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PREPARING PROPOSALS FOR FUNDED RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

The political scientist who wishes to conduct research needs resources. This article will discuss one way of obtaining those resources—the proposal for a grant to a funding agency, whether governmental or private. This is not intended as a guide to “grantsmanship,” or the tactics of eliciting money—although this is probably what some of the suggestions amount to—but rather a discussion of some of the considerations that the scholar should keep in mind as he plans his proposal. To the experienced proposal writer, these suggestions may be clichés, but they may help the younger or inexperienced political scientist to follow his research ideas with a proposal that may mean the difference between conducting or not conducting productive research.

The literature in most scholarly disciplines represents the work of a small proportion of the total membership in the discipline. With approximately 30,000 psychologists for example, one foundation executive estimates the creative contributors at no more than 2,000. In discussions for this article, the same type of estimate for political science ranged from 250-500 people. This is less than 10% of those professionally engaged in political science occupations who have received a doctorate, and an even smaller percentage if the total individual membership of the APSA is considered as the population. Although the size of the group of contributing scholars is not limited to a certain proportion of the discipline, the size of the group may never be great. There is no doubt, however, that the size of this group can expand. One of the ways in which the group can be expanded is by increasing the number of grant proposals from the “other 90%.”

Part of this situation is due to the socialization of students into the discipline. At institutions where the significance of support funds for study and research is recognized, students are informed and encouraged to submit applications and proposals. (Looking over the list of graduate NSF fellowships elsewhere in this issue, for instance, indicates that the larger, traditionally “prestige” institutions, received a preponderance of the fellowships.)

Some institutions now require the dissertation prospectus to be written in the format of a grant proposal. This obviously tends to acclimate the graduate student to the rigor and style—and the possibility of approval—of research proposals. One administrator describes a grant proposal as an “adult thesis project.”

The most important resource the political scientist brings to his research is himself—his intellect, his training, his energy. Productive and important research often needs no more than this. For the individual may do research in his home, office or library. But even to do this requires support for time and salary—either from the institution with which the scholar is affiliated or another source.

Increasingly, however, the scholar who sets out to investigate social phenomena needs more than simple support for living. He needs support for computer programming and machine time, travel to data sources, survey research and analysis, and research assistance.

“The heart of the matter is having an idea.” This is the way a large foundation grant administrator describes the primary criterion for the evaluation of a grant

proposal. Funded research plays an important part in the development and testing of ideas in political science, as the footnotes in the *American Political Science Review* and the prefaces to books increasingly indicate. Just as important to the individual scholar is the opportunity to gain resources to advance both the discipline and his professional career.

Every specific grant program has its own procedures for applications or proposals. Privately funded proposals are usually less demanding in format than government agency requirements, but the *substance* of the proposal is the important consideration regardless of source. Thus no "nuts and bolts" instructions appear here. These are usually available in the form of guidelines or manuals, and should be obtained from the granting institutions. Also, books such as David R. Krathwohl's *How to Prepare a Research Proposal* (Syracuse University Bookstore, \$1.00) can be consulted.

Both government and private foundations are sources of research funds. The amount of available funds allocated to political science often depends largely on the demand placed on the organization by members of the discipline. A leading example is the National Science Foundation, a major source of political science research support since NSF recognition of the discipline. The Division of Social Sciences approved 38 political science grants totaling \$788,098 from July, 1967 through June, 1968. This contrasted with 130 grants in anthropology for a total of \$3,608,630; or 47 grants in history and philosophy of science totaling \$829,000. The point is not that political science received less support while these other disciplines have many fewer members, but that fewer proposals were made, e.g. 275 in anthropology as against 94 in political science. These differences can be traced to disciplinary emphases, such as the traditional need for foundation support for the field work necessary to "commit" anthropology, or an aggressive strategy for obtaining support as in history and philosophy of science. While political scientists have sometimes complained about such figures as those above, and the disparity between the social sciences generally and other scientific divisions of the NSF (\$36,968,000 in obligations in 1968 of a total of \$505,228,000), only when proposals are received can it be said that the Foundation has had an opportunity to do more for political science.

A common feeling among political scientists who have served on NSF evaluation panels is that "there weren't enough quality proposals." While some of this feeling may be attributable to a highly developed critical sense, it is substantially accurate. These political scientists indicate that there is less need for more sympathy from the NSF than there is for more good proposals. The same may be said for the other types of NSF support, such as fellowships, which do not come under the Division of Social Sciences. The Civics Institutes sponsored by the Office of Education are subject to the same kind of competition, since there is no categorical allocation of available funds among more than 10 disciplines eligible for institute funds. The number and quality of political scientists' proposals have an important weight in the amount of funds available for them.

The broader questions of research support needs in political science have been, and are being, studied by three groups. The Advisory Committee on Government Programs in the Behavioral Sciences issued a report in 1968, *The Behavioral Sciences and the Federal Government*. The report's summary and recommendations appeared in the Fall, 1968, *P.S.* Another group is the Special Commission on the Social Sciences, established by the National Science Board in 1968. The largest undertaking was the Behavioral and Social Sciences Survey, whose report will be available shortly. Activities of these groups are covered in *P.S.*

Departments and institutions benefit from grants, through overhead costs and faculty advancement, as well as individuals, but the motivation usually must come from scholars with ideas. The following suggestions may be helpful to the political scientist who wishes to translate his idea into funded research.

Be Informed

Every grant-making organization has its own system for recruiting, evaluating and deciding on proposals. The prospective researcher must often think well over a year ahead of the present. He must be concerned with deadline dates and the con-

tingencies of his own professional life. This necessitates keeping informed about the schedules of such major sources as the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Office of Education, Department of Defense, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Department of State, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the larger private organizations such as the Ford Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Social Science Research Council. Other sources which specialize in certain types or areas of research should be followed through announcements, newsletters and *P.S.*

Make Informal Initial Inquiries

Most grant administrators welcome the opportunity to discuss the applicability of particular programs or standards of judgment to be applied with prospective applicants. A telephone call, letter or visit may be the way to determine whether a planned proposal falls within the guidelines established for a program, or whether an initial idea about subject or method seems feasible. Direct questions about receptivity, however, will often be answered indefinitely since administrators will depend on professional advice for evaluation, and especially because *originality* is often a key consideration and the administrator does not wish to inhibit it. Annual meetings of professional associations are attended by representatives of funding organizations, and they often set aside time to talk with interested political scientists. This is a convenient setting for an exchange of information and test of ideas with these representatives.

Look Over Previous Grant Award Announcements

One way of getting the flavor of the types of research funded by an organization is to look over the lists of grants made in the past. Each organization has this type of information in press releases or annual reports, and many of these awards are announced in *P.S.* This method has limitations however, for it must be kept in mind that each particular list of grants awarded reflects the proposals made during a certain competitive period, and the types and quality of proposals submitted on identical subjects may vary over time, as well as emphasis on the part of the organization. The National Endowment for the Humanities, for example, is now charged with supporting significant research on current social relevance. On the other hand, some organizations like NSF resist being "fashion-conscious" like some private foundations.

Write as one Professional to another.

Write the proposal for eminent, though not aged, members of the profession. Write it as if to a respected colleague who has asked you how you will go about your project. You need not "write down," since your real audience is a group of political scientists whose own work has been substantial. Regardless of the mechanics of the evaluation process, a group of "peers" in the profession will judge the substance of the proposal. One grant administrator described the typical reviewing committee as "fair-minded and fearless." The staff criteria for reading the proposals include an appreciation of where the proposal fits into the greater scholarly and social milieu, and an awareness of the strategic problems of research.

The aim of the proposal should be to elicit this sort of statement from the evaluator, suggested by a grant administrator:

I consider this an unusually fine proposal. The questions to be dealt with are significant. The applicant lets us into his thinking enough so that we can see how his proposed work is related to the current state of knowledge as reflected in the literature. And his suggestions for work to be done seem to be feasible and show imagination and good judgment.

The research director of an institution may be helpful in obtaining information about schedules, technical requirements, and the administrative details of proposals and grants, but most funding organizations prefer to work "professional to professional" on the substance of the proposal. Avoid the "promoter" influence on proposals undertaken chiefly to enhance a school's image, but do not hesitate to utilize the research office expertise in administration.

On bibliographies, proposals are judged by the standards of the discipline. From NSF experience, economics and mathematics bibliographies are usually short, whereas in the history of science panel members usually look for "every last article." The style in political science has tended toward longer bibliographies, but this is not a necessity if the references are "relevant and recent." Empirical research proposals often have shorter bibliographies than more traditional studies. One important class of references to include are those which might be cited as work already done on the same subject.

Be Specific

A proposal with well through-out, definite and concrete objectives and methods always reflects favorably on the proposer. Most proposals are not carried through as inflexible operations, and funding agencies recognize this, but they want to know what the proposer *thinks* he will do, and that he has clear plan as to how he will *start* if he obtains the funds.

Consider the Purpose of the Program

Keep in mind the ends and objects of the grant program. Then ensure that the proposal relates its substance to these ends. An administrator in the Office of Education says, for example:

The two weakest areas of proposals that cross my desk are usually the educational translation component (how can the substantive material be best translated into useful classroom units and materials) and the evaluation of the program.

These are the elements that would relate the proposal to the program.

Do Not Assume Your Proposal Will be Cut

Anyone who works with budgets faces the decision whether to request what he "really" needs or an amount which could be pared. Most grant making organizations naturally want the former, and most take proposals at their face value. It is preferable, particularly if the applicant is younger or if it is a first application, to be "modest." In the NSF, for instance, renewal grants are made readily if the promise of the initial proposal has been confirmed through a grant.

Do Not Anticipate Rejection

If political scientists anticipate the reception their proposals will engender because of their feelings (or usually someone else's) about who funds what, they may decrease their own opportunity for funding as well as contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy due to a decrease in the very type of applications for which support is desired. As one NSF panel member states,

. . . it is quite untrue to believe that the only form of political science to which the NSF graduate fellowship program applies is mathematical political science. Exactly to the contrary, the instructions to the panels of referees explicitly state that the judgments are meant to reflect only the individual qualifications of the applicant, and are not to be guided by any considerations of the relative need for or desirability of specified types of academic programs.

The same principle applies if one is at a small, undergraduate, black, or "non-prestige" institution. Often a feeling of being "left out" inhibits proposals which might be of high enough quality to change this situation.