“Strategies for an effective grant proposal”—A conversation with Steve Kresovich, Vice Provost for Life Sciences and Department of Plant Breeding and Plant Biology

Know your Program
- Talk to the Program Director about
  o the scope of the program
  o recently funded projects
  o the director’s vision for the program and it’s niche and function s/he sees for it
  o listen for the questions they can answer, and those they won’t answer
  o aim your proposal to the needs of the program

- Know that/how timing affects success—there may be realities in funding schedules, numbers of other highly qualified applications that came in at the same time as yours, changing priorities within a program or directorate that affect your success.

Tenacity and thickskinnedness
- Read reviews carefully and distinguish between those that are helpful and those that just hurt.
  o Respond to the reviewers carefully and completely
  o Resubmit as soon as possible with the changes to show the current reviewers that you took their advice seriously
- Submit enough grants and be prepared for only 35% success
- Know the funding rates in your discipline

Establish a scientific identity
- Become known nationally and internationally in your discipline
  o Invite yourself to other universities to give talks
  o Use your friends to help you network with their friends
  o Email someone even if you know them only remotely. They get benefits from bringing you to their campus too.
  o Get on the colloquium committee in your department and invite those people whom you would like to meet
- Build a strong record, with publications a priority and grants second in priority (especially if you’re early in your career)
- Seek out a constellation of new mentors, the important people in your discipline. Don’t just rely on your original mentor/advisor—you need your own identity to be successful
- At the same time, don’t neglect positive networks and collaborations that you already have in place, just expand beyond the original group. Your “pedigree” can become a problem

Manage your team, your collaborators
- Watch how the people you choose to work with fit together. They don’t all have to be the “best” people in the field, but you must know that the team will work well together. It is a community you are committed to and must work with over time.
- Make sure to meet your collaborators in person to establish the basics of the project. Do not rely on conference calls, videos, etc, but discuss issues face-to-face.
• When planning a project, circulate a matrix to your collaborators so they can clearly establish what they will work on and discuss this
• Establish clear objectives and topics for the project, with assigned responsibilities
• Establish a clear breakdown of how the money will be spent, so no-one can misunderstand once the project is under way
• Clearly explain in your proposal why and how the collaboration brings value to your project, why it will be especially successful and bring results
• Actually do all assignments you have agreed to do. You will become known as someone with whom it is good to work if you are prompt and thorough in your part of the project
• If you find you cannot to your assignment, hand the project off to someone who will do a good job—it will be more successful and you may save your own reputation
• Avoid people who do not do their assignments, no matter how well viewed they are in the field
• Avoid people whose scientific work you do not respect
• Work with people you like on a goal that is attainable. Work with people you trust—those who are potential friends