

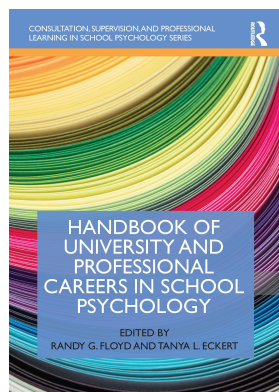
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Finding, Securing, and Managing Grants

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19 Finding, Securing, and Managing Grants

Keith C. Herman, Wendy M. Reinke, Erin A. Chaparro, Elise T. Pas, and Amanda L. Sullivan

When people think about becoming a school psychologist, often the initial attraction to the field is rooted in the service and training roles of the profession and a desire to impact students in positive ways. For many of us, as we pursue doctoral training in school psychology, the value and potential impact of our scholarly role becomes more apparent. We also become increasingly aware of the benefit of having funding to support our scholarship if we are to conduct the highest quality and most rigorous research. Unfortunately, training programs vary widely in how well they prepare future academics to successfully acquire research funding and manage large funded projects. Much of what we hear from our colleagues, even the most successful grant-getters, is that most of their training in grant writing and management has been on the job trial-and-error learning. In this chapter, we attempt to fill this void and present an easily accessible framework for getting and implementing research, service, and training grants to support school psychology scholarship.

Rationale for School Psychologist Involvement in Grant Writing and Management

We can think of three reasons for school psychologist involvement in grant writing. First, as noted previously, grants help support the goals of school psychology training, practice, and scholarship. Training grants allow us to recruit and train top graduate students in innovative school psychology research and practice. Practice or service grants provide funding to support small- and large-scale implementation of practices to support youth in schools at a scale that would be impossible without such support. Research grants provide support to conduct high-quality, impactful scholarship. Of course, it is possible to conduct solid and reputable research without funding. However, certain types of studies (e.g., large-scale group randomized trials) are simply not feasible without money to support data collection, participant incentives, and researcher time to conduct the study. When such studies are focused on intervention effects, such funding also provides opportunities for schools, educational professionals, and students to access interventions that they may not otherwise have the capacity or resources to implement.

Aside from the rationale that large-scale projects require funding, prior research supports the suggestion that higher-quality studies are associated with funded projects. For instance, in one study, we found that grant funding was associated with longitudinal and experimental designs (Martens et al., 2016). Of note, this study also found that school psychologists, in general, compete for funding on par with other psychology specialties. For instance, we found that studies in a prominent school psychology journal were more likely to have federal funding than studies in a comparable counseling psychology journal.

A second rationale for school psychologist involvement in grant writing is that funded research provides reputational benefits for the field and in particular can allow for more leverage within institutions that value this type of funding. During this era of drastic reductions in state

support for higher education, many public institutions have come to rely heavily on alternate revenue streams including grant funding. Programs that have faculty who are successful in acquiring funding can show their value to the institution with this type of support, which can provide some protection from program closures and possibly further investments from forward-thinking institutional leaders.

A third rationale to justify grant involvement for school psychologists, sometimes unknown by new or naïve scholars, is that grants can come with sometimes large benefits for the individual faculty member. Each institution has its own set of policies regarding reinvestment of grant funding in the research activities of the individual scholar, and these policies are tied to institution identity (e.g., research-intensive institutes often have the most generous benefits in this regard compared to more teaching-oriented institutions). However, these benefits can be quite significant. Some common types of benefits include the opportunity to “buy out” of teaching loads based on paying for part of one’s salary with grant funding; direct funds to research accounts where scholars can have discretion to use these funds for travel, equipment, or future research; support summer salary; and pay for space to conduct the research.

Grants vary in the types of benefits that are offered particularly in relation to institutional values and identity. The dollar figure plays into how much a particular grant is valued, whereby the more, the better. However, dollars alone do not define institutional benefit. In general, research grants are the most valued, particularly by research-intensive institutions, for at least a few reasons. First, research grants, especially rigorously reviewed federal grants (e.g., National Institute of Health [NIH], Institute of Education Sciences [IES], National Science Foundation [NSF], and Center for Disease Control [CDC]) are the most prestigious and thus beneficial to the program, department, college, and institutional reputation. Second, research grants often tend to provide the most lucrative resources to departments, colleges, and institutions. These grants usually pay the full indirect cost rate of institutions versus service, technical assistance, or training grants, which often set caps on these rates. Indirect cost rates pay universities for the infrastructure (e.g., lighting, heating, and office space) needed to conduct research. These costs are negotiated with federal agencies and vary based on whether the study is conducted on- or off-campus and by the location of the university. Negotiated rates can be as high as 70 or 80%. As an example, one of the authors’ institution has an indirect rate of 55%, which means that for every grant dollar requested to support the direct costs of the project, the institution gets an additional 55 cents to support the institution’s infrastructure (i.e., facilities and administration). In comparison, service grants received from agencies like the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) may have caps as low as 0–8% on their indirect amount. A project with \$1,000,000 of direct costs illustrates the considerable discrepancy where a research grant would provide the institution with a 55% rate with \$550,000 of indirect costs compared to a service grant that may only provide anywhere from \$0 to \$80,000.

Another way that research grants are more lucrative for institutions is that they often pay for more faculty time and salary than other types of grants. This disparity can be most striking for training grants that often pay for little, if any, faculty time. Research grants may pay for 20–50% of faculty member time, often for multiple faculty members. This means that the grant pays for this amount of the salary and benefits of these faculty members. This can be a large sum of money that frees up funds for department and college administrators to invest in other things, such as additional personnel. Finally, grants are valued because they can provide support for graduate student stipends and tuition. This allows programs to recruit the best and brightest students into their programs.

Although research grants provide lots of financial and reputational benefits to institutions, it is important to note that training and service grants have their own benefits. These grants allow programs to attract top students for innovative training opportunities and also to provide services at a scale that would not be possible in the absence of such funding.

Finding School Psychology Research, Training, and Service Grant Opportunities

The first steps in becoming a successful grant writer are to become familiar with various funding outlets and match your scholarly interests with potential funders. Here we provide overviews of the major funding opportunities to support school psychologists. We divide these opportunities into three broad types: research, training, and service grants. Next, we describe various funding opportunities within these categories.

Research Grants

We define research grants as funding opportunities that have as their primary purpose the development of scientific knowledge. Funders invest in these types of grants in order to increase understanding and help solve societal problems such as improving the health of a population, reducing disease, improving learning outcomes, and advancing technology. Research grants are often oriented around a common knowledge development cycle, such as the prevention science research cycle (see Earle et al., 2013). In this cycle, knowledge advances through exploratory, development, experimental, and scaling stages, and funding opportunities are offered that align with each stage of development. In the next paragraph, we outline a series of federal agencies and grant mechanisms that are relevant to school psychologists for research funding, followed by grants made available by foundations.

Perhaps the most immediately obvious agency for grants that school psychologists would consider is the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), given its affiliation with the United States Department of Education (i.e., USDOE) and thus its sole focus on research that rigorously and independently examines education. IES and its four Centers (i.e., the National Center for Education Research or NCER; the National Center for Education Statistics or NCES; the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance or NCEE; and the National Center for Special Education Research or NCSER) were created under the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) of 2002. ESRA (2002) specifies that the mission of IES was to

“provide national leadership in expanding fundamental knowledge and understanding of education from early childhood through postsecondary study, in order to provide parents, educators, students, researchers, policymakers, and the general public with reliable information about—(A) the condition and progress of education in the United States, including early childhood education and special education; (B) educational practices that support learning and improve academic achievement and access to educational opportunities for all students; and (C) the effectiveness of Federal and other education programs.” (p. 6)

Through IES, there are a series of different activities that get funded, including (1) education research grants (i.e., through NCER and NCSER); (2) research training programs (i.e., through NCER and NCSER); (3) research and education development centers (i.e., through NCER); (4) statistical and research methodology within education (i.e., through NCER); and (5) research grants focused on systematic replication (i.e., through NCER and NCSER). These are posted regularly on their website, <https://ies.ed.gov/funding/>, under “Requests for Applications (RFAs).” A specific RFA appears for each category as they are released as well as an “IES Application Submission Guide.”

With regard to funding mechanisms within the education research grants, there are a series of topics that one can apply to, which in the fiscal year 2020 application for NCER included the following:

- Career and Technical Education,
- Cognition and Student Learning,
- Early Learning Programs and Policies,
- Education Technology,
- Effective Instruction,
- English Learners,
- Improving Education Systems,
- Postsecondary and Adult Education,
- Reading and Writing,
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education, and
- Social and Behavioral Context for Academic Learning.

For NCSER, these included the following:

- Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD),
- Cognition and Student Learning in Special Education,
- Early Intervention and Early Learning in Special Education,
- Families of Children with Disabilities,
- Professional Development for Educators and School-Based Service Providers,
- Reading, Writing, and Language Development,
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education,
- Social and Behavioral Outcomes to Support Learning,
- Special Education Policy, Finance, and Systems,
- Technology for Special Education, and
- Transition Outcomes for Secondary Students with Disabilities.

These main topic areas tend to be stable, though, in some years, not all topics will be competed. Also, in some years, there are Special Topics. For example, in the RFAs for NCSER in fiscal year 2020, there were three special topics, including Career and Technical Education for Students with Disabilities, English Learners with Disabilities, and Systems-Involved Students with Disabilities.

Also relevant to the education research grants is classifications for “project types,” which include (1) Exploration, (2) Development and Innovation, (3) Initial Efficacy and Follow Up, and (4) Measurement. Up through the fiscal year 2019, there was a category for “Effectiveness and Replication,” which now is its own funding mechanism entirely (i.e., Systematic Replication). Each of these project types has its own set of criteria regarding the purpose, scope and size of the study, time period allowable, and budget cap. Specifically, the purpose of the Exploration grants is to explore and identify relationships between characteristics of students, educators, schools, and policies with education outcomes. The ultimate objective of Exploration (previously referred to as “Goal 1”) grants is to reveal new information that would drive the trajectory of future research, practice, or policy. The purpose is not to test an intervention (as those studies are categorized elsewhere) but rather to inform the development or testing of interventions. As the name suggests, Development and Innovation (Goal 2) grants allow a researcher to develop and pilot test new or adapted interventions with the ultimate goal of producing a fully developed intervention as well as preliminary evidence of the theory of change, feasibility, fidelity, costs, and promise of impacts on student outcomes. Initial Efficacy and Follow-Up (Goal 3) grants are meant to test interventions using rigorous designs that meet the IES What Works Clearinghousedesign standards. These can be initial tests or long-term follow-up studies. The latter must include interventions that have already been rigorously tested, whereas initial efficacy studies would not yet have been rigorously tested. Beyond impacts on student outcomes, IES

also requires an examination of the benefits and costs of the intervention. Finally, Measurement (previously called Goal 5) grants are focused on the development and validation of either new or adapted assessments with the ultimate goal of developing a valid measure for practitioners or researchers, either of student outcomes; educators' skills, knowledge, or abilities; or indicators of school effectiveness. This may require an Exploration grant if extant research does not yet address the measurement framework of interest. While not required, one may note that you could move through the goal structure from Exploration to Measurement, Exploration or Measurement to Development and Innovation or Initial Efficacy Testing and Follow Up, or from Development and Innovation to Initial Efficacy Testing and Follow Up.

In addition to IES, there are contracts that are released directly from the USDOE, which allow for partnering with state departments of education, local education agencies (LEAs), or schools. For example, there was a mechanism through the "Investing in Innovation" or i3 fund, which was established in 2009 as part of the American Recovery and Investment Act and was focused on providing funding to support innovative practices in schools that have shown an impact on student outcomes. These grants could go to LEAs, nonprofit organizations in partnership with one or more LEAs, or to a consortium of schools. These grants allowed for the expansion or development of innovative practices and promoted cross-sector partnerships. Since 2018, this mechanism was re-worked to be the Education Innovation and Research mechanism, which was created under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act. The purpose remains to provide funding focused on the creation, development, and implementation of field-initiated innovations but has been expanded to emphasize that the replication and scaling is of innovations that are evidence-based.

Other relevant contracts that have come out of the USODE are School Climate Transformation Grants. These grants are awarded to state education agencies or LEAs (i.e., in two separate calls for proposals) and are focused on the building of capacity to support districts (via state grants) or schools (via district grants) in the transformation of school climate. In 2015, this focused specifically on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, whereas in 2020, this more broadly focused on multi-tiered systems of supports. Again, these grants offer opportunities for partnership (e.g., provision of training or evaluation services) of academic researchers with state and local education agencies.

A final area of interest for universities, and particularly Colleges of Education or departments with school psychologists, are mechanisms geared toward training additional education professionals. In 2020, the USDOE released a series of these; the most obviously relevant was the "Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program." Similar personnel development grants were released for training special educators with a master or doctoral degree program (i.e., "Personnel Development to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities"). Similarly, there are programmatic grants that could also be of interest and could offer opportunities for partnership. One 2020 example of this was the "Project Prevent" program, which was focused on school district capacity-building when serving schools with pervasive violence.

Other federal agencies also have grant mechanisms that can be of relevance to school psychologists. Specifically, within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), there are four agencies interested in topic areas that school psychologists may have expertise in. These include the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH; <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>), the Eunice Shriver Kennedy National Institute of Child and Human Development (NICHD; <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/>), the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHHD; <https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/>), and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA; <https://www.drugabuse.gov/>). NIMH provides grant funding for research addressing the prevention and treatment of mental health disorders and has a focus on suicide prevention. NICHD has three relevant branches. First, the Child Development and Behavior Branch

includes the following relevant “high-priority areas”: (a) bilingual and biliteracy; (b) social, environmental, and economic factors impacting stress reactivity, adaptive behavior, and school functioning; (c) psychosocial adjustment for individuals in high-risk environments; (d) school readiness in economically and socially disadvantaged children; (e) reading, writing, and mathematics processes, learning, and learning disabilities; and (f) reasoning. Second, the Population Dynamics Branch includes high-priority areas of (a) behavioral research on the use and non-use of contraception, (b) health and disease across the lifespan, and (c) multilevel interactions and inputs to human health and development, including gene–environment interactions. Third, the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Branch is also a relevant topical area for school psychologists.

A particularly useful tool for searching all previously funded NIH grants is the Report website (<https://report.nih.gov/>). Here you can search by keywords and find every recently funded project along with abstracts to quickly see what fundable topics within each Institute may align with your interest. Most of the federal funding agencies offer similar searchable indexes to assist potential applicants in learning more about their funded portfolio.

Other federal agencies that fund relevant work are the National Science Foundation (NSF; <https://www.nsf.gov/funding/>) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; <https://www.cdc.gov/>), particularly within their Violence Prevention division (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/>), which is focused on child abuse and neglect prevention, youth violence, suicide prevention, sexual violence prevention, and intimate partner violence prevention. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP; <https://www.ojjdp.gov/>) also has had relevant funding mechanisms. In recent years, there was the “Comprehensive School Safety Initiative” and in 2019, the “Comprehensive School-Based Approach to Youth Violence and Victimization.” The latter was focused on building capacity for reducing youth violence and victimization as well as improving the response to children’s exposure to violence with the ultimate goal of enhancing public safety. Finally, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) funds programmatic efforts to promote the social and economic well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities and educational organizations are among the myriad grantees they support. For example, ACF funds Head Start and early childhood initiatives, which may involve an evaluation component that academic researchers could partner on. Similarly, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) focuses on the study of prevalence, prevention, and treatment of substance use and abuse and mental illness with one specific focus area on this work conducted in schools. This agency also supports programmatic efforts in schools and has provided funds to states, local jurisdictions, community organizations, and may also involve an evaluation component that presents an opportunity for collaboration and research.

Foundation Funding

Foundation funding opportunities are as diverse as those available from federal agencies. As with federal opportunities, foundation grants span research, training, and services and can include fellowships or grants to institutions or individual investigators (e.g., early career awards). Each foundation’s proposal requirements are unique, but many are considerably more concise than those for federal grants. A key distinction between foundation funders and federal grant opportunities is that indirect costs rates are often much lower than universities’ negotiated rates. Among the authors of this chapter, rates for past foundation grants have ranged from 0 to 15%. Another distinction is that foundations may offer more flexibility in how proposals are submitted (e.g., direct email to the program officer) or how funds are distributed (e.g., offering direct distribution to the principal investigator rather than being an award to the institution).

In addition, foundations may limit the number of applicants from an institution or require a letter of interest before a full proposal is permitted or even invited. For these reasons, researchers should plan well in advance of competition deadlines to allow for the preparation of brief materials and coordination with an institution's administrators before preparing materials for submission. In the case of limited submissions (i.e., where one or few submissions are permitted from an institution), there may be an internal consultation or review process at your institution to select which researcher or proposal is allowed to proceed with deadlines well in advance of those specified by the funder.

The dispersion of foundation opportunities can make them challenging to locate. Whereas scholars interested in federal funding can search grants.gov to identify relevant programs, foundation grant opportunities are likely to be accessed through professional organizations such as

- American Psychological Association's American Psychological Foundation, <https://www.apa.org/apf>
- National Association of School Psychologist's list of external funding opportunities, <https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/nasp-research-center/grant-funding-opportunities>
- American Educational Research Association's list of external funding, <http://www.era.net/Professional-Opportunities-Funding/External-Fellowship-and-Funding-Opportunities>
- Social Psychology Network, <https://www.socialpsychology.org/funding.htm>

In addition, foundation websites and online platforms are often designed to provide searchable databases of opportunities. For scholars associated with universities, these platforms can generally be accessed through your libraries or offices for sponsored research and provide searchable databases of federal and non-federal grant opportunities in the United States and internationally. The following is a list of platforms available at the writing of this chapter:

- Proquest's Pivot, www.pivot.proquest.com (formerly, Community of Science)
- Sponsored Programs Information Network (SPIN), <https://spin.infoedglobal.com>
- Foundation Directory Online (FDO), <https://fconline.foundationcenter.org>

These databases generally allow users to search by keywords, type of funding, and other delimiters such as deadlines or eligibility requirements (e.g., citizenship). Searches or specific competitions can often be saved or tagged so that users receive email updates, which can aid in planning for future submissions. While helpful, these databases can be cumbersome and time consuming to use because they catalog tens of thousands of funding opportunities worldwide. For this reason, it is wise to allocate considerable time to refine searches and explore opportunities. If available at your institution, a librarian or sponsored projects staff member may be able to assist with the process or even create individualized searches on your behalf, which can save hours otherwise spent learning how to use each database and sifting through results.

Alternatively, or in addition to using the tools we have described, it can be helpful—and likely much more efficient—to identify potential funding sources by considering the funding histories of scholars who do, or have done, work similar to what you hope to pursue. You can identify this information from the funding acknowledgments in published articles or by reviewing these scholars' vitae and websites.

Finally, researchers—and particularly early career scholars—can learn about applicable funding opportunities (and even meet with program officers or other foundation leadership) through conference programming and information sessions (e.g., program officer panels) at annual meetings and conventions. Although the universe of foundation opportunities is quite

large, the network of foundations related to a particular substantive area can be quite small, making the relationships developed or tips learned in these settings critical to the competitiveness of future proposals.

Training Grants

For graduate educators in school psychology, training grants can be a valuable funding source to support students or develop innovative programming or partnerships. The primary purpose of training grants is to increase the number of well-trained personnel in priority areas defined by the funder. These investments are made because the funder has decided that there is a shortage of personnel in a given area or with a particular skill set. Training grants can target pre- or post-graduate training for both practitioners and researchers.

Federal. One of the largest and most sustained sources of training grants in school psychology is the personnel preparation grants program of the USDOE's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP; see <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepprep/applicant.html>). A cursory search of OSEP's Discretionary Grants Database (<https://publicddb.osepideasthatwork.org/>) during the writing of this chapter showed approximately 30 such grants addressing preparation of school psychologists. Funded under federal special education law, these grants fund graduate programs to prepare personnel (i.e., 84.325K program for special educators and related service providers) and leadership (i.e., 84.325D program for future researchers, faculty, and administrators) to reduce chronic personnel shortages and improve outcomes of students with disabilities. These grants are formulated to primarily provide financial support to trainees such that they generally require that at least 65% of funds go directly to students and generally require that all funded students graduate from their degree program during the grant period. OSEP grants share common narrative requirements of describing the national, state, or local personnel needs; competencies to be developed; and how outcomes related to trainees' competencies, credentialing, and employment outcomes will be evaluated.

Other OSEP grant opportunities include doctoral training consortia, national centers for training, and interdisciplinary research training. Beyond OSEP, other federal training grant opportunities include IES's pre- and post-doctoral interdisciplinary research training, methods training, and early career development and mentoring programs (see https://ies.ed.gov/funding/ncser_rfas/ncser_training.asp and https://ies.ed.gov/funding/ncser_rfas/training.asp); NIH's institutional training grants, fellowships, and career development awards (see <https://researchtraining.nih.gov/>); the Health Resource and Services Administration's Graduate Psychology Education (GPE) program (see <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/grants/mentalbehavioralhealth/>); and SAMHSA's Minority Fellowship Program, which partners with professional organizations to support both doctoral- and master-master's level fellowships to trainees, as opposed to institutions (see <https://www.apa.org/pi/mfp/>). These grants have the potential advantage of helping attract the best and brightest students, particularly in areas where there are personnel shortages, and can facilitate piloting of new programs or specialties. At the same time, they may come with some disadvantages such as potentially creating new administrative or teaching obligations. Many training grants also include service or employment obligations that require scholarship and tuition repayment if funded scholars do not engage in post-graduate service obligations.

Service grants and contracts. Another type of grant opportunity worth exploring are those funded not for research but intended to support professional development, service delivery, and scaling up of evidence-based practices targeted to unique populations. The USDOE offers discretionary grants through different offices. One way to learn about the range of USDOE discretionary grants is to visit their website www2.ed.gov and click on the links related to grant funds and the annual grant forecast. The office with the greatest degree of relevance for those in the School Psychology profession is the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

OSEP provides several different funding mechanisms that are directly awarded to state education agencies (SEA) annually, which can support the work of school psychologists and related professionals. There are two types of grants that OSEP awards: Formula and Discretionary. First, we will discuss the formula grant that may not have grant writing opportunities, but will include opportunities for collaboration with SEAs and LEAs. These can fund pilot projects, which may later lead to other grant writing projects. Second, we will discuss discretionary grants, which offer opportunities to write and collaborate on the grant writing process with school districts, charter schools, and state departments of education.

Formula grant—state level. Part B & C Formula Grants, which include Preschool Grants, Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, and Special Education, are examples of funding awarded directly to states. Most of these funds flow directly from the SEAs through to the LEAs and other service delivery agencies, but some of the funds may be used for state-level activities. Contact your SEA's Office of Special Education Services to learn about currently funded projects that may involve stakeholder support. State-level efforts are often guided by advisory or leadership committees that include community stakeholders.

Formula grant—district level. From the Part B & C funds that LEAs receive, they may use up to 15% of the funds for early intervention services. The district can use the 15% to create early intervention systems for students who are not eligible for special education. Districts can use these funds to pay for professional development, instructional and behavioral coaches, intervention programs, screening or assessment systems, or intervention implementation. Generally, these funds are managed by the district's Director of Special Education Services. It is best to speak with the school district when you have a smaller scale project that may align with the district's needs and goals for early intervention and special education prevention services. For example, if you are interested in testing a new reading intervention, you can speak with the district about piloting the new intervention. As part of this arrangement, the district can use the 15% of funds for early intervention to cover substitute teachers while the classroom teachers receive the training.

Discretionary grant—state level. Part D grants offer the most opportunity for collaboration with an SEA during the grant writing process. Some states may want to hire an external grant writer, or an SEA may be interested in offering a subaward to fund a partnership project. These grants are awarded through a competitive process with a peer review from a standing panel. The standing panel is required to score the applications in alignment with the legislative and regulatory requirements and guidelines. Some of these grants include the requirement of having a higher education partner. For those competitions, SEAs are required to include at least one higher education partner in their application to be considered responsive to the request. Selected grant competitions may also require an external evaluator. Subawards are then awarded to evaluators that can be housed at a higher education institution. The evaluators may also assist in the grant writing process. The role of the evaluator is to collect data and provide reports to the SEA and OSEP in a year-end report summarizing the outcomes of the grant activities. Although discretionary grants are not research projects, their data can be used to examine new policies and state scaling-up efforts.

In summary, the key to learning more about both formula and discretionary grants from any state DOE office is to get to know the decision-makers at your state's department of education. An informal meeting to share your interests and learn about SEA projects may open the door to collaborative grant writing opportunities.

Strategies for Writing Successful Grant Proposals

Once you have identified an appropriate funding outlet, the next skill is to learn to write grant proposals that will appeal to this particular funder. Although grant writing skills are somewhat

generalizable and also somewhat akin to writing good scholarly papers, we have found that each type of grant, and actually each funding opportunity, has its own unique set of optimal qualities. In this section, we summarize some of the most important skills tailored to each type of funding opportunity (please also refer to Bauer, 2017, and Pequegnat, Stover, & Boyce, 2011 for additional detailed strategies). One important implication of having so many different types of funding opportunities is that each type of grant may require a specific writing approach for successful applications. In turn, successful grant writing requires specific skillsets that are tailored to each type of grant. This may sound daunting at first—the idea that one would need to become proficient in multiple grant writing styles. However, it is important to note that there is a general skill set that applies to all grants such as being an efficient, economical, and clear writer capable of identifying and articulating fundable ideas. Additionally, one person does not need to be effective at all types of grant writing; you may find that one type of grant appeals to you and best matches your writing approach and thus may choose to focus on getting this one category of grant.

Fundable Ideas

Fundable ideas are ones that connect to a funding agency's priorities (i.e., found on their websites) and are realistic yet innovative. In general, fundable ideas also align with the scientific enterprise, where incremental steps are valued and expected more than exponential leaps in knowledge. Successful proposals build off prior knowledge and represent the next logical step in the knowledge development cycle rather than a quantum leap. Think of discussion sections of high-quality research articles where the authors suggest the implications of their work for future studies. Usually these suggestions for future studies are examples of relevant, reasonable, and logical progressions of ideas. Keep in mind, funding agencies and, in turn, grant reviewers (i.e., researchers who sit on grant review panels) tend to be conservative in their expectations about what they will recommend for funding. Thus, we have found that it is usually a good idea to err toward parsimony in your funding proposals and highlight the unique contributions of your idea along with its solid grounding in extant research. Simplicity also increases the likelihood that proposals will be clear and understandable to reviewers; complexity increases the chance that reviewers will be confused by aspects of the proposal and thus scores them poorly.

Of course, grant writers must balance elegance with innovation. Otherwise, a proposal will be viewed as mundane. Good grant ideas generate a favorable reaction in those knowledgeable about the field. It is wise to run your ideas by colleagues (at your institution or elsewhere) and program officers (an employee of the funding agency who oversees applications and interacts with prospective applicants to encourage high-quality proposals) to get their reaction about whether they are both reasonable and innovative. Engaging in (or creating) support groups regarding proposal ideas and research study aims (e.g., a monthly group meeting where you can exchange products or ideas or engage in “mock reviews”) is an excellent way to get concrete feedback about the fundability and understandability of your ideas.

As an example, several of the authors on this chapter worked together in implementing and evaluating a professional development and consultation model to support teacher implementation of culturally responsive practices. The intervention filled an obvious void to address the well-established educational outcome disparities experienced by youth of color and was an explicit concern to a partnering school district. The idea led to a development project followed by an efficacy trial. However, experience implementing the project generated new ideas for the research team about missing elements of the approach. These insights led to a successful exploratory grant application to identify discrete indicators of culturally responsive practices that could be systematically and efficiently observed and delivered as feedback to support teachers.

Fundable ideas often emerge from meetings and agreements (or compromises) about what is needed in the field. Fundable ideas when competing for discretionary grants arise from existing programs or a known gap in service delivery. These ideas will likely extend from an already funded project or a statewide initiative that is looking to iterate to include a different or more targeted population. Discretionary grants are often written by a team of people across departments or agencies. It is important that the team agrees on who will write the various sections, who will gather the needed information, who will organize and edit the proposal, and so on. During the grant writing process, it is helpful to have a standing weekly meeting to be sure that all parties are able to move forward with their assigned tasks.

Fundable ideas are also ones matched well to the skills and background of the lead investigator and the team assembled to conduct the work. In this regard, it is important to be mindful of your career stage and your prior grant funding experience in relation to decisions about which grants to apply for and what role you should play in a grant. It would be highly unlikely for a new investigator with no prior funding or grant administration experience to secure a large grant without a credible research background (e.g., a high-quality publication record) and a team of co-investigators that includes others who have had successful grant funding and administration experiences. Instead, it would be wiser to start with smaller grants (for instance, NIH has an entire series of smaller grants such as R03s) or to submit grants as a co-investigator rather than principal investigator to establish a record of grant experience. An alternate pathway would be to pursue Career Development grants such as K or F awards from NIH. These grants are intended to support the development of independent investigators and often pay for large portions of a person's percent effort to allow them time to develop these skills. For example, K awards require and pay for 75% of investigator time on the project which allows the awardee to buy out of all or nearly all of their teaching commitments.

Finally, we encourage you to think big about the topics that you are most passionate about and how these topics might link directly to national public health or educational priorities established by funders. In our experience, unsuccessful grant writers get easily discouraged when they do not see a request for proposals that aligns perfectly with their interests. Instead, it is critical to have an expansive understanding of your primary research interests and how they connect with a range of public health and education priorities. As an example, one of the authors has an interest in preventing internalizing problems in youth but has never received federal funding on that specific topic. Instead of solely focusing on a narrow range of funders who might be interested in funding that topic, this author reflected on his broader theory of how internalizing problems develop and can be prevented. In this view, nurturing environments at home and school are protective against internalizing problems (as well as academic and externalizing problems), and thus most of his funded research has focused on supporting school personnel (teachers and principals) in providing nurturing environments for all youth. These studies align with his particular interest in internalizing issues given that these environments help prevent these problems, but he may have struggled to get funding if he narrowly focused directly on funding only for depression or internalizing problems.

Writing Abstracts

The abstract may be the most important part of a grant proposal. The reason is because of how grants are typically reviewed. For NIH and IES research grants, a small group of reviewers (usually three) are assigned the task of providing detailed critiques of a proposal. For those proposals that make the cut for review by the full panel, the primary reviewers present their review to the entire panel, which may include more than 20 experts. At panel meetings, after the presentation and discussion of the proposal, all reviewers on the panel, not just the primary

reviewers, provide a score for the proposal. Given the reality of how busy reviewers are, including the fact that each has primary review responsibility for several other proposals, many panel members may base their judgments about the research based on their reading of the abstract and listening to the discussion. Even for those reading the full proposal carefully, the abstract is a first impression and can set a proposal on a path toward being viewed favorably or unfavorably. Thus, it is essential that your abstract is concise and well-written and clearly conveys the innovation and big ideas of the proposal. Good abstracts capture the reader's attention by showing the public health significance of the project, making clear the unique contributions, and conveying that the design or approach is reasonable and innovative. The abstract is akin to a cover letter for a job in that it needs to catch the attention of the audience and make the reviewers compelled to read more (and closely).

Abstracts for OSEP discretionary funds should provide an overview of the goal of the project and the proposed outcomes. The methods can be described broadly, but specific details are not required. Abstracts for OSEP discretionary grants can provide a broader perspective of the project as compared to abstracts for research grants for IES or SAMHSA. Begin with who is applying and name the program that the grant would fund. Include a statement describing the timeline and the end goal. Clearly state the targeted population and the intended outcomes. The abstract should succinctly summarize the overall purpose and goal of the proposed project.

Background or Significance

Background or significance sections set the stage for the proposal by establishing the rationale and need for the project. This section is roughly similar to the introduction of a research article where literature is reviewed that provides a justification for why the study is important and how it fills a void in the existing knowledge base. Specific requests for proposals will outline key elements that should be included (e.g., specific questions to be answered or even formatting of the section). As with a research narrative, it is important to state the purpose, goal, and outcomes early in the significance section and be sure to repeat those details throughout the application as needed. The review panel reads many grants, and it is important to not assume that a panel member will remember what they read within the first several pages.

The key to a successful significance section is being able to vividly describe the local context within your state or district or study context. Discretionary grants, unlike research grants, are more focused on telling the story of the local context. It is important to cite some research, but these grants do not require a densely cited narrative. Instead, these significance sections should include local data summarizing the current efforts, outcomes, successes, and areas for improvement leading up to the current proposal to address remaining needs. A successful significance section clearly describes current events and remaining needs supplemented with local data. Within research grants, there is a greater emphasis on demonstrating knowledge regarding the field of research while highlighting your own and your colleagues' contributions to this field. Though there is a greater emphasis on a densely cited narrative, an outstanding proposal is one that balances citations and the literature with a storytelling approach that leads the reviewer through an articulation of the problem, what is known and unknown, and ultimately the way in which you plan to address the problems.

Theory of Change

Some grants, especially research grants testing interventions, require a theory of change or logic model, which is a detailed organizer summarizing the components of your proposed project.

Generally, the theory of change will include implementation strategies, outputs, outcomes, and impact. Within these categories, you will describe the indicators or variables that define why you hypothesize your program will have the intended impact resulting in the preferred outcomes. A reviewer should be able to read your theory of change and be able to understand your proposed project, purpose, methods, and outcomes.

It is important to align your significance section with your theory of change. A solid theory of change is well articulated in the significance section. Similarly, the theory of change should also be well linked to the measures. Many sources of data can be used to inform the theory of change. In the case of discretionary grants, the focus will be on the state or district context, data, and needs assessments. The proposed interventions and outcomes should be grounded in research-based theories or evidence- and scientifically based practices. When beginning the grant writing process with a team, it can be helpful to start with the theory of change to make sure your team has a unified vision of the components of the proposed project.

A pitfall for novice grant writers is to not clearly articulate the theory of change either visually or in narrative form or to confuse the different categories captured here. Asking for a review of your theory of change by a colleague or colleagues not connected to the writing team, and ideally not even necessarily an expert in your field of study, can provide valuable insight into understandability.

Measurement, Design, and Analysis Plan

As mentioned previously, it is critically important that the measurement plan is aligned with the theory of change. The proposed outcomes should match in name and number to those listed in the theory of change. If there are more distal outcomes in the theory of change than can be captured in the proposed study, make that explicit to the reader. Similarly, avoid the common pitfall to name extraneous outcomes that are not specified in the theory of change. The design is sometimes dictated by the grant mechanism itself (e.g., differences arise between discretionary and research grants). In both cases, the analysis plan should be well tied to the design of the study as well as the measures being used.

In a discretionary grant (e.g., a training or professional development grant), there is a greater focus on a program evaluation approach, such as an observational study. Thus, most primary data collection includes administering surveys of participating educators and collecting school-level data from state databases. Analysis plans are mostly descriptive and summative. Rarely are there experimental designs that call for more complex analysis than a basic ANOVA. Since there is rarely a counterfactual (i.e., control or comparison) condition, it is difficult to compare outcomes from different conditions. Instead, you might focus on outcomes between cohorts. Generally, the measurement and analysis plan for discretionary grants is more focused on task completion. For example, the measurement plan might describe giving teachers a pre- and post-training knowledge survey and then summarizing how many teachers were trained, when they were trained, and across how many districts and grade levels they were trained; taking the storytelling approach mentioned earlier.

In a research grant proposal, the design may be dictated by the mechanism, and so paying close attention to explicit requirements and more nuanced suggestions for the design within the request for proposals or applications (i.e., naming varies by funder) is important. For example, efficacy mechanisms often require randomization or otherwise present a shortlist of acceptable designs. Research grants are judged specifically on the appropriateness of the research designs and analytic approach as well as the expertise among the team to execute them. Thus, the selection of co-investigators is highly important, and the lead investigator needs to ensure that there is sufficient statistical expertise provided both in the research proposal conceptualization as well as expertise among the proposed study team members. For most research grants, this is

scored as part of the narrative (i.e., research design) and when evaluating personnel (i.e., often a separate score).

Though a full research design and analytic tutorial is beyond the scope of this chapter, an inevitable consideration in school-based research, particularly for larger-sized studies and grants (e.g., efficacy trials), is the clustered nature of these studies. Students are naturally “clustered,” or grouped, in classrooms and schools, and therefore, they have overlapping characteristics as a function of this grouping. This has implications both for the design (e.g., if you randomize, are you randomizing individuals within these clusters or are you randomizing the clusters?) and for the analyses. The analyses need to account for the cluster in which randomization occurs (e.g., if you randomize whole classrooms or schools, your analyses should adjust for the shared variability of students within these groups and should consider the “treatment” variable as a classroom or school variable and not a student variable). This clustering also impacts power to detect effects in your study, whereby many more schools are needed in trials randomized at the school level versus a study randomized at the student level. You must ensure that there is a match between your intervention (i.e., where the intervention is being implemented and with whom) and your research design and that your analyses adequately account for the design and can be conducted with the measures you collect. For more information, see https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/ReferenceResources/wwc_cluster_standards_030416.pdf

Training Grants

Core grantwriting skills will serve you well when preparing training grants, but there are a few distinctions worth considering. Whereas research grants generally allow an opportunity to build on prior research contributions, training grants allow for contributions to be made to graduate education. Notably, preparing training grants provides an appreciation of the data and documentation-heavy nature of maintaining program accreditation and approval because you can repurpose the materials collected in these processes to substantiate the nature and quality of your program and provide evidence for the likely success of your proposal. By keeping strong program records, you will facilitate the process of preparing training grant proposals, which is especially valuable given increasing unpredictable (and increasingly short) intervals between release of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and submission deadlines, not to mention brief lags (or complete lack thereof) between notification of awards and grant start dates. If you do not have the luxury of relying on existing data amassed to appease accrediting agencies or your state boards, you can use prior RFPs to identify the types of data likely to be required in future competitions and then start collecting or synthesizing that data while you wait for the next RFP to be released.

An area that may be less familiar to graduate educators and researchers preparing training grant proposals is program evaluation. Here, it is not enough to rely on the evaluation processes or measures required or preferred by internal or external offices. Instead, you should take time to learn about the types of measures and processes preferred by the funder. Often, you can leverage technical assistance materials, archived webinars, or Q&A sites to mine critical information that will set your proposal apart from the less savvy applicant. With program evaluation often comprising a quarter or more of points (as in OSEP’s 100-point scheme) and just a few points separating funded from unfunded proposals, you cannot afford not to make mistakes in this area.

As with most research grants, building a strong team is critical. Not only will you need to show that key personnel have the expertise and experience relevant to the proposed objectives and activities, but you will also need to demonstrate that the team is able to allocate the necessary time to carry out those activities. A weak evaluation plan providing an insufficient allocation of personnel time will likely result in an unfunded proposal. When in doubt, increase the amount of time personnel will give to the training grant.

Other Aspects of Successful Grants

The narrative of the grant where you describe the rationale, significance, research design, analytic plan, personnel, and resources for the proposed project is usually the most important part of the proposal. However, it is not the only essential component. Several other aspects of the application are often critical and can either make or break a proposal. Here we focus on five: (1) budget planning and justification, (2) letters of support, (3) appendices, (4) working with program officers, and (5) consulting personnel.

Budget Planning and Justification

Part of grant proposal preparation includes carefully planning your budget for direct costs and justifying these expenses. It is a good idea to get sample budgets from successful grants in the same category as the one you are submitting. These examples will allow you to see common expense categories for successful grants. In general, most funding in proposals goes to pay personnel, including research staff and the faculty research team. Other categories of expenses include equipment, travel, supplies, data collection costs (e.g., payment for data collectors and participant incentives), stipends (e.g., for students), and consultant costs. Keep in mind that funders may be different in how they account for direct and indirect expenses. For instance, IES allows a fixed amount of total expenses (both indirect and direct costs) for given mechanisms, and your budget would include these in the total calculations (e.g., direct costs plus indirect costs). However, NIH budget maximums are for direct costs only; indirect costs are calculated in addition to these direct cost totals.

Letters of Support

For many proposals, letters of support are essential and required for successful applications. For instance, IES requires detailed letters of support for partner school districts, indicating school district's interest in and understanding of critical aspects of the proposals. For efficacy trials, for instance, this includes clear statements in the letter that the district understands and supports the idea of randomly assigning participants to conditions. In addition to school partner letters, it is also helpful, if not required, for some proposals to have letters of support from consultants on the project, including scholarly experts and expert practitioners.

Appendices

Appendices are similarly essential, and each funder and mechanism will put forth required types of appendices as well as page limits. Appendices are a great resource to provide additional information that cannot otherwise be covered within the narrative. Examples include tables with data regarding the target sample, descriptions of intervention materials (e.g., if in development, a mapping of what you think the intervention may look like and, if testing something already in existence, a table of contents or list of components for the intervention), measures you intend to employ (e.g., survey items), and specifics about your power analyses.

Working with Program Officers

It is always a good idea to connect with a program officer before submitting a grant proposal. Program officer availability and accessibility may vary by funding mechanism. For IES proposals, we have always found it very helpful to discuss proposal ideas with program officers. When

possible, we send abstracts and specific aims to the program officer before the discussion to prepare them for the meeting. Program officers also can offer you valuable input after a proposal has been reviewed. They generally sit in on reviewer panel meetings, so they can provide context for some of the written comments given in panel reviews.

Consulting Personnel

Composing a credible expert team of co-investigators and consultants is critical to grant funding success. As mentioned earlier, you want to ensure there is a balance of experience with grants, the required knowledge of the content area you are focused on, as well as the research methodology and analyses. Consultants (either individuals or a group selected to serve on an advisory panel) are a way to round out the expertise on any of these areas. These may be developers of an intervention you are studying or adapting, practitioner partners who can provide feedback on feasibility and acceptability, content area experts who may help you design a new program or educational approach, or experts in a methodology you are employing. However, it is important to ensure that no area of high importance to your proposal is only covered by a consultant.

Implementing Grants

One of the most exciting and terrifying moments of a grant writers' career is the moment they realize a large proposal is going to be funded. It is exciting because a lot of work and planning went into writing the proposal and successfully acquiring funding is the culmination of that effort. At the same time, it can be terrifying to have the simple realization that now you actually have to conduct the study to do what you said you would do in the proposal. Implementing funded grants is a huge responsibility and requires its own unique skill set.

Postaward Planning

The initial steps of grant implementation include submitting an institutional review board (IRB) proposal to your academic institution to ensure ethical compliance with human subject standards. When working with school districts, they may also have their own IRB application that you will need to submit. All team members will need to be in compliance with the IRB and pass training in the ethical treatment of human subjects. In addition, you will need to hire team members (e.g., research assistant), coordinate payment for faculty proposed to be a part of the team, purchase needed materials, and organize space to house team members, materials, and equipment. You will need to work with individuals from your university from human resources and fiscal offices to determine procedures for accomplishing each of these tasks.

Team Management

A key skill in grant management is team management. As you build your team, consider the many roles needed to effectively conduct the work proposed. Depending on the size of the project, you may want a full-time staff member who coordinates the critical aspects of the project. For instance, this person, the project coordinator, would oversee scheduling data collection, organizing materials, training data collectors, and tracking consents, assents, and data collection completion. In some cases, your project coordinator may also be involved in recruiting participants. In addition, your team will also likely include other faculty members who are part of the project, graduate research assistants, and part-time data collectors. Having regular meetings (e.g., weekly or every other week) will help to ensure that everyone is informed of progress and is accountable for their own contributions. Effective meetings are set to a specific

time matched to the content needed to be discussed, have a set agenda that all members can contribute to, and result in clear actionable next steps that are documented by way of minutes. These team meetings are similar to school-based problem-solving teams that school psychologists are trained to be a part of or lead. Recognize that managing others takes time and may not necessarily be a skill you feel equipped to do. Seeking models or mentors who do this well is one way to develop these skills.

Data Tracking and Management

A critical early step is deciding how to track and manage data (e.g., participant recruitment, consent forms, and data collection), so that your team can monitor when various actions are completed, and which activities remain to be addressed. For instance, if you proposed data collection employing a pretest-posttest design, you would want to set up a system to (1) assign an identification code to eligible participants as names cannot be stored in your data sets, (2) track written consent status (if required), (3) track when pre-assessment data were gathered, and (4) track when post-assessment data were gathered. You may also track the provision of incentives, if applicable. In some cases, we obtain consent from both teachers and parents of students in the classroom and thus have two separate tracking systems for each participant type. Further, we often gather several types of data (e.g., observational, academic achievement, and surveys from multiple reporters) and thus need systems that allow us to track each component of the data collection.

Once data has been gathered, it will be essential to set up a system for managing your data. First, data should be stored in a secure location (i.e., paper data in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room and electronic data on a password-protected computer) and without identifiable information. Second, paper-based data should be double-entered into a computer database (e.g., using statistics software such as SPSS) on two computers/in two files. Syntax can be used to compare the two data sets and identify data that do not match, so that errors in data entry are caught and rectified. Third, you should keep at least one backup of your (de-identified) data. Being thoughtful about how the data are stored and accessed by others will reduce errors in your data sets. For instance, we store our data files on a shared drive, but only allow a few team members, who are trained on data use, have access to them. For example, individuals are instructed to always save the shared dataset onto their computer before manipulating the data in any way. This avoids the problem of someone saving over the original dataset. Fourth, you should set up a documentation system for your data measures (e.g., technical reports with the items and scales used at each time point) and codebooks for the data files (e.g., identifying variable names, labels, and values as well as how variables are calculated). This can be very helpful when it is time to analyze data or to share with others, external to the team, without sharing the data file. While some of the points addressed here may seem like common sense, thinking about all possible ways that errors can be avoided will save time in the end.

Recruitment and Retention Strategies

To have enough power to detect an intervention effect, projects need an adequate sample size. Thus, another critical component of successful grant implementation is being able to recruit and retain participants during the life of the project. Conducting school-based applied research often requires recruiting principals, teachers, and students (via their parents) to be part of the study. Prior to writing and submitting your research proposal, you would have worked on securing school district partners and buy-in from school personnel. After your grant has been funded, you will need to re-activate these relationships. Often times, it may have been more than a year since you started the conversations with school district partners, so you will need

to remind these partners (or in some cases, when administrators change, explain to new school personnel) what the goals are for the project. It can be helpful to develop a brief, one-page summary to share with school partners, outlining how the project fits within the school district or building priorities. Having buy-in from school administrators will be helpful, particularly if you need access to teachers. For many of our projects, we have budgeted for a school stipend to offset the burden of data collection. Principals then have access to these funds and can use them to support their school. In addition, we provide stipends to teachers as compensation for their time in completing assessments. For students, we often provide a small gift or a gift card to a popular restaurant or retailer for their time completing assessments. These gestures can help with recruitment by conveying respect for the time and effort of your partners and participants.

Being transparent about all aspects of the project is also important for recruitment and retention. Providing a list of requirements for participation (e.g., consent, random assignment to intervention, participation in data collection, and attendance at intervention trainings if assigned to treatment) as well as verbal explanation is helpful. When recruiting a school to participate, you would meet with the principal (and any other key participants) to go over the list of project activities, allow them to ask questions, clarify the procedures, and set dates for when each activity will occur. Ask the school decision maker to sign a form indicating that they understand each activity and when it will occur and leave a copy of this form with them. It can be referred to at any time if there is confusion. Further, this clear communication can be helpful in retaining participants because they know what they are getting into from the start.

Reports to Funders

Funders expect ongoing reporting about activities that you completed and progress toward study goals. At a minimum, these reports occur once per year. The reports typically include a narrative description of grant activities in relation to the agreed upon performance objective and a budget report. The purpose of the report is for funders to determine if you are on track and if they will continue your funding for projects that span across several years. For some funders (e.g., IES), they will ask you to describe (a) dissemination efforts with your partners, (b) products that are derived from the project, (c) the impact of the project on the community of interest, and (d) whether any changes or problems were encountered.

Summary and Conclusions

Grant writing and implementation may seem daunting, but the benefits are worth the time and effort. Funded research grants offer the opportunity to develop your line of inquiry in a rigorous fashion by providing the resources that enable you to think bigger and broader. Further, grants can provide the resources to train and fund graduate students and bring a sense of prestige to your graduate training programs. There are different types of awards, including research, training, and services grants. Each brings specific benefits. In this chapter, we provided some guidance on where to look for grant opportunities, explained the differences between the types of grants, and offered some insights into how to develop and implement fundable ideas. Good luck in your pursuit!

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