

Respondent: Laura Gee, Tufts University

What external organizations have funded your work?

I've been funded by Facebook Research and the WE Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Why do you apply for external funding? What do you use the money for?

I apply for external funding for a few reasons. First, and perhaps obviously, I apply when I think a project will be better from money being spent on it in the form of things like subject payments for a lab experiment, research assistants, or purchasing a proprietary dataset. Second, I apply to get feedback on a project before it has even begun. Often I will apply and won't get funding, but I always reach out afterwards to get feedback on why we were not funded because the people judging my grant application are often also the audience for the eventual papers I write, so knowing what they didn't find compelling early in the process is incredibly useful. Third, I apply as a commitment device to move a project forward in a timely manner. There are very few enforceable deadlines in academia, grants are one of the few, and so they can really help me to push something forward.

When you were first beginning to apply for funding, how did you discover organizations that might be interested in your work?

When I first began applying for funding I asked others in my field where they had applied before, and in particular people earlier in their careers. I also set up a meeting with the grants and foundations people at my institution to ask for ideas about places I could approach about funding my work.

What were the biggest mistakes you made, in your early applications?

One of my biggest mistakes in my early applications was not asking for more input from the organization who was providing funding before applying. I didn't realize that you could (and should) reach out to the program officer or person who is listed as a contact with a 1-2 page summary of your project to see if it is a good fit at least a month before the deadline for funding. That person will often give you important feedback that will make you either realize the project is a bad fit, and you shouldn't waste your time (or theirs) with a full application, or they will help you understand how to describe your project in a more compelling way.

Are there other ways in which your process for applying for funding and writing proposals has changed over time?

In my early career I was told that I didn't need funding to obtain tenure at my institution, so I only applied for funding when the project really needed external funding. I obtained a good amount of internal funding for projects early in my career because it felt like a better use of my time to concentrate on the easiest sources of funding, which for me were often internal, and

spend most of time working on the projects. As I've progressed in my career I am now more comfortable taking on longer term projects, which also require more funding, and as such I'm applying for more grants than I did earlier on.

What surprised you the most about how the funding process works?

I was surprised by how often I get rejected, although I suppose I likely shouldn't be that surprised.

What advice would you give to scholars who are struggling to find funding for their work?

I'd honestly evaluate how much you need external funding to meet your goals for the work and for your career trajectory. Then I'd aim at getting the amount of funding that just allows you to obtain those goals. I'd also suggest working with others who have been successful in obtaining funding and learning from them (this is something I wish I'd done more of). Last, I'd suggest asking for feedback from colleagues, your institution's grants/foundations office and grant writing office, and from the people at the funding agency.