Tips on writing successful grant applications

Dr. Sarah Basset
Associate Professor
Art and Art History

1. Expect rejection, but persist anyway!
2. Often researchers have nearly a dozen grant proposals turned down before having one accepted. The lesson is, keep trying!
3. Know what you're talking about....and know what you don't know!
4. Not only should a grant submission show you have a strong grasp of your topic, you should also be able to explain what still needs to be explored. You're doing research, you don't necessarily have to have all the answers already.
5. Follow directions exactly!
6. If a granting institution wants a 4-page summary, don't give them 2, 5 or 8. Be careful to follow the format they have asked for.
7. Spell check, spell check, spell check!
8. Grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors can be the difference between a proposal that gets read and one that gets ignored. Have several people look over your proposal for typos and logical flow.
9. Avoid jargon!
10. Not everyone on grant committees is an expert in your field, so avoid using technical language that only those on the "inside" will understand. Write for an intelligent, yet not necessarily informed audience.
11. Your work is important!
12. In a grant proposal, be sure to emphasize how your research is unique and how it will benefit your field and, yes, the world. Even if your work is very specific, talk about why your topic is worth studying.
13. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

Most granting institutions have a phone number to call in case you have questions about applying. Don't be afraid to use it.

Dr. Bassett has won grants from such external sources as the National Endowment for the Humanities, Dumbarton Oaks Research Center / Library of Harvard Universities (Center for Byzantine Studies), and the American Research Institute in Turkey. At Wayne State University, she has successfully applied for University Research Grants, Faculty Summer Research Grants, and the Faculty Global Curriculum Development Grant.