

Budget Basics 4 March 2010

Building a Team

1. Start building a team well before you start writing the grant.
2. Focus initially on areas of common interest and shared ideas, NOT what the other person can do for you.
3. Consider including persons you have worked with before, but, if you are a junior investigator, be aware of issues of independence.
4. Consider including colleagues at other institutions, if you have a prior working relationship and if they have appropriate expertise.
5. Only include persons who have the time and will commit it. Adding someone who is well known in your field but already overloaded is not a good idea unless you can demonstrate an ongoing working relationship.

Building a Budget

1. Ask yourself first: Am I building a budget where the sponsor has a published upper limit, a range in which most funded grants have fallen, or no apparent upper limit?
2. Are there restrictions on certain categories of expenses? Examples:
 - (a) a training or career development grant may offer salary money and a small amount, not to exceed \$xxx, for supplies;
 - (b) a Federal government research grant will not allow secretaries' salaries to be paid
 - (c) a Federal research grant may

forbid foreign travel, or require special permission ahead of time.

3. Always ask for what you really need to do the work. Do not pad your budget or try to do the work on a shoestring.
4. Note that research grants often devote 60-70% of the total direct costs to personnel, the other 30-40% for everything else. Establish your team first (who? what % effort? at what salary? what fringe benefit rates apply?), as this is your most expensive item.
5. No matter how little detail the sponsor wants, do a detailed budget and budget justification for your own purposes. Add up all the expenses for one study or experiment, determine how many studies you can do in a month, and multiply through. If you don't have a head for these details, find someone who does.
6. Review budgets and budget justifications for successfully competed proposals like the one you are writing, preferably those submitted by your more detail-oriented, compulsive colleagues.
7. Remember that how you plan and justify your budget says a great deal about how you plan and carry out your work. A sloppy budget with rounded numbers for everything and skeleton justifications for everything except personnel suggests you may work carelessly.