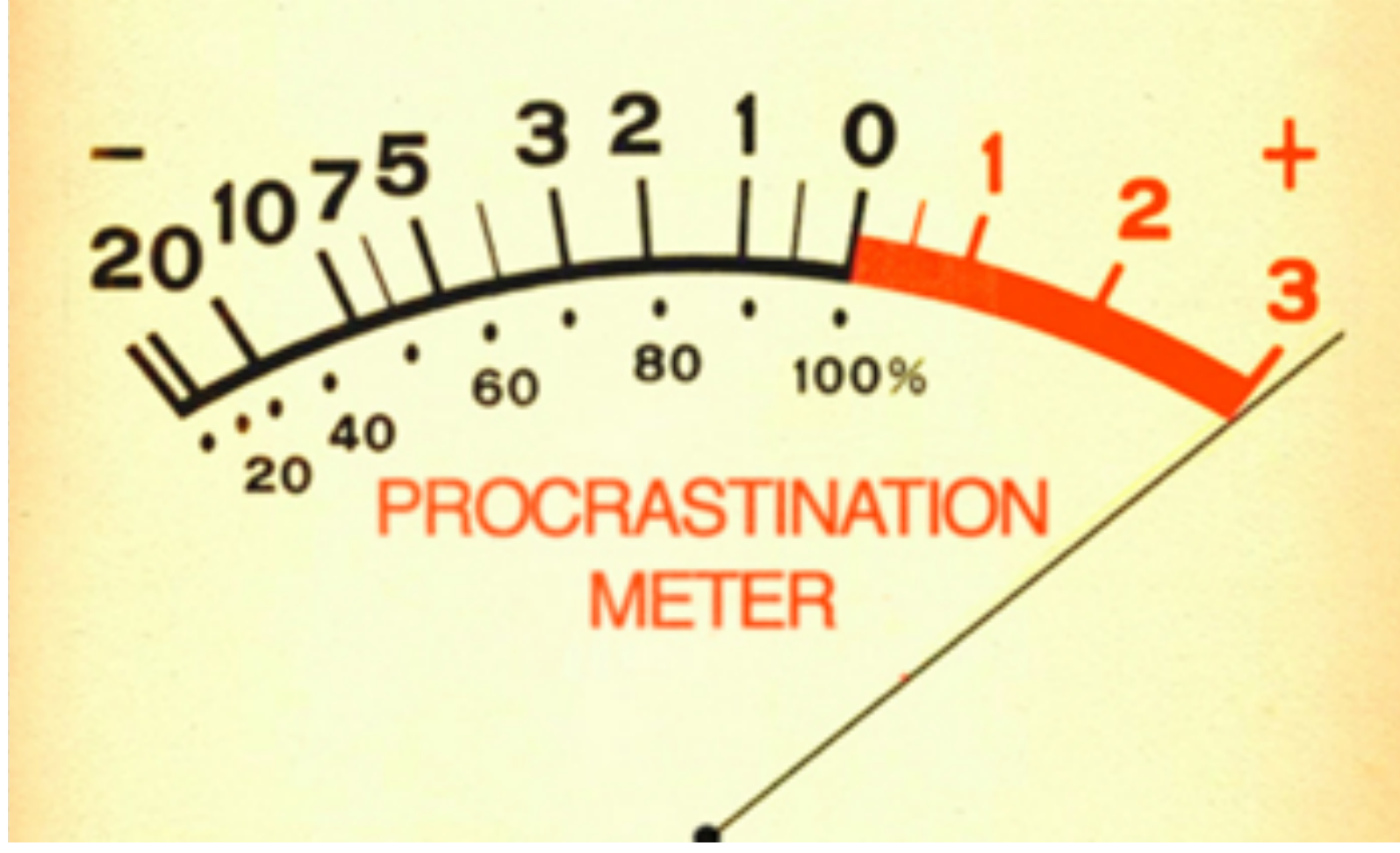
- Draft proposal sections
- Vet proposal draft
- Incorporate suggestions
- Revise proposal
- Edit/proofread proposal
- Prepare budget



Process

- Verify that proposal adheres to instructions
- Ensure that proposal meets review criteria
- Route application for institutional approvals
- Finalize application
- Submit application





Avoid the danger zone!



Beware the squirrels!



Allow time for last-minute epiphanies!



Luck



The review process

How are proposals reviewed?

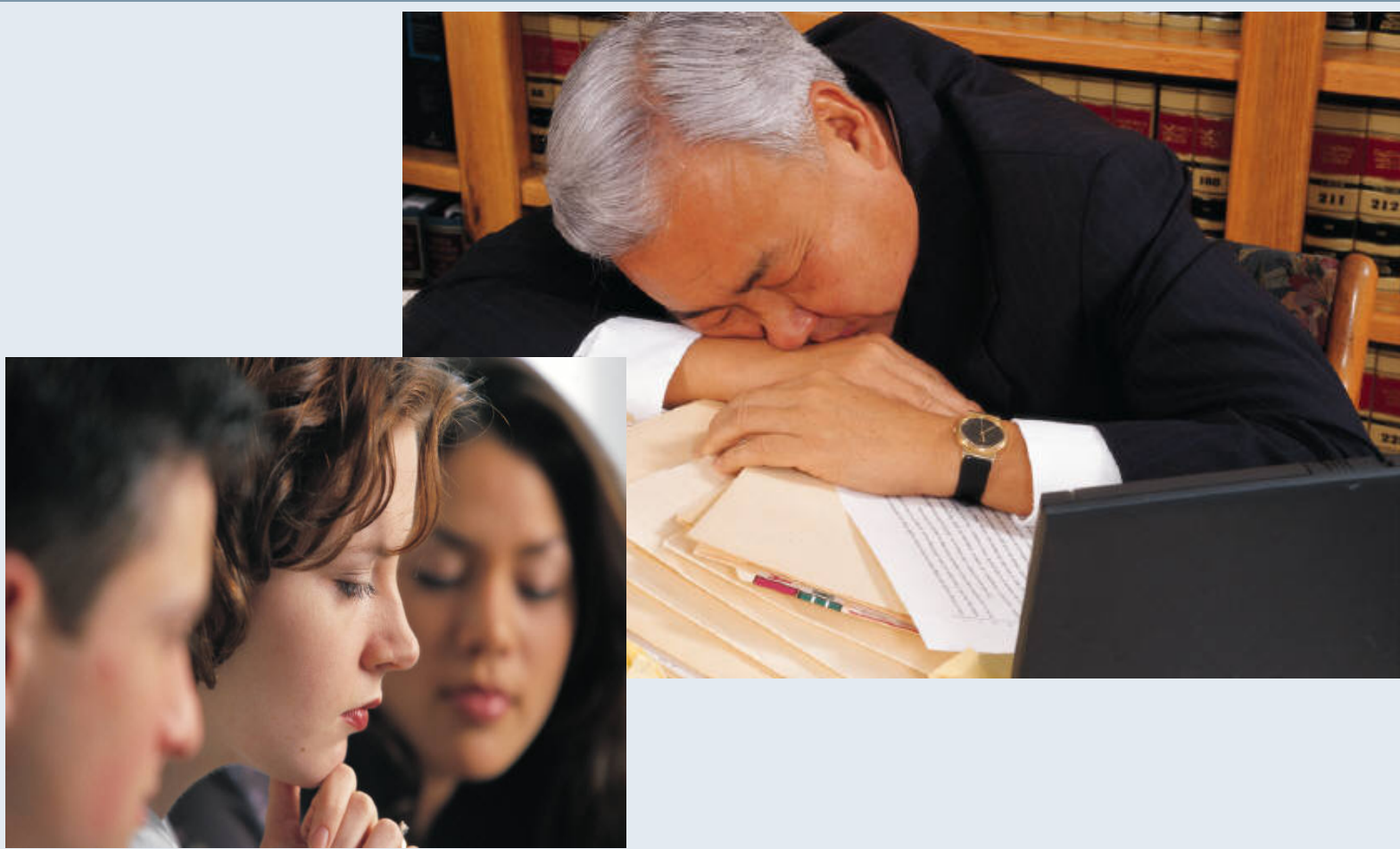
- Realize that the review process and the review criteria vary from one sponsor – and even one program – to the next
 - ▣ Identify the review process and the review criteria for your targeted sponsor, program, solicitation
 - ▣ Understand how the sponsor defines each of the review criteria
 - ▣ Determine how the sponsor weights each of the review criteria (if applicable)

Think about your reviewers

- Remember that while your application will be submitted to an agency, it will be read by people
- Prepare your application with your reviewers in mind



Think about the circumstances under which reviewers work.



Write to hold your reviewers' attention.

Think about your reviewers

“Distinguishing between innovations that emerge from empirical testing of concepts and pre-existing notions and practices currently embraced by businesses to distinguish themselves from competitors in a given local consumer market illustrates the extent to which competitive incentives to offer new and potentially innovative products may encourage such businesses to adopt practices from other markets, thereby avoiding costs associated with research and development of those new products.”

– From Morrison and Russell,
Grant Application Writer's Workbook

Think about your reviewers

“We will use the previously designed data collection instrument, described in section B.3.1 on page 16, and the statistical analysis, similar to that which is in the methods section of the reprint attached as appendix VI, to measure the extent to which our healthcare assessments approaches will be reflective of the community standards described in Section B.2.1 on page 5.”

– From Morrison and Russell,
Grant Application Writer's Workbook



“Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious and adding the meaningful.” John Maeda

Think about your reviewers



Be aware of the “curse of knowledge”

“It’s hard to know what it is like for someone else not to know something that you know. It’s the chief driver of bad writing.”

— *Steven Pinker*

Help reviewers advocate for your proposal

- Tell your reviewers a story

“No matter what the genre, all writing is storytelling.”

— Steven Taylor Goldsberry

- Provide everything that reviewers will need to properly evaluate your proposal in the body of the proposal

Make the “go” / “no go” decision

- Appraise the readiness of your proposal to be submitted
- If the proposal is lacking any required components, or if it is simply not yet as compelling or competitive as it could be, it's a “no go” – the proposal is not ready for submission
- If everything is in place, it's a “go” – the proposal is ready for submission!

Is there a secret to getting a proposal funded?

*“Nothing in this world
can take the place of **persistence**.”*

Talent will not;

nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent.

Genius will not;

unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not;

the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone

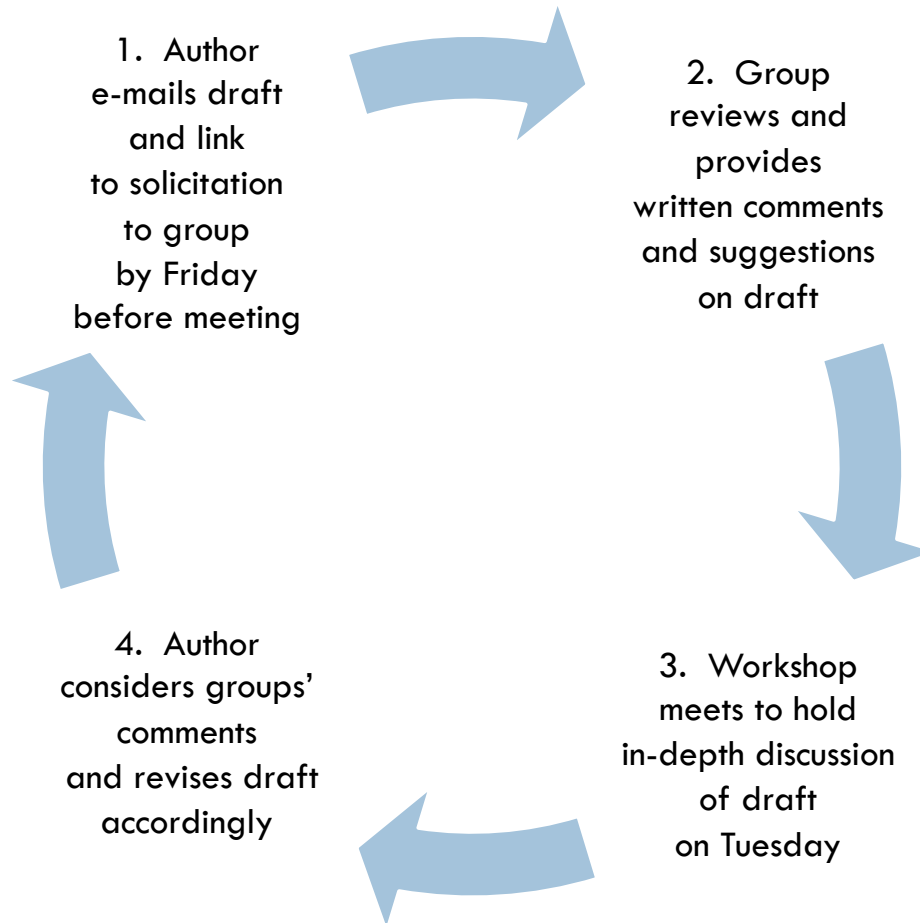
are omnipotent.”

— Calvin Coolidge



Consider creating a proposal-writing group
or workshop

One approach for a workshop



What are the benefits of a workshop?

- Participating in a workshop will:
 - Let you learn about the current grant environment
 - Show you how and where to find appropriate funding opportunities
 - Enable you to learn about agencies and foundations and their missions
 - Familiarize you with the entire proposal writing process
 - Encourage you to begin writing early
 - Provide you more time to think through your ideas
 - Allow you time to have a *eureka!* moment
 - Give you a chance to consider how best to present your ideas
 - Offer you an opportunity to obtain feedback from your peers – and from your program manager
 - Let you see and analyze other grant proposals
 - Inspire you to maintain focus and momentum as you write

Successful proposal writing in the humanities

**Thank you,
and good luck
with your application!**

Questions?



If you have questions
or would like additional information,
please feel free to contact me.

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