



Association for Asian Studies

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Securing Funding for Asian Studies: Dispelling the Mysteries

Presented on March 27, 2010, at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting in Philadelphia

The forum was moderated by:

Steve Wheatley, Vice President, American Council of Learned Societies

The other presenters were:

David Adams, Senior Program Officer for Outreach and Public Affairs, Council for International Exchange of Scholars/Institute of International Education

Cheryl Gibbs, Senior Program Officer, International Education Programs Service, US Department of Education

Linda Musumeci, Director of Grants and Fellowships, American Philosophical Society

Nicole Restrick, Fellowships Manager, Social Science Research Council

Russell Wyland, Assistant Director of Research Programs, National Endowment for the Humanities

The **Forum on Securing Funding for Asian Studies** had two goals: (1) to provide information about the specific funding programs offered by the participating organizations; (2) to suggest ways to maximize the chance of being successful in obtaining funding.

The most up-to-date and accurate information about the funding opportunities offered by these organizations is best found on their websites.

This summary pulls together the presenters' suggestions about preparing successful proposals.

To avoid the most common problems that cause proposals to go unfunded, the presenters suggested things to keep in mind:

- The statement of the core issue that the proposal addresses needs to be stated in a compelling way;
- The activities planned to accomplish the work must be clearly described;
- The scope of the work described must fit the time frame of the grant applied for;
- If the proposal includes a request for fieldwork, there needs to be a clear explanation of why fieldwork in a particular place is essential to the project;
- The applicant needs to carefully follow the specific requirements of the funder's grant application. Some of these requirements are obvious, like meeting the deadline—but also it is also important to follow the guidelines on details as specific as the width of margins, etc. And, of course, it is important to proof read very carefully.
- Be sure that the proposed activities are feasible within the political and/or cultural setting in which the person proposes to do research (e.g., will the host country government allow survey research; are the materials critical to the project available or open to foreigners; are the questions to be asked in a survey ones that will offend local cultural sensitivities?)

Other comments and suggestions from the presenters include:

Be aware that reviewers judge the proposal and the applicant as a single 'package': one presenter noted that her agency gives 60 points for the project design and 40 points for the applicant's profile. Make sure that the scope of the project proposed is commensurate with your experience and educational background. The project and the applicant's CV should form a coherent and convincing whole.

For proposals to do fieldwork in another country, applicants need to describe their language ability in a clear way. Sometimes this is obvious from the applicant's CV; sometimes it can be described in a letter of reference from a mentor or other colleagues. Some founders require specific evidence of language ability.

Most review committees include a mixture of experts in the particular field under consideration and people from other fields. For that reason, proposals should be written for an audience of intelligent non-specialists. Don't expect the reviewer to be familiar with your field or its particular vocabulary. It can

be useful to have people outside your own field read the proposal for clarity before you submit it. Avoid jargon and exaggeration.

“Don’t think of review committees as hostile: reviewers are actually interested in learning from you.”

Letters of support should come from a range of appropriate professionals, not just the applicant’s mentor(s). Always give the reference a copy of the proposal so that he/she can discuss your ability to successfully complete the work proposed. It is wise to suggest topics that the reference might include in the letter of recommendation. References should discuss both the person *and* the project.

With regard to the questions asked on the application, it is imperative to follow the old adage, “answer the question asked.”

Funders list the criteria and requirements for their grants on their websites. Make sure that all of the criteria are met. Many funders also provide tools which can be very useful (for instance, sample successful applications; a list of past successful grantees, etc.). If requested, some funders will provide the review panelists’ comments on the applicant’s proposal. If the funder is allowed to send them, one should request the panelists’ comments whether or not the application is successful.

Submit only the materials indicated in the application instructions.

“Think of the grant application as a request for *time*, not just for money,” as one presenter put it.

The application should present a strong argument—within the specific field of study—for the approach proposed: “why are you taking this particular approach?”

Make sure that your bibliography demonstrates your familiarity with the field.

Answer the question, “so what?” Make it very clear why the knowledge gained from this research is important.

Employ the “why/because tool.” Critique the final draft of your proposal or project statement to identify and anticipate the places where a reviewer will pause and ask “why.” Be sure to supply the “because” or explanation before submitting.

Proposal writing is not just an exercise to get a grant. Keep in mind that writing a grant application is a useful step towards being able to present your thinking and research to a wider, educated, sophisticated audience