Staying the Course: Staying Motivated in a Competitive Writing Environment

WSU College of Education
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Welcome!

* Introductions, all campuses

* We can all act as a resource for each other. These workshops create community to tackle issues faculty often don’t discuss.

* What challenges do you have staying motivated in grant seeking and grant writing?
Common Challenges

- Motivation (internal / external)
- Personal feelings about rejection
- Time management
- Need for support, training, mentoring, editing
- Writer’s block (internal editor)
- Concerns about tenure process and performance
How do I deal with taking rejection personally?

* Today’s grants environment is much more competitive

* About 1:10 grants once awarded. Now it’s often 1:60. (e.g., NSF = Now 2-12% funded, used to be 16% funded).

  Expect rejection. Use as a learning process, continually improving your work for success.

* You’re not alone! Chat with colleagues about projects, proposals, and submittals. Faculty at all levels experience rejection. (Some areas receive more funding than others, e.g., sciences).

* Count your successes (accepted LOI, a few points off an award, fellowship, internal WSU award, etc. You’re on the right track!)
How do I address repeated rejections?

* This is normal!
* Fit YOUR project into THEIR needs and guidelines, not vice versa.
* Make sure your project is INNOVATIVE.
* Focus on RESULTS and OUTCOMES.
* Establish your CREDIBILITY, experience.
* Focus on ACCOUNTABILITY and ASSESSMENT.
* Address reviewer comments. (Multiple reviewers, different ones each time. Focus on issues of agreement between reviewers…Trends vs. outliers).
* Form your own review team. Ask for comments on drafts from supervisors, colleagues, grant officers, WSU grants staff and editors.
Addressing rejection (cont.)

* Try smaller grants, different grant types (foundations, state, local, internal WSU).
* Combine small grants and funding sources to complete a project
* Find creative ways to do project with less funding (grad student experience, etc.).
* Add collaboration & partnerships (federal grants want broad impacts)
* Take workshop, attend a retreat, find a mentor.
* Use staff editors, WSU Foundation, OGRD, pay outside editor
* Read grant writing books (available in my office).
* Read successful proposals, project abstract and reviewer comments
Addressing rejection (cont).

* Take a workshop, attend a retreat, find a mentor.
* Use editors: lgirardeau@wsu.edu. WSU Foundation, OGRD, pay outside editor
* Read grant writing books (available in my office).
* Read funded abstracts (on agency sites)
* Ask to see colleagues’ reviewer comments and drafts of successful and unsuccessful proposals (their choice)
Everyone can find an hour a week or write page a day.

Create a list or pie chart of your time on a typical day. Include home activities and tasks.

Cut out small tasks you don’t enjoy or that can be delegated, consolidated (e.g., 8-9 pm Wed, mindless tv)

This creates at least 30 minutes a day or a few hours per week. Rearrange times so you’re fresh (in morning, before checking email, etc.)

Create regular, enjoyable writing time (page a day, hour a day, 2 hour block a week, etc., on topics you enjoy).
* Choose competitions with short “letters of intent” instead of writing a full proposal. Only a few pages to jump through 1st hoop.

* (LOI’s are common for foundations and large federal grants if you catch the correct deadline cycle).

* Some proposals require letters of support and partnerships. Think ahead and plan for meetings!

* Collaboration and meetings add time to a grant project, but are worth it (funders like partnerships btwn depts., institutions, schools, agencies for nation-wide impact.)
Motivation

* Trying DOES count in the tenure process
* Supervisors count submissions, not just your awards. (Each department and supervisor differs)
* They also want to see improvement.
* Are you learning from the process? Trying new competitions, different types of grants? Willing to partner and collaborate?
Internal vs. external motivation: *Write for joy, not tenure*

* Choose projects you’re *passionate* about. Enthusiasm will shine through, increase chances for success.
* *Write because you care.*

* Focus on your desire to change the world instead of “funding your project.” This commitment will shine through (especially for foundation grants).
Don’t try to write perfectly the first time. E.B. White wrote up to 16 drafts of each piece.

Embrace CFD’s (“crummy first drafts”). Just get your thoughts on paper, to get used to writing regularly.

Try “free writing” (5 minutes without stopping, to banish internal editor.

Try writing by hand, or in your native language.

Brainstorm stupid ideas first, to free up creativity for great ideas.
Writer’s Block (cont.)

- Secrets of effective people: “Never check email in the morning.” (10-20 minutes to refocus after interruption).
- Try writing for 30 mins in morning before checking email
- Find another time when you’re alert (after workout?)
- Create sacred space: favorite café, chair, music
- Make commitment (time, duration, place, topic)
- Try 4 sessions, reassess. Habits take awhile to form.
Laura Girardeau, lgirardeau@wsu.edu, x6232
Faculty Research Development Coordinator

I help COE faculty identify funding sources, focus projects and edit drafts

WSU Foundation: helps with contacts, background, success history, etc.

COS Pivot, grants database hosted by WSU.
(Platform may change: use Pivot while you can).
*What has worked for you for “Staying the Course”?

*See colleagues as collaborators, partners for grants, mentors and shared resources, instead of competition.

*Together, we can make WSU stronger, gain funding.