Maximizing the Competitiveness of your Academic Funding Application

Newfoundland & Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research
Research Exchange Group on Aging

Dr. Stephen Bornstein
Dr. Michelle Ploughman

February 13 2013
Especially for trainees

Get familiar with the territory

- Ask your supervisor if you can help review grants/awards/journal articles that she/he is reviewing.
- Provides context and enhances your ability to sort good from not so good.
2. Build a track record

http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/

**Institute of Aging  Awards and Prizes**
The *Age+ Prize* recognizes excellence in research on aging carried out in Canada. Awarded annually to 10 to 15 authors of a published, scientific article on aging, the Age+ Award is aimed at graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and residents from all disciplines conducting research in aging.

**Travel Awards** IA provides travel funds for Masters and Doctoral students, and Post-doctoral fellows to present their work at a conference, workshop or symposium.

**CAG-IA Student Poster Competition**: A prize is awarded for the best research posters at the Canadian Association on Gerontology Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting

**Institute of Aging Summer Program**
The CIHR Institute of Aging annual *Summer Program in Aging (SPA)*

**CIHR Institute of Gender and Health** Conference Scholarships
*total funds available: $10,000*

**IHSPR Travel Awards for Trainees and New Investigators**
3. Strengthen your CV

- Get going on your publications and abstracts early.
- Present preliminary findings at a conference in which abstracts are peer-reviewed.
- Find colleagues to collaborate with or help out and ask to be listed as a co-author.
- Write and publish a review article.
4. Pick the right agency

- Start locally if funding is available
- Don’t forget Health Canada, health charities, charitable foundations
- Considerable SSHRC and NSERC, not just CIHR
- Don’t forget American funders; Canadians are often eligible
5. Pick the right competition

• Focused RFPs often easier than open competitions
  – At CIHR, check institute websites
• Some general competitions at CIHR have possible co-funding from ‘your’ institute(s)
• At NLCAHR, apply to both general and special competition (NL-HARP)
• At CIHR, pick the peer review committee carefully
6. Tailor your application to the program

• Read the program description and the evaluation criteria carefully; compare them
• Use the key words and concepts in both (and especially in the evaluation criteria)
• Tailor your language and content to the peer review committee
  – Try to find out whether reviewers are specialists or generalists
  – If not sure, write for both
7. Justify your request

• Why should they fund your application?
  – Use the literature review section to make an argument about why your contribution is necessary, important, innovative
  – Describe your proposed contribution clearly
  – Explain your methodology carefully; try to foresee objections, alternative approaches
8. Take the instructions seriously

- Respect the word limits (overall and for each section)
- Use the headings suggested
- Put the right stuff into the right sections
- Pay careful attention to the required information and budget for KT

Make sure to cross your is and dot your ts.
9. Write carefully

• Style matters: incomprehensible, sloppy prose can doom a brilliant application
• Work hard on the abstract and introduction
• Proofread and get external advice
• Give yourself enough time to get advice, rewrite, revise, edit
• Avoid acronyms as much as possible
• Avoid unnecessary repetitiveness
10. Find the right ‘partners’

• For students, pick your referees carefully
  – Recent teachers or big supporters?
  – Academics or employers?
  – Big shots or familiars?

• For new faculty
  – Find PI’s to take you on as Co-Investigator
  – Take seriously the need for non-academic partners
  – Take seriously the request to identify reviewers and conflicts
11. Sweat the Details

• The budget is important
  – Don’t just go for the maximum
  – Follow the rules about what is fundable
  – Make sure the price is right
    • For equipment
    • For salaries and student stipends

• The methodology matters

• Start early; get input, criticism from others
13. Be realistic and persistent

- Find out the general success rate and the success rate for first applicants
- Keep on trying
- Take reviewers’ comments seriously and respond to them explicitly and respectfully