

**Respondent:** Laura Wherry, New York University

**What external organizations have funded your work?**

The National Institute on Aging and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

**Why do you apply for external funding? What do you use the money for?**

I previously worked in a soft-money environment in which applying for external funding was an important part of my job. I was in a research faculty position that gave me a lot of protected time to focus on research projects, but I was also expected to secure external grants to cover my time on these projects. In some ways, this is very similar to my current position, where external funding helps to protect my time for research by allowing me to buy out of teaching. In both settings, external funding has also provided me with the resources needed to purchase data and pay for research assistance.

**When you were first beginning to apply for funding, how did you discover organizations that might be interested in your work?**

I signed up for various mailing lists with funding opportunities through my university's grants office. At conferences, I kept my eye out for informational sessions with funders, which are often available at field-specific conferences. I also looked at which funders were supporting researchers with similar research agendas. Twitter is also a great place to find out about various calls for proposals from funders.

**What were the biggest mistakes you made, in your early applications?**

The biggest mistake was not asking for help or input from others with experience getting grants. For instance, many researchers are happy to share their successful grant proposals if you ask them. This can help you better understand what the funder is looking for in a research proposal. With certain funders, like the National Institutes of Health, it can be really helpful to talk to a Program Officer early on to understand whether your research aims are a good match for their funding priorities. Senior colleagues can also be a helpful resource. I've asked many for advice on writing grants, particularly if they've received grants from the funders that I'm targeting. Sometimes these colleagues have even reviewed grant proposals for the funder and are happy to share what they've learned from being involved in the review process. You can also ask peers and senior colleagues to read over at least some parts of your proposals to get feedback. I think getting advice and input early on can really help strengthen your grant proposal.

**Are there other ways in which your process for applying for funding and writing proposals has changed over time?**

I think the process is different for everyone but what seems to work best for me is to start with a research idea or project that I plan to pursue - and then to keep my eye out for potential funding opportunities. This is easier for me than trying to come up with something brand new in response to a call for proposals. Also, when I work on a grant proposal, I think of it as writing the first part of any paper. It's really a great opportunity to craft an introduction and motivate the work and its contribution. Ideally, most of the text in the proposal can be repurposed in the eventual manuscript coming out of the project.

**What surprised you the most about how the funding process works?**

The process is extremely unpredictable and also very slow. There are so many variables in terms of who will be reviewing the grant and the funding priorities that it is difficult to predict the likely outcome. And, with federal grants, you may need to first apply more than a year in advance of when you'll actually need the funding!

**What advice would you give to scholars who are struggling to find funding for their work?**

Get as much feedback as you can from the review process and then plan to revise your proposals to either resubmit to the same funding organization if that is possible, or try and send them somewhere else. You might also consider different funding mechanisms with the same funder.