Preface

What’s in a Name?

IF YOU WORK in higher education, whether a two-year, four-year, doctoral, or research institution, and your position entails generating grant proposals and running grant-funded projects, this handbook is for you. If you also have leadership responsibilities at your institution, we hope you will find the Appendix helpful and relevant to those duties. We expect that you will use this volume as a handbook, reading through the chapters, picking and choosing among the Toolkit items those that suit your needs, and perhaps going back to reread sections when circumstances or the needs of a particular project warrant it. You will encounter some repetition of concepts across the chapters. We did this deliberately so that each individual chapter can stand alone at least to some extent.

Our title tells you that this book is aimed at an academic audience. Our examples are drawn from our experience with proposals to support the research, scholarship, creative activity, instruction, and outreach of the faculty members with whom we have worked over the years. Whereas we are a network of grant writing consultants at the University of Missouri, a land-grant, Research I institution, our advice does not by any means assume that you will have access to professionals like us to help with your grant proposals. We are keenly aware that many, if not most, of our readers will be at smaller institutions without this kind of support. Indeed, survey data from the National Organization of Research Development Professionals (NORDP) suggests that the 14-year tenure of our Network is extremely unusual even among institutions that do provide grant writing support now.

A Rose by Any Other Name . . .

There is more than a little irony in the fact that, despite our success in creating what is increasingly recognized as a national model, the “grant writer” label seems to be at the bottom of the list of desirable titles for
many in the emerging field of research development. The selection of titles is fraught with institutional turf wars: “Specialist” and “coordinator” may be considered lower-level positions; “officer” and “development” are reserved for those in the development division; anything with “writer” is relegated to lower salary levels. And so it goes.

In an informal survey of the members of NORDP in spring 2010, I found that, despite the use of a variety of titles, the activities which are by far the most common among the membership are proposal development, identifying and distributing funding opportunities, and pulling interdisciplinary teams together. This was reinforced when NORDP surveyed its membership in 2011: 87 percent of research development offices are editing grant proposals and helping to identify funding opportunities for their faculties.

This is not to say, however, that the grant writer title is without its issues. We settled on “grant writing consultant”—and that is the title we will use throughout this book—because we do not for the most part compose the first drafts of the proposal narratives. We are experts in process; our faculty members are the content experts. Our jobs entail helping faculty members identify funding opportunities they might otherwise miss, identifying and pulling interdisciplinary and interinstitutional teams together, organizing proposal documents, organizing the people and tasks of proposal preparation, managing the timeline for proposal preparation, managing the timeline for proposal preparation (read: polite, but persistent, nagging), drafting budgets and budget justifications, and conducting workshops and graduate courses in grantsmanship.

It is worth reiterating that this book will be useful to you regardless of whether you have access to grant writing professionals. This book lays out the work of proposal development and contextualizes that work in an academic environment. You may need or choose to do all of the tasks associated with preparing your grant proposals, or you may hand some of those tasks off to others. Either way, we believe the advice and tools of this book will allow you to proceed more effectively and efficiently.

**Using This Book**

We have organized this book into three parts: Part One provides advice on proposal development and management of the resulting grant awards. Part Two offers tools and templates to help you accomplish those tasks. The Appendix advises campus leaders who wish to benefit from our experience in building institutional grants culture.
Part One is divided into three sections: “Diving into Grants Culture” lays the groundwork for your proposal work. In this section, Chapter 1 begins with an overview, historical and current, macro and micro, that should help you contextualize your grant work. Chapter 2 walks you through the process of identifying and winnowing potential sponsors for your work. Chapter 3 asks you to look up from your desk or lab bench, look around your campus, and tap the support that is already in place for you. Following this thread, Chapter 4 examines current sponsor preferences for collaborative and interdisciplinary work. Finally, Chapter 5 moves past these more general activities to help you prepare to write a specific proposal.

The second section of Part One, “Developing Your Proposal,” walks you through the key sections of a typical grant proposal. This section includes chapters on the writing itself (Chapter 6), the abstract (Chapter 7), the proposal narrative or project description (Chapter 8), the budget (Chapter 9), and the proposal package as a whole (Chapter 10).

The last section of Part One, “Next Steps,” deals with postsubmission issues: what to do when your proposal is initially declined (Chapter 11) and then finally awarded (Chapter 12).

Part Two comprises a Toolkit of tested materials that we have found helpful in our own proposal work. (The Toolkit can also be accessed online; see p. iv.) This Toolkit is divided into four sections. As its title suggests, the first section, “Diving into Grants Culture,” parallels the section by the same title in Part One of the book. The glossary and other materials in this section are designed to help you think about your project as an experienced grants professional would. The materials in Section Two, “Managing the Proposal Work,” should help you manage the proposal process without being overwhelmed as you track all the people and proposal documents involved in the process. Section Three, “Developing Your Proposal,” focuses directly on the parts of the typical proposal, offering templates, examples, and cheat sheets to help you generate a strong proposal and respond appropriately to reviewer comments.

The last section of the Toolkit, “Building Institutional Grants Culture,” and the Appendix that follows Part Two are aimed at campus leaders seeking to build your institution’s grants culture. We offer sample documents in the Toolkit and advice in the Appendix that are drawn from our experience in nurturing the University of Missouri’s Grant Writer Network as a resource for MU’s faculty.

We hope that you will find this handbook both useful and usable.