

Grand Challenges Explorations

Tips from Reviewers

Launched in 2008 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Grand Challenges Explorations (GCE) grant program seeks particularly bold ideas from innovative thinkers around the world to solve the greatest challenges in global health and development.

Review Process

Because the foundation receives so many submissions, proposals go through an initial screening phase in which those that do not respond to specific elements in the topic description or propose ideas clearly identified as “off-topic” are removed. Following this initial phase, each proposal is reviewed independently by up to six members of an external panel of reviewers with broad expertise and with experience in identifying innovative approaches to solving daunting challenges. Proposals may also be reviewed by a separate panel of relevant experts. The entire review process is blinded, and the applicant’s name and affiliation are not revealed to the reviewers.

Tips from Reviewers

Reviewers have identified the following critical characteristics of successful proposals:

1. **Innovation:** In the first section of the proposal, applicants should include one or two sentences **in bold** that capture the essence of their idea. These sentences should convey what is exciting about the idea, why it is innovative and how it differs substantially from existing solutions. Applying expertise from outside the topic area is one of the sources of innovation evident in funded projects.
2. **Responsiveness of the Proposal:** The proposal must explain how the idea addresses a key need illustrated in the topic description. In addition, the topic description highlights ideas that will not be funded, so applicants should make sure that their idea does not fall into one of these categories.
3. **Testability of the Idea:** Applicants must include a clear, logical and thoughtful description of how the proposed idea will be tested and produce interpretable and unambiguous data. Since proposals are reviewed “blind,” this description is a key element in conferring scientific credibility on the project.
4. **Feasibility of the Project:** The application must describe how the work will be performed within the GCE Phase I budget and within the 18-month time frame allocated for a Phase I GCE award.
5. **Potential for Increased Funding:** GCE is designed as a two-phase funding mechanism whereby projects that have shown initial promise can receive increased funding. Phase I applications are more likely to be funded if they clearly and convincingly describe a general plan for moving forward in Phase II.
6. **Clarity:** Most of the reviewers for each proposal are likely not to be deep experts in the field. To maximize the chance of being funded, proposals should be written in clear language without jargon specific to a particular field. Given the two-page limit, proposals also should be concise and balanced in how they present the elements described above.

To learn more about the ideas that have received funding, please visit the Grand Challenges web site: <http://www.grandchallenges.org/Explorations/Pages/GrantsAwarded.aspx>.