

DOs AND DON'Ts FOR WRITING  
SUCCESSFUL GRANT PROPOSALS ON  
MEDIEVAL FEMINIST SUBJECTS  
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Jane Chance gives much excellent advice, with which I concur. I would like to supplement her points with a few “dos and don’ts” for grant writing. I will focus particularly on ways to maximize the potential benefits in preparing grant applications and ways to avoid running into pitfalls either with granting agencies or one’s home institution.

DOs

DO apply for multiple grants during a given funding cycle. You must research your funding sources carefully and tailor your applications meticulously (see below), but if you are doing one proposal, you might as well do several. Once you have written a budget, compiled a bibliography, written your project descriptions and abstracts, set out your work timeline, etc., you might as well get as much mileage as possible out of the effort. So, for instance, during the cycle in which I received my National Humanities Center fellowship, I also applied for an NEH, an ACLS fellowship, and a Guggenheim. The more applications you submit (provided you research carefully and tailor meticulously), the greater your chances of success.

DO target your applications carefully. This piece of advice might seem to contradict the previous point, but in fact, they go hand in hand. Jane Chance gives some excellent insights on this point, and I would like simply to offer one brief addendum. Educate yourself about the sometimes unwritten requirements and expectations of particular funding agencies. For instance, certain fellowships in practice never go to scholars working on a first book project, though none of the official guidelines ever say anything of the sort. Talk to people who have held particular fellowships or received particular grants. Look at the *curriculum vitae* of particularly successful feminist scholars in your area, and

note at what stage in their careers they received particular grants or fellowships. There's no real harm in aiming high, but have realistic expectations.

## DON'Ts

DON'T cut deadlines too fine. It's a good idea to set deadlines for yourself in advance of hard submission deadlines to allow for any potential glitches in the submission process; see also the next point regarding internal submission deadlines for your institution. For example, the last time I applied for an NEH, the process was complicated in the extreme, requiring the downloading of particular kinds of software that my computer didn't want to run etc. to use the "grants.gov" submission procedure.

DON'T ignore your own institution's rules about submitting external proposals to internal committees for required "vetting" prior to official submission, and note internal deadlines, which at my institution are typically around a month ahead of the actual agency submission deadline. Attend carefully to requirements that administrative permission be sought and given to apply for grants, and determine if your institution has matching funds requirements. At Florida State University, we have an office that has to approve all grant and fellowship applications prior to submission; one typically must also have one's application "signed off" by the department chair and academic dean. If one does not follow the (quite involved and particular) institutional rules about grant applications, paperwork, signatures, and approvals, one runs the risk of not getting released from teaching to accept the grant, not getting funds to "top up" a fellowship to the level of one's salary, and other unpleasant consequences.

DON'T be unrealistic about your budget. Check funding agencies' specifications carefully to see what sorts of purchases they actually cover. Some grants, for instance, can be used to purchase books, microfilms, etc., and others cannot. If your budget includes travel to conduct archival research, draw up a detailed timeline of what you will do when and where, and calculate per diem rates using specified, permitted sources (often the rates given by the State Department, but not always).

Finally, DON'T give up! It often takes more than one attempt to secure a particular grant or fellowship. If the funding agency offers you the opportunity to see the evaluations of your proposal, by all means take advantage of that opportunity.

#### CRITIQUE OF DR. PEPPER'S PROPOSAL

Dr. Pepper has identified a fantastic project, but the proposal does not make clear *why* the project is so fantastic. There are several major scholarly conversations to which this project might contribute: investigations of the international dimensions of English religious and textual cultures; investigations of female book ownership, female patronage, and female textual communities; explorations of women's places in medieval and early modern religious cultures; revisions of literary and historical periodization through a gendered lens; examinations of ongoing medieval legacies in early modern East Anglia, known to be a complex, fraught environment in the medieval religious landscape—the list could undoubtedly go on.

Dr. Pepper, however, has set out the project fairly narrowly as a study of manuscripts. This focus might be attractive to a small subset of funding agencies; indeed, she might tailor a piece of this proposal to get a grant like the Neil Ker Award from the British Academy to work with the British manuscripts. However, most funding agencies will not be interested in a project that appears to have such a restricted focus and such limited scholarly significance. Dr. Pepper needs to do a better job of making the larger stakes of her work clear; she needs to attend more fully to various big picture issues even as she balances attention to detail. So, in addition to situating her project in light of at least some of the scholarly veins outlined above, she also needs to make clear her relation to major works in her admittedly very interdisciplinary field, beyond just mentioning them in the bibliography. She lists some scholars in the "Justification" section, but she needs to do more to indicate how her work intersects with, and even more importantly, builds on and departs from, the work of these scholars.

Dr. Pepper's main job in revising this proposal is to make clear why the focus of her project is not in fact minute and the

significance is not in fact limited. What she chooses to foreground might well vary; indeed, it probably should vary to make the proposal attractive to funding agencies with different objectives. So, for a proposal to a body like the American Association of University Women, Dr. Pepper might emphasize the importance of her work in the framework of the history of gender and class relations. For a grant from the American Academy of Religion, she might focus her proposal through the lens of a trans-historical study of gender, textual culture, and devotional practice across the pre- and post-Reformation periods.

Dr. Pepper's budget also needs to be much more detailed. She needs to specify what microfilms she will purchase and how much each one will cost; this can generally be determined by doing a bit of research on library websites, looking for pricelists from the reproductions departments. She needs to break down the cost of the trips into categories such as airfare, per diems at permitted rates, car rentals if necessary, and the like.

Finally, Dr. Pepper ought to make clearer what exactly she plans to publish as a result of her research: an edition? a monograph? a series of articles? more than one of the above? Rather than saying "I seek funding to support a project on lay devotional practices and reading instruction, which is titled 'The Gilbert Hours and Family Devotion'," I would advise saying something like, "My current project is a scholarly monograph concerned with lay devotional practices and reading instruction entitled *The Gilbert Hours and Family Devotion*." A subtle difference, perhaps, but I think a significant one, because a monograph will likely be the most attractive outcome for many funding agencies. What is the publication timetable? What are the proposed publication venues? Funding agencies like "measurable outcomes" (to use current admin speak), so Dr. Pepper should confidently project what she will produce, when, and where. She should also make clear what work she has already done, what related conference papers she has presented, what related articles she may have published or submitted. A project that is well underway is going to be more attractive than one in its initial stages.