

National Network of
Libraries of Medicine

Greater Midwest Region



SOURCES

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An Insider's View of the NLM Grant Process

Ruth Holst, Director
Columbia Hospital Medical Library

Are you thinking about applying for an NLM grant? Do you know where you can get help to cut through the bureaucracy? Do you ever wonder what really goes on at those Biomedical Library Review Committee (BLRC) meetings? Do you even know what the BLRC is? Well, here are the answers to some of your questions. I am currently in the fourth year of a four year term on the BLRC and have been asked to

provide an "insider's view" of the workings of the NLM grant funding process. My answers, therefore, will be somewhat personalized. To get more objective and authoritative answers to your questions, I recommend the references at the end of this article.

What is the BLRC?

The Biomedical Library Review Committee (BLRC) is one of more than 100 study sections within the National Institutes of Health (NIH). "Study section" or "study panel" are

the phrases we insiders use for these groups. However, there are lots of different names depending on which agency of the NIH is doing the review. Each study section has at least 12 members comprised of experts from the section's field. The BLRC has 21 members representing the areas of librarianship, education, medical informatics, and biotechnology. Approximately one-third of BLRC members are librarians and generally only one is a hospital librarian. Committee members serve for four years.

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Proposal Writing: A Skill We All Should Learn

Jean Sayre
GMR Associate Director

During the past several years I've heard several reasons why people don't write grant proposals: not enough time to write a proposal, too much work, the forms are too intimidating, not enough time to do a special project. I'd like to send along some words of encouragement for people who are interested, but might find the task a little daunting.

Why should I consider writing a proposal?

In most cases grant funding exists

for special projects that ordinarily would not be funded by your institution. Consider projects that fulfill a need and will enhance the visibility of your institution and your library. If your project fits into the mission of your institution (such as outreach to a service area) even better! Obtaining outside funding, even a small amount, enhances your standing within your institution, and lets your supervisors recognize you as a proactive and progressive employee. Designing a project and following it through to its successful conclusion helps forge partnerships with people you may not have worked with be-

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Tech Notes



JavaScript??? Cookies???

*Adapted from "Cyberspace," Sea-Currents, v17n4 July/August 1999
www.nlm.nih.gov/sea/publications/seacurrents/99/99n4.html#9*

Bryan Vogh

Internet Coordinator

NN/LM Southeast Atlantic Region

The information in this article will allow you to test your browser and see if it meets the minimum requirements for Next Generation DOCLINE. If you haven't used the test site at (www.nlm.nih.gov/docline/test/), please do so. Next Generation DOCLINE requires Netscape Communicator 4.5, Netscape Navigator 4.07, or Internet Explorer 5.0. JavaScript and cookies must be enabled in your web browser.

JavaScript

JavaScript is a web browser script language. JavaScript is not the same as Java, which is a programming language. As a web browser scripting language, JavaScript can be used to control the web browser. This allows realtime updates and the use of context specific popup menus. For example you could pull down the menu for receipts and update with the "fill" date. In the rest of the display this information will be updated based on the date selected from the pulldown menu. Another reason NLM plans to use JavaScript is to allow printing of one receipt per page.

Netscape: In Netscape select "Edit" — "Preferences." In the left of the window that opens the word "Advanced" will have a + (plus) next

to it. Click on the word "Advanced" (not on the plus). From the list of choices that appear in the right pane, JavaScript information will appear in the top half of the window. "Enable JavaScript" should be checked.

Internet Explorer: Where is JavaScript? Microsoft uses the name "Active Scripting" instead. In Internet Explorer select "Tools" — "Internet Options" and choose the "Security" tab. Make sure that the "Internet" zone is selected. Click on "Custom Level" and scroll down the list to "Scripting" (ignore all those Java choices, and remember, Java isn't the same as JavaScript). "Active Scripting" should be enabled.

Cookies

Cookies are small files that are saved on your computer and can be read by web servers to track information about users. Most cookie files are site-specific (i.e. the site that created the cookie is the only one that can access it). Next Generation DOCLINE cookies will be site-specific.

Netscape: By default, Netscape stores cookies in a file named "cookies.txt" that can be found using the Windows "Find Files or Folders" tool. This file can be opened in a word processor, but hand editing is not recommended. In Netscape select "Edit" — "Preferences." In the left of the window that opens the word "Advanced" will have a + (plus) next to it. Click on the word "Advanced" (not on the plus). From the list of choices that appear in the right pane, cookie information will appear in the

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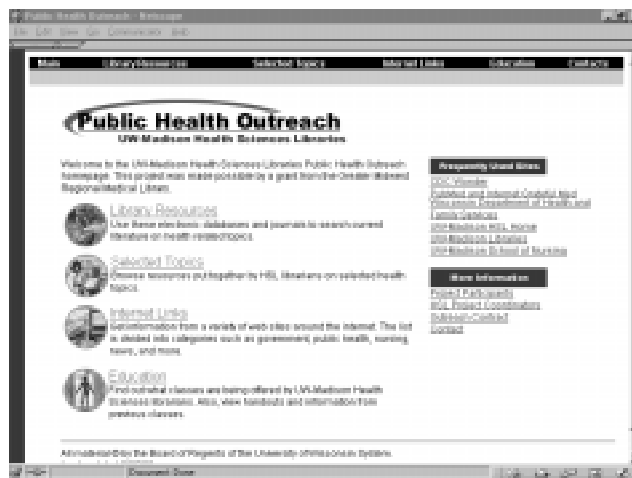
Public Health Information Initiative: Web Based Access to Information Resources

Tammy Mays
Outreach Librarian
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Introduction: The Health Sciences (HS) Libraries at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW), in collaboration with the UW School of Nursing, received a NLM subcontract (N01-LM-6-3523) to provide public health nurses technical, teaching, reference service, and document delivery support (funded through the NN/LM Greater Midwest Region). HS librarians developed a test region to examine information needs of public health nurses in a 17 county area in southern Wisconsin. The project was carried out with assistance from public health nurses at 17 rural county public health departments. The project included: pre-and post-assessment questionnaires; establishment of minimum computer standards and Internet readiness; arrangements with Internet service providers; on-site visits to check connections and demonstrate the Internet, Internet Grateful Med, PubMed, Loansome Doc, OVID MEDLINE, and CINAHL; development and maintenance of a web site (www.medsch.wisc.edu/chslib/pubhea/); regional workshops for hands-on training ("Internet: Beyond the Basics: A Hands-on Internet Workshop for Health Care Professionals"); and evaluations.

Public Health Information Initiative (PHII) Web Page

The PHII web page (www.medsch.wisc.edu/chslib/pubhea/) was developed for this project. This web page provided links to specific health-related databases that allow public health nurses convenient access to



The Public Health Information Initiative web page can be seen at: www.medsch.wisc.edu/chslib/pubhea.

information. This web page also assisted public health nurses in decision-making skills, communication with colleagues throughout the state and nationwide, and as a continuing education tool. As the contact person for the PHII web page, the project team members critically evaluate web sites before adding them to the web page.

Site Visits

Once public health departments were connected to the Internet site visits were arranged. An information technical consultant and I would travel to each office to demonstrate the use of the PHII web page developed for this project (www.medsch.wisc.edu/chslib/pubhea/). The web page offers The National Library of Medicine databases, PubMed, IGM, MEDLINEplus, document delivery via Loansome DOC, and additional health resources including the Virtual Hospital and HealthFinder.

Site visits were initially scheduled for ninety minutes per session. Although the sessions frequently exceeded the allotted time, once the

nurses were connected to the Internet they were eager to learn and didn't seem to mind spending extra time to learn advanced searching features or find additional clinical web sites.

Hands-on Workshop

The project team members provided the public health nurses a two-and-a-half-hour hands-on workshop.

This workshop was designed to develop the nurses' search skills on the Internet and enhance their knowledge about web-based resources assisting public health nurses in practice. The workshops provided opportunities for hands-on practice and included instructor demonstrations and course handouts. The resources introduced included Wisconsin-specific, as well as national sites, which provided nurse education or assistance in decision making. Special features of the course included information related to product recalls, safety alerts, and FDA and CDC sites of interest. This course was offered in four different locations in southern Wisconsin during the month of February. The workshop web page is available at www.medsch.wisc.edu/chslib/pubhea/workshop.htm

Development and Evaluation of Workshops

Each participant completed a pre-and post-assessment questionnaire. Analysis of the pre-assessment questionnaires revealed that the nurses

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GRANT, continued from front page

What types of grants are funded by the NLM?

For a description of each type of grant, I recommend reading the Fact Sheet on Extramural Programs. ⁽¹⁾ The latest update is always available on the NLM Web site. There are fact sheets and/or program announcements with more detail for each category of grant as well.

When does the BLRC meet?

The BLRC meets three times a year in March, June, and November at the National Library of Medicine to review grant applications. These dates correlate to the deadlines for applications received by October 1 (March meeting), February 1 (June meeting), and June 1 (November meeting), respectively.

How does the BLRC peer review process work?

Each grant application is assigned to two primary reviewers and one secondary reviewer, all of whom have expertise in the subject content of the application. The primary

reviewers write extensive (several pages) reviews of the proposal and present the proposal to the rest of the committee. The third reviewer prepares an abbreviated written review and contributes to the discussion. Sometimes an outside expert is asked to contribute a review when there is no one on the committee who has the expertise to review a particular aspect of the proposal. Most NIH applications undergo a secondary review by an advisory council composed of eminent individuals from the medical, health sciences, and lay commu-

nities. The NLM's advisory council is the Board of Regents.

Does everyone on the BLRC read and review all types of grant applications?

No. The Information Access grant applications are reviewed only by the Medical Library Resource Subcommittee, which includes the 8 members who work in health science libraries or are library educators. Biotechnology applications are generally assigned to the committee members who are experts in that field. The other applications are all reviewed by members selected from the whole committee. The librarian members of the BLRC most often get assigned to Information Systems grants, IAIMS grants, and Internet Connection grants. But depending on the complement of proposals received by a given deadline, librarian members fre-

The range of possible scores for an individual grant application goes from 100 to 500, with 100 being the best score.

quently are also assigned to research grants, fellowship grants, and publication grants. The research proposals are often the most difficult because of the highly technical and in-depth subject-specific content. An understanding of the research process is an absolute necessity for reviewing these applications.

How does the scoring system relate to the likelihood of funding?

The scoring system for NIH grants is unique. That's a polite way of say-

ing it's difficult to understand. The range of possible scores for an individual grant application goes from 100 to 500, with 100 being the best score. Thus, a lower score is a better score. Because the competition for grants is very intense, an application with a score over 200 usually will not be awarded. In fact, the "payline" is closer to the 160 mark. Proposals with scores at 160 or below are said to be "fundable." Depending on the number and quality of the grant applications received in a given year and the amount of funding available, some proposals in the 160-200 range do get funded, but many do not. Grant proposals that are judged by the primary reviewers to be in the less desirable half of the scoring range, 300-500, are usually not scored and are not discussed at the BLRC meeting. It is more important for the committee members to spend their short time together (one and a half days per meeting) discussing the proposals that are more likely to be fundable. Applications in the 300-500 range are given a "no score." Written summaries from the reviewers are still sent to the applicants to let them know the reasons for the "no score."

What are my chances of getting funded?

There are separate funding allocations for each type of grant. This means that Information Access grant applications will never have to compete with another type of grant for funding. Likewise, the payline for Access grants may be higher than for other types of grants during those years in which fewer Access grant applications are submitted. However, the overall NLM funding rate for most categories of grants is 25%. So, in general, you have a one in four chance of getting funded.

How long does the grant application process take?

The whole process takes nine to twelve months from the time of submission (application deadline) to the time of funding (notification date). Much discussion takes place within NIH about ways to streamline the process. Certainly, electronic transmission of applications and notifications cuts down the process time. The peer review and staff review processes are key to the success of the grants program, and these processes require time because they involve busy individuals.

What should I do if my proposal doesn't get funded?

Always consider revising the proposal and resubmitting it. For example, if you receive a score in the low 200s, this generally means that the committee found merit in your proposal but was not satisfied with some aspect of it. Read the reviewer's comments carefully and revise the content of the application to address the deficiencies identified in the review. Remember, three out of four grants do not get funded. So, you are not alone. Many proposals are funded on the second try. Never resubmit the proposal without revision, however. You are likely to get a less favorable score than the first time if you do not make a significant effort to address the reviewer's comments. If your proposal receives a "no score," don't panic. This is not a good position to be in, but it will not prove fatal. You just need to step back and rethink

your ideas. I would also recommend contacting the Extramural Program staff at NLM or the staff at your regional NN/LM office. They are ready and willing to help you in any way they can. They may also be able to recommend a consultant or mentor for you who can take an objective look at your proposal. This is not like a homework assignment in school. You are not only allowed to get help, you are encouraged to get help. There are also a number of resources to assist you with writing your proposal. See references at the end of this article. ^(2,3)

Being asked to serve on the BLRC is a great honor. But, it is not an easy assignment.

What's it like, personally, to be on the BLRC?

Being asked to serve on the BLRC is a great honor. But, it is not an easy assignment. On the plus side, all your travel expenses are paid and you even receive a modest fee for your work. Meeting and working with the other members of the committee is awesome (literally). The best thinkers, writers, and researchers in the fields of health science librarianship and medical informatics are right there on the panel with you. Librarians can learn a tremendous amount about medical informatics during their tenure on the committee. Working with the staff at NLM is also a great experience. On the other hand, there is a lot of hard work involved with read-

ing all the proposals and with writing critiques that are meaningful and succinct. Members generally are assigned to review five to ten proposals and read another 25 or more for each meeting. There are always a few proposals that engender considerable discussion and even disagreement. But it is particularly challenging to write a review when you know the other reviewers are much more knowledgeable than you on a particular topic. A radiologist on the committee told me that he found the BLRC to be one of the most humbling experiences of his career.

Is it worth the hard work to be on the BLRC?

You bet!

1. Fact Sheet: Extramural Programs (www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/extrapro)
2. Bowden VM. National Library of Medicine resource grants: application and review. *Bull Med Libr Assoc* 1992 Apr; 80(2):157-68. Updated version at: (www.nlm.nih.gov/ep/grapprev.html)
3. Zink S, Illes J, Vannier WM. NLM's extramural programs: frequently asked questions (www.nlm.nih.gov/ep/faq1.html)

TECH NOTES, continued from page 2

top half of the window. Either "Enable all cookies" or "Accept only cookies that get sent back to the originating server" must be check marked.

Internet Explorer: Each cookie is saved as a separate file in Internet Explorer. They are usually stored in

a folder named "Cookies" in the Windows system directory. In Internet Explorer select "Tools" — "Internet Options" and choose the "Security" tab. Make sure that the "Internet" zone is selected. Click on "Custom Level" and scroll down the list to

"Cookies." Either "Allow cookies" or "Allow per-session cookies" should be enabled.

So check your browser and get ready for the New DOCLINE, coming this fall.

INITIATIVE, continued from page 3

needed more guidance when searching on the Internet. With this in mind the project team members designed a hands-on workshop for the public health nurses.

Workshop Objectives

- Describe general types of clinical information available on the Internet

- Describe general types of health-related consumer/patient education resources available on the Internet

- Identify Internet resources for general and specific health care information, using public health databases

- Identify Internet sites that supply continuing education, both credit and noncredit courses

- Describe, and subscribe to, mailing lists of your choice

- Search the Internet for news services

- Search the Internet for product recalls

- Order a document using Loansome Doc in PubMed

After analyzing the post-assessment questionnaires, we discovered that the workshop had improved the nurses' searching capabilities as well as increased their comfort level. One nurse stated that she no longer feared destroying her computer! The most gratifying comment was received at our last workshop when a nurse wrote, "This class opened my vision of what is attainable and opened the door for me to try and explore."

Poster Session

After analyzing the pre and post assessments the project team mem-

bers and I compiled and interpreted the statistics in a poster entitled "Public Health Information Initiative: Web-Based Access to Information Resources." This poster can be viewed on the PHII web page at www.medsch.wisc.edu/chslib/pubhea/images/poster.pdf. The project team presented this project in a poster session at the May 1999 Medical Library Association National Meeting (Chicago, IL) and will be presenting it at the University of Iowa Libraries'/ University of Iowa Center for Teaching's symposium, "Powerful Learning, Powerful Partnerships" (November 1999 in Iowa City, IA).

PROPOSAL, continued from page 1

fore and strengthens your professional network. Proposal writing hones your skills and helps your professional development, which ultimately gives you a better resume!

I've never written a proposal before. How do I begin?

Consider projects funded through the Greater Midwest Region. You can find these opportunities on the web site at www.nnlm.nlm.nih.gov/gmr/funding/current.html. The proposal requirements are not as difficult as some, and the GMR staff will help you with your proposal! As you are writing, you can have GMR staff review the proposal and make suggestions. Take advantage of any available expertise within your institution. If you don't have a grants officer, ask other successful proposal writers in your institution if they can help with your proposal. Many

people who have been successful in obtaining funding often are willing to share their expertise. Chances are, you already know somebody in your area who has been funded, so ask them to review your work. If you are looking for a written guide, the GMR has examples of its successful proposals as well as NLM grant proposals. Contact the GMR if you would like an example mailed to you. After you have successfully completed one proposal and project, you will have the confidence to try another more complex proposal.

Do you have any tips?

Check out the tips for writing proposals from veteran grant writer Jocelyn Rankin in this issue. In addition to Jocelyn's tips, remember that the granting agency also has a purpose or agenda for funding proposals. Make sure your project fits the

agency's agenda as well as your own. I recommend that you get feedback on your idea from the granting agency before you start writing. This may help avoid problems later on and will save you time and energy. Nothing is more disappointing than to invest work in writing a proposal, only to find out later that it isn't what the agency was looking for in a proposal.

Just do it!

It's possible you may not be successful your first time, but you will learn from the experience. Patience and perseverance are the virtues of a successful proposal writer.

This issue of *3 Sources* will assist you in finding funding availability, proposal writing assistance and registration for grant notification services.

Ten Tips From a Grant Reviewer

Jocelyn Rankin, Director, Medical Library, Mercer University

1. Start Small
2. Choose Fundable Project
3. Set Clear Objectives
4. Describe Settings
5. Do Needs Assessment First
6. Make Methods Logical
7. Tie Evaluation to Objectives
8. Justify Budget
9. Polish Writing Style
10. Understand Critique

Technical Bulletin (May/June)

The list below summarizes the articles published by the National Library of Medicine in the *Technical Bulletin* (www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/techbull/tb.html). To request print copies of individual articles, please contact the GMR office.

Technical Notes (e1)

Direct Access to ELHILL and TOXNETCommand/Menu Systems Ceases on September 30,1999

Request for Input on NLM Long Range Plan Hospital and Health Administration Index

TRI97 to Join TOXNET in Early July 1999; TRI87-94& TRIFACTS to be Retired from NLM

Converting SDI searches to PubMed (e2)

HealthSTAR Unique Journal Citations Migrate to PubMed (e3)

Internet Grateful Med Update (e4)

MLA 1999 (e5)

BIOETHICSLINE Regenerated and New Bioethics Thesaurus Published (e6)

NLM Funding Cycles

New Information Access, Information Systems, Internet Connections, IAIMS, Publications, Research Grants, Conferences, and FIRST Awards

Cycle I

Application Receipt Date: February 1

Merit Review: June-July

Board of Regents Review: September-October

Earliest Project Start Date: December

Cycle II

Application Receipt Date: June 1

Merit Review: October-November

Board of Regents Review: January-February

Earliest Project Start Date: April

Cycle III

Application Receipt Date: October 1

Merit Review: February-March

Board of Regents Review: May-June

Earliest Project Start Date: July

Competing Continuation, Supplemental, and Revised Grants

Cycle I

Application Receipt Date: March 1

Merit Review: June-July

Board of Regents Review: September-October

Earliest Project Start Date: December

Cycle II

Application Receipt Date: July 1

Merit Review: October-November

Board of Regents Review: January-February

Earliest Project Start Date: April

Cycle III

Application Receipt Date: November 1

Merit Review: February-March

Board of Regents Review: May-June

Earliest Project Start Date: July

Important Dates

National Online Training Center Class Dates

Making the Transition: Converting to PubMed and Internet Grateful Med to Search

Chicago, IL December 15, 1999

Introduction to Web-Based Searching for the Librarian and Information Specialist

Chicago, IL December 13-14, 1999

For additional 1999 NOTC classes, class descriptions, and online registration, check: www.nlm.nih.gov/mar/online

Midwest Chapter/MLA Annual Meeting 1999

(www.lib.msu.edu/mhsla/conf99)

October 6-9, 1999

Grand Rapids, MI

Amway Grand Plaza

South Dakota Library Association

(www.sdl.n.net/lib/sdla/sdlahome.htm)

1999 Annual Conference

October 6-9, 1999

Watertown, South Dakota

Contact: Sandy Roe

roes@columbia.dsu.edu

Ohio Health Sciences Library Association Fall Meeting

October 12, 1999

Akron, OH

Akron General Health

& Wellness Center

4125 Medina Road

Contact: Patty Augustine

paugust@neoucom.edu

330-740-3476

Health Science Librarians of Illinois Annual Meeting

(www.siumed.edu/lib/hslil/)

November 4-5, 1999

Quincy, IL

Contact: Arlis Dittmer

(217) 228-5520 x6971

dittmer@culver.edu

Toni Tucker

(309) 827-4321 x3642

ttucker@darkstar.rsa.lib.il.us

Kentucky Library Association Annual Conference

October 13-15, 1999

Louisville, KY

Galt House East

Contact: Carolyn Tassie

606-233-8225

ctassie@transy.edu

Iowa Library Association Annual Conference

October 13-15, 1999

Dubuque, IA

ILA Health Sciences

Roundtable Meeting

October 14, 1999

5:15-6:00

Contact: Paul Elliot Dahl

facstaff@sbtek.net

Wisconsin Library Association Annual Conference

October 19-22

La Crosse, WI

Radisson Hotel La Crosse

Contact: Ethel Himmel

Chair, Conference Planning Committee

himmel@execpc.com

608-868-1133

To suggest items for the calendar, please e-mail (gmr@uic.edu) or call 800-338-7657.

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