



# ASSOCIATION FOR TROPICAL BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

## WEBINAR Session 1: Writing a Successful Grant Proposal

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Co-Chair  
ATBC Awards Committee

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# ATBC Grants and Awards

Grants and awards are intended to recognize scientists and conservation practitioners worldwide, at different career stages:

- ATBC Honorary Fellows
- Student and Early Career Awards
  - Luis F. Bacardi Award for Advances in Tropical Conservation
  - Alwyn Gentry Presentation Awards
  - Asia-Pacific Chapter Meetings Prizes
  - New Phytologist Poster Prize in Plant Biology
  - **NEW in 2020: ATBC Seed Research Grant** (can apply within criteria)
- Outstanding Research Awards
  - Navjot Sodhi Conservation Research Award (can self-nominate)
  - Awarded by Biotropica Editorial Board: Julie S. Denslow Prize - researcher & Peter Ashton Prize – student

# ATBC Seed Grants (10 chosen)



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## 2020 ATBC SEED RESEARCH GRANT: CALL FOR PROPOSALS

OPPORTUNITIES/JOBS/INTERNSHIPS

## 2020 ATBC SEED RESEARCH GRANT: CALL FOR PROPOSALS

👤 ATBC 🕒 February 9, 2020



The ATBC Seed Research Grant supports research addressing tropical biology and conservation at Master's and early Doctoral levels. Five grants of up to \$1,000 each will be awarded in 2020. The grant funds may be used for international/domestic travel, lodging, meals, and other research-related expenses. Funds cannot be used to purchase permanent equipment (e.g., computers, cameras, etc.), but

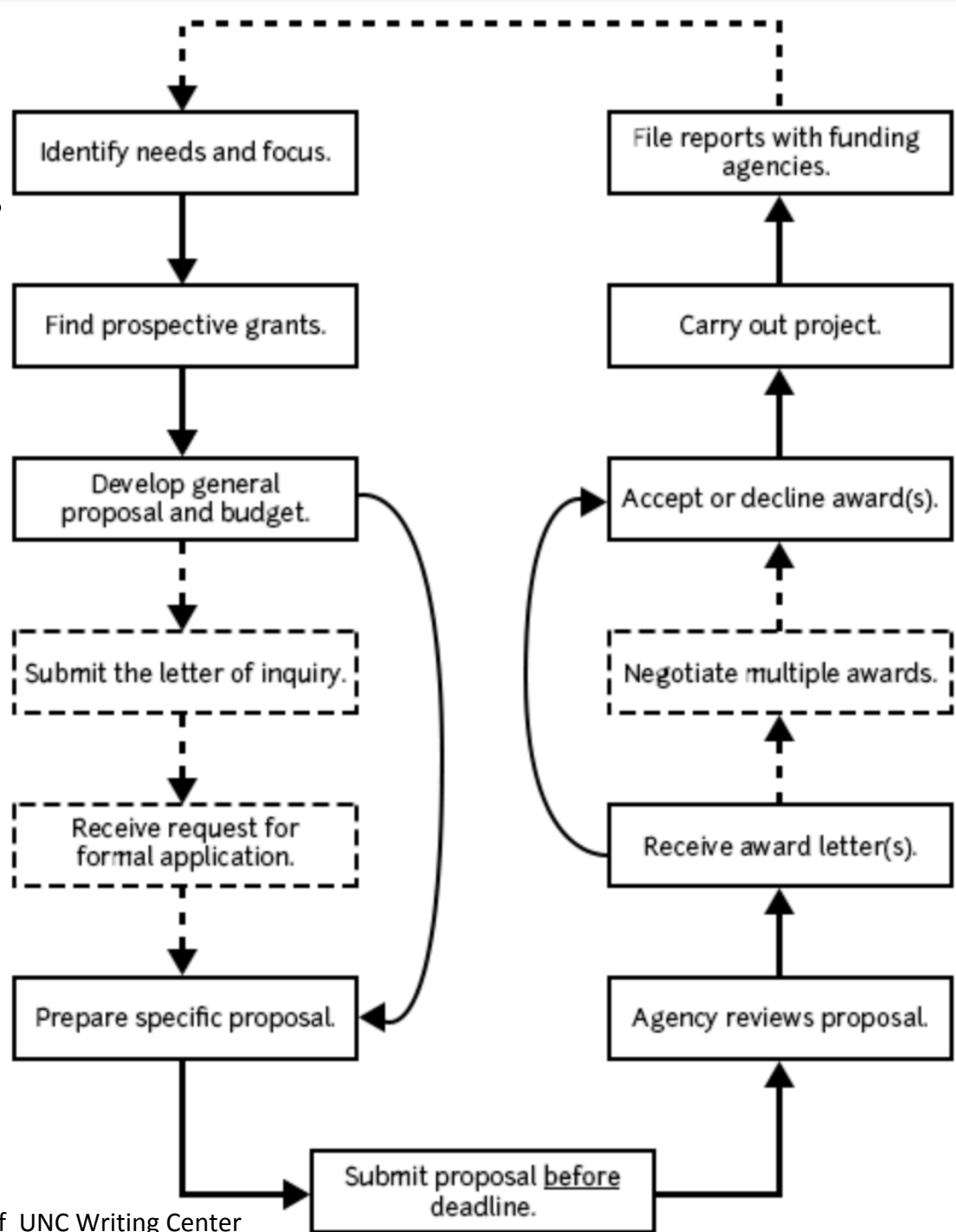
<https://tropicalbiology.org/blog/2020/02/09/2020-atbc-seed-research-grant/>

# ATBC Seed Research Grant Requirements

- Supports research addressing tropical biology and conservation for **Master's and early Doctoral students** (within first 2 years)
- Allowable expenses: international/domestic travel, lodging, meals, other research-related expenses (consumable supplies - **OK, permanent equipment – not OK**)
- Applicants must be an **ATBC member** at the time of application
- Application: Application form, 3-page research proposal, research timeline, literature cited, budget & budget justification, terms & conditions document, **one letter of support**

# The Grant-Writing Process

- Match your needs and interests to the right funder(s)
  - **ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?**
- Prepare budget(s) early on in the process
- Tailor your proposal to a feasible **WORKPLAN** and **BUDGET**
  - These may help guide your descriptions considerably
- Consider your need to do a **REPORT** (with **photos/video?**) while doing the project



# Some General Tips

- Apply **early** and often.
- Don't forget to include a cover letter with your application.
- **Answer all questions.** (Pre-empt all unstated questions.)
- If rejected, **revise your proposal and apply again.**
- **Give them what they want.** Follow the application guidelines exactly.
- Be explicit and **specific**
- Be **realistic** in designing the project, but share enthusiasm.
  
- Make explicit the **connections** between your research questions and objectives, your objectives and methods, your methods and results, and your results and dissemination plan.
  
- **Follow the application guidelines exactly.** (This is on this slide **twice** because it is very, very important!!)

# Focus

Early on, think about the focus of your research/project.

Answering the following questions may help you narrow down while writing:

- What are the **very specific research questions** that you're trying to answer?
- What **relevance** do your research questions have? (Basic science/theory/applications/conservation?)
- Do you plan on using **quantitative methods**? Qualitative/descriptive methods? Both? Investigate what are best methods and alternatives.
- Will you be undertaking **experimental research**? Observational research? Lab research? Interviews?

# Audience

- The majority of grant programs recruit academic reviewers **with knowledge** of the disciplines and/or program areas of the grant. Thus, when writing your grant proposals, **assume that you are addressing a colleague who is knowledgeable in the general area**, but who does not necessarily know the details about your research questions.
- Remember that **most readers are lazy** and will not respond well to a poorly organized, poorly written, or confusing proposal. Be sure to give readers what they want. Follow all the guidelines for the particular grant you are applying for.
  - This may require you to **reframe your project** in a different light or language. “**Reframing your project** to fit a specific grant’s requirements is a legitimate and necessary part of the process unless it will fundamentally change your project’s goals or outcomes.” (UNC Writing Center)
- Final decisions about which proposals are funded often come down to whether the proposal convinces the reviewer that the research project is well planned and feasible and whether the investigators are well qualified to execute it.
- Throughout the proposal, be as explicit as possible. **Predict the questions that the reviewer may have and answer them.**



# Think of your reviewers

**Przeworski and Salomon (1995) note that reviewers read with three questions in mind:**

- What are we **going to learn** as a result of the proposed project that we do not know now? (goals, aims, and outcomes)
- **Why** is it worth knowing? (significance)
- **How will we know** that the conclusions are valid? (criteria for success)

ALSO REMEMBER – Reviewers are people

- DO NOT insult your reviewers ever.....
  - Which **means assume knowledge**.....

But ALSO **don't waste their time** with incomprehensible methods, excessive verbiage

**A possible trap: Bias in Reviewers ----- this does exist (can lead to lopsided reviews for and against)**

- you won't know if reviewers **favor one side** of a theoretical argument over another
  - So, present both sides fairly, don't express your own bias other than hypotheses
- 
- **Clear and concise and complete** makes a reviewer happy

# Theory

- Be sure to clarify your project's **theoretical underpinning and orientation**.
  - I believe this was a key component of the most **successful student proposals** in the Seed Grant Competition
- Even if you think your project isn't about theory, it is based in **comparable previous work, historical thinking and gaps** in understanding.
- Explain those and **how your work fits in** as best as you can.

# Style

- The **way you write** will tell the reviewers a lot about you!!! (This is a good thing, don't hide who you are).
- From reading your proposal, the reviewers will form an idea of who you are as a **scholar, a researcher, and a person**.
- 
- If there is a place to highlight where you are from, what is unique about you, and/or what draws you to the subject, **embrace the chance to share**. If nowhere else, make your CV speak to this as much as you can.
- Reviewers will decide whether you are especially **creative, logical, analytical**, up-to-date in the relevant literature of the field, and, most importantly, capable of executing the proposed project.
- Allow your **discipline and its conventions** to determine the general style of your writing, but somehow **allow your own voice and personality to come through. This makes an impression that will stick with your reviewers.**
- **Be memorable.**

# Proposal Components

1. Title page
2. **Abstract**
3. **Introduction** (statement of the problem, purpose of research or goals, and significance of research)
4. Literature review
5. **Project narrative** (methods, procedures, objectives, outcomes or deliverables, evaluation, and dissemination)
6. Personnel
7. **Budget**

# Abstract

Or: “Write the Abstract Last and Know it will be Read First and Last and Repeatedly”

The abstract provides readers with their first and possibly the most important impression of your project. **Write it Last** so it can be dagger-sharp and clear.

To remind themselves of your proposal, readers may glance at your abstract when making their final recommendations, and again for a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> look, so it may also serve as their last impression and ongoing vision of your project.

The abstract **should explain the key elements** of your research project in the future tense. Most abstracts state: (1) the general purpose, (2) specific goals, (3) research design, (4) methods, and (5) significance (contribution and rationale).

Be as explicit as possible and pro-active in your abstract. Use statements such as, “The objective of this study is to ...” “**We will....**”

# Introduction

- **Don't be too long-winded but don't leave ANYTHING out.**
  - Say up front what you will do – not after a LONG preamble.
- The introduction should cover the **key elements** of your proposal
  - your research goals or objectives
  - significance of the research
  - expected outcome
- You must provide a **believable background** and rationale for the project.
  - No work is truly 100% original, so don't go overboard stating how novel it is
  - Establish that you know precedents and are filling a gap
- Yet, don't be shy explaining the **need and relevance** of the research. HOW is your project different from previous research on the same topic? Will you be using new methodologies or covering new theoretical territory?
- The research goals or objectives should identify the anticipated outcomes of the research and should match up to the needs identified in the statement of problem.
- List only the principle goal(s) or objective(s) of your research and save sub-objectives for the project narrative.
- If space, why are you prepared to do it yourself? Training? (**Brag a little** if possible)

# Project Narrative

- **Don't Leave them guessing about anything**
- The project narrative provides the meat of your proposal.
  - Specific **hypotheses** to be tested,
  - Methods
  - Procedures
  - Outcomes and deliverables
  - Evaluation
  - Dissemination of the research
- **Pre-empt and then answer** all of the reviewers' questions before they might ask them.
  - Why are your methods the best?
  - If any techniques are very new, spend more time describing them if there is space
  - Personnel numbers, skill sets and functions
- **Clearly and explicitly state the connections between your research objectives, research questions, hypotheses, methodologies, and outcomes.**

# Budget

- Consider setting up an **exhaustive budget** for your project, even if you will only ask for a portion of that.
  - This exercise focuses the mind on what activities are critical,
  - helps you write the Project Narrative, and also
  - may guide your choices about which funders might cover different needs.
- Make sure that all budget items **meet the funding agency's requirements**.
  - Most funders have limits
    - No permanent equipment
    - No overhead
    - No International Travel
- If excluded, but required, explain **what other grant sources** may pay for the item



# Review it Critically

- Ask yourself (and any volunteer readers) to check
  - Did you **make explicit the connections** between your research **objectives** and **methodology**?
  - Have you made your **hypotheses** explicit?
- Have you presented a **compelling** case?
- Does your project seem feasible? Is it **overly ambitious**? \*\*
- Have you stated the means that grantors can use to **evaluate the success** of your project after you've executed it?

# ATBC 2020 Seed Grants Judging

- Was the **Relevant Literature** Cited?
- Was the **Methodology** Used Appropriate?
- Is the **Budget Request** Justified?
- Does the Student Have **Strong Support Letter**?

# Some Resources

- <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/grant-proposals-or-give-me-the-money/>
- <http://www.learnerassociates.net/proposal/>
- [http://www.dfwonline.org/resources-grantwritingtips.asp](http://www.dfwonline.org/resources/grantwritingtips.asp).
- Przeworski, Adam, and Salomon, Frank. 1995. [“Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions.”](https://s3.amazonaws.com/ssrc-cdn2/art-of-writing-proposals-dsd-e-56b50ef814f12.pdf) In <https://s3.amazonaws.com/ssrc-cdn2/art-of-writing-proposals-dsd-e-56b50ef814f12.pdf>