



Getting Started with a Successful NSF ATE Proposal

Marilyn Barger, Principal Investigator, Florida Advanced Technological Education Center, Hillsborough Community College, Tampa, Florida



Look around. There are lots of two-year degrees being offered by lots of colleges that have successfully acquired NSF ATE (National Science Foundation Advanced Technological Education) funding. Why not you, your program, or your college? True, there's a lot of work in writing a successful proposal, but the rewards are many, not only for your college but also for the individuals involved. Successful projects can jump-start new technical programs; help faculty acquire professional development and training; and strengthen your partnerships with industry, educational institutions, and other stakeholders. An NSF grant is good for you and your program, and here are ten tips for a successful proposal for NSF ATE.

1. Get started.

Identify a goal that encompasses something you want to accomplish. Study the program guidelines you want to be funded by so your project supports their mission. Read and reread the program solicitation. Read the summaries of current ATE projects on the NSF website (or their own project websites). Structure your thought process to fill in one of these statements: students need...; there is a gap...; there is a shortage...; faculty need.... Remember that ATE supports a variety of activities that strengthen technician education in high-technology fields that drive the U.S. economy through partnerships with industry, secondary schools, and government agencies. If your idea does not match that need, adjust your idea so that it does.

2. Get buy-in from your college.

Your college needs to be involved from the very beginning. Your proposal must align

with the goals of the institution. Follow all processes your college has for grant applications. Your college grants office needs to know what the deadlines are. The formal on-line submission is done by someone in your college administration. Do not confuse partner commitment letters with financial support letters. The first type of letter is essential; the second is nice but not necessary. Finally, define college resources that can help you develop your plan, coordinate proposal writing activities and data gathering, and proofread your draft.

3. Identify the target audience of the proposal.

It might not be obvious, but you must write the proposal document for the reviewers. They might not know the vocabulary of the discipline you are writing about. They will spend less than one hour reading and reviewing the proposal that you spent as many as 200 hours creating. You need to plant your vision. Be crystal clear and concise, develop credibility, and provide a detailed work plan. Propose metrics of success and identify compelling needs and partnerships.

4. Get help with the writing.

Creating the proposal document is the core activity in the submission process. Your college might have a grants department or contracted grant writers who can help you write the main document (project description). Clearly communicate your project needs and approach; have very clear goals, activities, and outcomes; provide details on how and when things will be done; and emphasize intellectual merit and broad impact.

There's a lot of work in writing a successful proposal, but the rewards are many, not only for your college but also for the individuals involved.

See Proposal, page 7.