

Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Grant Writing

Overview

The goal of a grant request is to demonstrate convergence between your mission and a funders values, between your program's purpose and their past giving history, between your timelines and their grant cycles. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be an effective tool for developing grant requests to corporate or foundation funders.

Use Cases

Let AI:

- Sort the data
- Build prospect pipelines
- Draft generic language

AI Can:

- Draft basic narrative components
- Summarize large data sets or research reports into clean copy
- Refine grammar, eliminate passive voice, improve flow
- Suggest edits that align tone and structure

How-To Guide: Best Practices for Using AI for Grant Writing

The responsible use of AI can significantly augment the grant writing process, improving efficiency and clarity. However, it is important to prioritize **academic integrity, transparency, and accuracy** while navigating institutional and funder-specific policies.

1. Ethical and Policy Compliance

The primary rule of using AI in grant writing is to **know and follow all applicable guidelines**.

A. Funder and University Policies

- **Check Funder Rules First:** Always consult the specific guidelines of the funding agency (e.g., NIH, NSF, NEH, private foundations). Some prohibit AI use entirely for proposal development, others require explicit disclosure, and some may limit the volume of submissions if AI is suspected of heavily driving the application.
- **Adhere to University Guidelines:** Review [NIU's policies](#) and departmental policies on the use of generative AI in research and writing, especially regarding **confidentiality and intellectual property (IP)**.

B. Confidentiality and Privacy

- **Do Not Input Sensitive Data:** Never paste confidential, proprietary, or unpublished data, specific aims, or details about research participants (even metadata) into public, open-source AI tools like general-purpose chatbots.

- **Protect IP:** Be aware that data input into some public AI models may be used to train future models, potentially exposing your novel research ideas or proprietary information to others. Consider using **secure, institutional-approved AI tools** if available.

C. Transparency and Attribution

- **The Applicant is Accountable:** You are ultimately responsible for the entire content, accuracy, and integrity of the grant application. AI tools cannot be named as authors or co-authors.
- **Disclose AI Use:** If a funding agency requires disclosure, be transparent. Detail the specific AI tool used, the section it assisted with, and the nature of the assistance (e.g., "Grammar check using Grammarly," or "Drafting of the Literature Review outline using ChatGPT 4.0 with subsequent human editing").
- **Verify All Sources:** AI-generated citations and references are notorious for **hallucinations** (fabricating sources that do not exist). **Every citation, fact, and data point** generated or suggested by AI must be manually checked against original, credible sources.

2. Strategic Use of AI

AI is a powerful **assistant** but is not a replacement for your scientific expertise, strategic thinking, or compelling narrative voice.

Effective Use Cases	AVOID Using AI For
Outlining: Structuring a proposal section based on funder criteria.	Generating First Drafts of Core Content: Your scientific voice, novelty, and unique approach will be lost or generic.
Proofreading & Editing: Checking for grammar, spelling, clarity, and conciseness.	Fabricating Data or Citations: AI can make up facts or references.
Summarizing & Synthesis: Condensing lengthy articles for a literature review or creating an executive summary draft.	Inputting Sensitive Information: Never compromise confidentiality or IP.
Brainstorming: Generating alternative phrasing for a complex idea or listing potential keywords for search.	Replacing Human Judgment: The final strategic decisions and persuasive narrative must be your own.
Tailoring & Word Count: Adjusting the tone, simplifying jargon for a public-facing abstract, or cutting text to meet a strict word count.	Submitting Unedited AI Output: Reviewers can often detect generic, AI-generated prose, which can negatively impact the application.

3. Mastering the AI Prompt

The quality of AI output is directly proportional to the quality of your input (the prompt). Be a "scientific" prompter.

1. **Be Explicit and Detailed:** Provide specific instructions, context, and constraints.
 - *Example: Instead of "Write a problem statement," use: "You are a program officer at the MacArthur Foundation reviewing a grant for arts programming. Critique the following draft of my application based on the guidelines for 'Chicago Commitments.' Point out any jargon and suggest a more compelling opening sentence. The word count limit is 500."*
2. **Provide Reference Material:** If appropriate, upload or paste in your existing (non-sensitive) text (e.g., your specific aims, a draft section, or the funder's exact review criteria) and ask the AI to work **on that material**. This grounds the AI in your project and reduces "hallucinations."
3. **Break Down Complex Tasks:** Do not ask the AI to write an entire proposal in one go. Segment the work (e.g., Step 1: Create an outline. Step 2: Draft a 200-word paragraph for the budget justification. Step 3: Polish the grammar of the methodology section.)
4. **Iterate and Refine:** The first output is rarely the best. Analyze the result and provide feedback to the AI.
 - *Example: "That's too formal. Adopt a more assertive and direct tone," or "Incorporate the data from the attached table into that paragraph."*

4. Final Review Checklist

Before submission, you must finalize the application and ensure the AI's influence has been managed responsibly.

- **Read the Entire Proposal Aloud:** This is the best way to catch grammatical errors, awkward phrasing, and the generic, flat tone often associated with unedited AI content.
- **Confirm All Facts:** Check every single statistic, reference, date, and claim. Do not trust the AI to be accurate.
- **Maintain Your Voice:** Ensure the final narrative reflects your unique expertise and compelling vision. The writing should sound like you and your team.
- **Verify Funder Compliance:** Double-check all formatting, page limits, font requirements, and mandatory sections, as AI may not always adhere to strict technical specifications.

REFERENCES: AI-Powered Grant Development webinar. Marts&Lundy, (2025).
This information was generated with assistance by Google's Gemini, (2025).