

Top Ten List of Grantsmanship

*Thoughts from Dr. Alan M. Shiller
USM - Department of Marine Science*

1. **Talk with the program manager.** They'll usually tell you whether or not you're wasting your time and will sometimes pose the sorts of questions that they think reviewers will have. Also, a lot of program managers like getting a brief "heads up" that a proposal is or might be coming.
2. **Read, believe, and follow the RFP** (if there is one). I've reviewed many proposals submitted to a particular program that didn't fit the program--not only does this waste your time, but it doesn't make a good impression on the reviewers and managers.
3. **Find out how much money is available and what are the budget guidelines.** It may not be worth your time to apply to a program where very little money is available relative to the number of applications--buying a lottery ticket may give you the same odds at less effort.
4. **Make the first page sparkle.** Make it clearly say what the proposal is about and why it's important. If you can't hook the reader in that first page, you're lost--remember, many reviewers are looking at more than just one proposal and most reviewers also have short attention spans. (Think about how you might review a proposal.)
5. **Volunteer to review proposals.** Not only does this endear you to program managers, but you'll also learn a lot about what does and doesn't make a clear proposal as well as what other proposers think are important problems and approaches.
6. **Have clearly defined hypotheses, goals, and approaches.** Make it easy on the reviewers to see what you're doing and what the justification is. Don't try to "finesse" details--reviewers will see right through it.
7. **Be honest about the problems with your approach.** Again, reviewers will find all the problems even if you try to hide them--being up front about potential pitfalls and problems will show that you've done some careful thinking.
8. **Don't over-promise.** A lot of people think they need to "promise the moon" even though they know they can't deliver more than low earth orbit. Either the reviewers will see this as a ploy or else they'll simply say that you're trying to do too much.
9. **Have good science.** Being in the good graces of managers and writing clear proposals are fine, but if there isn't good science behind it, who's going to care?
10. **Proof read your proposal.** Too often people are in such a rush to meet a proposal deadline that they don't proof read and end up making glaring errors. While there may not actually be a correlation between lack of typos and good science, there's a certain psychology to not aggravating the reviewers.