

“While you’re up, get me a grant”\*




\*with apologies to David Streiner (Can J Psych 1996 41:137-43) and the Grant's Scotch company

Submitting a grant application to CIHR  
CIHR Grant Writing Workshop  
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# Background

- UW Faculty since 2004
  - School of Optometry: 2004-2007
  - Health Studies & Gerontology: 2007-
- Main research focus: use of health information systems in rehabilitation of older persons - \*
- Current CIHR funding:
  - Two-year Operating Grant
  - Five-year Emerging Team Grant
  - CIHR sub-grant: Research to Action Program in Dementia
  - Co-I:
    - Catalyst Grant
    - Partnerships for Health System Improvement Grant
- CIHR Grants Committee – Health Services Evaluation and Interventions Research – July 2006-June 2009
- CIHR Grants Committee – Strategic Training Modules, May 2007.



\* BTW, A catchy title is sometimes helpful



# Outline

- The Idea
- The Track Record Dilemma
- Building a Team
- Developing the Proposal
- Packaging the Proposal
- The Budget

# The Idea



- Find a research idea you REALLY, REALLY like
- Link to established research priorities, e.g.:
  - Listening for Direction consultations
  - Strategic priorities of CIHR Institutes
  - Consensus workshops on research priorities
- Talk to the folks at CIHR
- “The Hook”:
  - Why does this need doing? What problem does it solve?
  - What are the potential implications and impacts of the research?
  - The “Wow Factor”?
  - Don’t oversell it



## The Track Record Dilemma

“You can’t get a grant  
without a track record, and  
you can’t get a track record  
without a grant.”

# The Track Record Dilemma\*

- Collaborate:
  - Seek out senior mentors as collaborators, co-authors, and advisors
  - Partner with/involve an experienced person
  - Participate in research networks
  - Co-PIs: one newer, one more senior

\* This section draws on a 2008 workshop sponsored by the Ontario Rehabilitation Research Advisory Network

# The Track Record Dilemma

- Develop skills:
  - Grant writing workshops
  - Review successful proposals
  - Get feedback from experienced people, who can be critical but also supportive



# The Track Record Dilemma

- Build a record:
  - Get preliminary/pilot data
  - Go for smaller, short-term grant (e.g., research foundations, smaller grant agencies)
    - get data and publish the results
  - Publish your thesis research
  - Look at grant writing as an experience

# The Track Record Dilemma

- Be realistic:
  - Don't take on too much or try to do it all at once
  - Match size of project and methods to your experience
  - Don't ask for too much money in first go-round

# The Track Record Dilemma

- Know your stuff:
  - Be able to sell your idea in an elevator conversation
  - Know the methods and be able to explain them
  - Understand and explain the benefits of the project

# Building a Team



- Select team members carefully
  - Bring the necessary expertise (e.g., biostatistician, qualitative researcher, health economist)
    - But make sure this expertise is apparent in the grant, or this can work against you (“They should know better!”)
  - Newer researchers and trainees are viewed positively
  - Show evidence of collaboration
  - Are these people you would enjoy having a beer with?
  - If you have the funds, hire a smart person to be a project coordinator



## Building a Team

- Engage stakeholders and decision-makers
  - Policy-makers, clinicians, consumers
  - If possible, have their involvement in developing the proposal
  - Could be part of team as co-investigators, collaborators or members of an advisory “Knowledge Exchange Board”
  - This will strengthen your credibility and could be a key part of your KT strategy

# Developing the Proposal



- Get input from your investigators and collaborators:
  - Teleconferences if necessary, but they're painful and you don't want to rely on them
  - Book a time (long before the grant deadline) for a major face-to-face meeting to plan the grant (e.g., 1 to 1-1/2 days, if possible)
  - Make it fun and spend some time getting to know each other (sadly, UW does not allow expenses for alcohol)
  - If possible, have a meeting facilitator who is not you
  - Don't expect to get email feedback, but a catchy subject line may get attention, e.g., "It's time to look at the fatal flaws"

# Developing the Proposal

- Have a conceptual or theoretical framework
- Describe your hypotheses (but don't state as the null)
- Justify your sample size (if you can't, maybe you should be looking for pilot data)
- Describe the psychometric properties of your instruments (pilot data?)
- Describe the roles and contributions of team members
- Pay attention to the KT section
- And the most important thing.....

# Developing the Proposal

- **Be Consistent!**
  - Connections between objectives, study methods and data analyses should be clear
  - If you say why, say what (what are you going to do to achieve each objective)
  - If you say what, say how (how will this be done and how will the data be analyzed)
  - Reviewers who may know nothing about your content area can still tell if you haven't described how you'll do what you said you'd do



# Packaging the Proposal



- Consider the reviewers
- Avoid acronyms and jargon
- Play by the rules (stick to the page limits, but use the page limits)
- Edit like crazy (having too many pages and needing to cut down is a good position to be in)
- If you're still writing the proposal the day it's due, you're in trouble

# Packaging the Proposal



- Appendices are OK, but should be minimal:
  - A workplan/timeline is a good idea
  - Questionnaires if you have them
  - Reviewers aren't required to read these
  - Putting stuff in appendices that should be in the main part of the proposal is annoying to reviewers

# Packaging the Proposal

- Put in a “Summary of Progress” even if no previous grant (How did you get to this point? What background or pilot work have you done? Literature reviews?)
- If a resubmission, address reviewers’ comments carefully
  - don’t be defensive, even if you think the comments are stupid
  - be forewarned, the next batch of reviewers may come up with a whole new set of issues, so also look for other ways to improve the grant

# Packaging the Proposal

- If you can, get some help with getting all the signatures you'll need

# The Budget



- Follow CIHR guidelines, e.g., for student stipends
- Don't ask for overhead or administrative expenses
- Don't ask for anything that LOOKS like overhead or administrative expenses
- The more justification, the less chance your budget will be cut
- Your budget is likely to be cut anyway

# The Budget

- Don't leave this too late
  - Preparing the budget may expose flaws in your plan or show you where additional details are required (e.g., Who will do the focus group interviews? How long will they take? How will people get there?)
- The budget is a way to demonstrate you know what you're doing
  - If you know how to budget a project, you probably know how to do the project

# The Budget

- The proposal has strict page limits; the budget justification does not – take advantage of this

# The Budget

- Miscellaneous useful pieces of information
  - They'll allow a tape recorder, even if they won't allow equipment
  - Conference travel: \$3,000/year is OK
  - You can budget for open-access publication costs: \$2,000/year is OK
  - A trainee can be a co-investigator and still get paid from the grant
  - For last round, all budgets were cut about 11%



## Other resources

- Agarwal R, Chertow GM, & Mehta RL. Strategies for successful patient oriented research: Why did I (not) get funded? *Clin J Am Soc Nephrol* 2006; 1: 340-343.
- Inouye SL, & Fiellin DA. An evidence-based guide to writing grant proposals for clinical research. *Ann Intern Med* 2005; 142:274-282.
- Streiner DL. “While you’re up, get me a grant”: A guide to grant writing. *Can J Psych* 1996; 41:137-43.