Common Budget Mistakes

Lessons Learned from a Recent Grant Writing Workshop

No PI effort listed – The most important element in a proposal is the ideas of the PI. Therefore, PI effort should be included (as a % not hours).

Facilities and Administrative Cost - All proposals must contain F&A costs (see the Grants and Contracts web for current rates), or a copy of agency policy which restricts F&A costs for all grantees, or an F&A cost waiver.

Make sure the budget adds correctly! – Also check for rounding errors.

Use the correct fringe rates for faculty and grads – This information is available from the Grants and Contracts web site.

Don’t show pennies! - The inclusion of pennies implies a degree of precision that doesn’t exist when doing research. Budgets are best guesses of project cost if everything goes according to the original plan.

Put commas in numbers - Numbers with commas are much easier to read. Your proposal should please the reviewer not irritate them.

Use the columnar format for budgets - Numbers should align on the right. They should be easy to follow.

Don’t include budget categories without numbers. – If you aren’t requesting equipment funds, don’t show equipment line items.

Equipment items must cost at least $5,000 – Don’t list items in the equipment category unless they meet the definition.

Start your budget with the most important item – Begin with salaries.

Don’t over commit PI time to the project - Be realistic about the time you can devote to the project. What would happen if you submitted 3 proposals each showing 50% effort and they all got funded?

Don’t measure PI time with hours – There is no such thing as a standard 40-hour work week for faculty. It’s important to use % of effort.

Use agency electronic forms – when available

Visit the following web sites for more information on sponsored project budgeting:

Office of the VP for Research

Grants and Contracts Office

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