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## More and Better Grant Proposals? The Evaluation of a Grant-Writing Group at a Mid-Sized Canadian University

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**Abstract:** *Obtaining external funding has become increasingly difficult for Canadian researchers in the social sciences and humanities. Our literature review suggests that grant-writing groups and workshops make an important contribution to increasing both applications for external funding and success in funding competitions. This article describes an 8-month grant-writing group for 14 social scientists in a mid-sized Canadian university. The goal was to increase applications and successes in funding competitions. The group integrated several strategies perceived by Porter (2011b) to encourage more and better grant proposals: offering “homegrown” workshops that were ongoing rather than occasional, sharing successful proposals, coaching and editing, bringing together emerging researchers with established ones, and placing participants in reviewers’ shoes. These strategies were combined in a series of monthly sessions that required participants to write each section of a grant proposal and share it with others for feedback. Participants perceived this approach to work well; it appeared to provide useful feedback and examples, and develop a sense of accountability and community. The number of applications submitted for funding increased 80% from the funding cycle just prior to the group (2013-2014) to the funding cycle during or immediately after the group (2015-2016). The rate of success in obtaining funds from internal and external grant submissions increased from 33% to 50% over this same time period. The greatest increase in submissions and success were experienced by emerging and alternative academic researchers. From their program evaluation, authors conclude that grant-writing groups are a useful way to build researcher confidence and commitment to submitting proposals to funding competitions and contribute to success, especially for researchers with limited experience in such competitions.*

**Keywords:** *Academic writing; alternative academics; grant-writing groups; grant writing; program evaluation; writing workshops*

## Introduction

External or extramural funding is essential to conducting much academic research and, in many departments with graduate programs, to providing financial support and research experience for graduate students. Success in obtaining such funding also enhances the reputation of researchers and their universities. However, in Canada, obtaining external funding has become increasingly difficult for researchers from the social sciences and humanities due to a serious decline in granting-council funding in inflation-adjusted dollars since 2007 (CAUT, 2013). The corresponding decline in grant success rates makes identifying and implementing strategies for increasing success in funding competitions ever more important for researchers and universities alike. This article describes implementation of one such strategy, an 8-month grant-writing group at a mid-sized Canadian university. The goal of the grant-writing group was to increase submissions and success in external funding competitions among researchers in humanities and social science related disciplines with three specific objectives: (a) to strengthen grant-writing skills of participants; (b) to increase submissions to both internal and external funding competitions, recognizing the importance of internal funding as a launchpad for external grants; and (c) to increase success rates in funding competitions. The grant-writing group strategy is presented here within the context of the literature on predictors of, and strategies to enhance, success in external funding competitions and various indicators of the degree of success of the group in meeting its objectives.

## Literature Review

### *Method*

Literature on enhancing success in external funding is found primarily in the field of research administration. To find relevant literature in this field, we searched tables of contents of major journals (e.g., *Journal of Research Administration*, *Research Management Review*, *Journal of the Grants Professionals Association*) as well as the reference lists of articles. While this literature includes grant-writing workshops among the strategies for enhancing success, we had to turn to the creative writing literature for details related to the methods, strategies, and dynamics of writing groups. We relied on books on creative writing and writing groups, and expanded outward using references from these books.

This approach produced 39 articles and one book chapter summarized in Table 1. Thirty of these focused on success in obtaining external funding, and 13 addressed the dynamics of writing groups. Lead authors included 12 who were in administrative positions at universities or research organizations and 16 faculty members. The administrators were more likely to publish several articles while faculty most often published only one. Most publications came from research or experiences in the United States, with one from Australia, two from Canada, and one from Uganda. The 30 publications that addressed strategies to enhance success covered three thematic areas: (a) predictors of success ( $n=6$ ), (b) what can or has been done by colleges and universities to enhance success ( $n=16$ ), and (c) barriers to and enablers of submitting funding proposals ( $n=8$ ). Of the 13 publications that specifically addressed writing groups, four focused on writing for funding, and the remainder on writing for postsecondary courses or publication.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Reviewed.

Author	Date	Journal or Book Not determined	Theme
Badenhorst et al. (Canada)	2013	All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education	Writing groups
Badenhorst et al. (Canada)	2016	Canadian Journal of Education	Writing groups
Banta et al.	2004	Journal of Research Administration	Strategies to enhance success; writing groups
Boyer & Cockriel	1998	SRA Journal	Individual barriers & enablers
Boyer & Cockriel	2001	Journal of Research Administration	Individual barriers & enablers
Bruffee	1984	Writing centers: Theory and administration (Olson, ed.)	Writing groups
Bryan	1996	Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy	Writing groups
Carr, McNicholas, & Miller	2009	Research Management Review	Barriers to success
Dingerson	1977	Journal of Higher Education	Strategies to enhance success
Dooley	1994	Research Management Review	Individual barriers & enablers
Dopke & Crawley	2013	Journal of Research Administration	Writing groups; strategies to enhance success
Easter & Schultz	1998	Research Management Review	Strategies to enhance success
Easterly & Pemberton	2008	Research Management Review	Individual barriers & enablers
Frantz	2013	Research Management Review	Writing groups; strategies to enhance success
Friend & Gonzalez	2009	Academe	Writing groups
Gibson	2015	Journal of the Grant Professionals Association	Strategies to enhance success
Houfek et al.	2010	Nurse Educator	Writing groups

Kleinfelder, Price, & Dake	2003	American Journal of Health Education	Individual barriers & enablers
Liebert	1977	Journal of Higher Education	Predictors of success
Linder et al.	2014	Innovative Higher Education	Writing groups
Mishler	1988	Research Management Review	Strategies to enhance success; Institutional strategies
Mishler	1989	Research Management Review	Strategies to enhance success; Institutional strategies
Monahan	1993	SRA Journal	Individual barriers & enablers
Monahan & Fortune	1995	Research Management Review	Predictors of success
Muffo & Coccari	1982	Research in Higher Education	Predictors of success
Muir	1979	Research in Higher Education	Predictors of success
Neumann	1978	Research in Higher Education	Predictors of success
Nguyen & Meek (Australia)	2015	Journal of Research Administration	Strategies to enhance success; Institutional strategies
Porter	2004	Journal of Research Administration	Strategies to enhance success
Porter	2007	Journal of Research Administration	Strategies to enhance success
Porter	2011a	Research Management Review	Strategies to enhance success
Porter	2011b	Research Management Review	Strategies to enhance success
Salas-Lopez et al.	2011	Journal of General Internal Medicine	Writing groups
Schumacher	1994	Research Management Review	Strategies to enhance success
Sisk	2011	Journal of the Grant Professionals Association	Strategies to enhance success

Steinert, McLeod, Liben, & Snell	2008	Medical Teacher	Writing groups
Tumwijekye et al. (Uganda)	2013	Journal of Research Administration	Strategies to enhance success
Walden & Bryan	2010	Journal of Research Administration	Individual barriers & enablers
Whitney	2012	English Journal	Writing groups
Wolfe	1982	Research in Higher Education	Predictors of success

### *Strategies to Enhance Success in Obtaining External Funding*

Several authors identified the 1970s as a time when American postsecondary institutions were turning increased attention to external funding for research (Liebert, 1977; Mishler, 1988; Muir, 1979). Literature during this period followed two lines of inquiry, both of which have continued on to the present. The first is publications by administrators about strategies for postsecondary institutions to increase funding success (Banta et al., 2004; Dingerson, 1977; Dopke & Crawley, 2013; Easter & Schultz, 1998; Frantz, 2013; Gibson, 2015; Mishler, 1988, 1989; Porter, 2004, 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Schumacher, 1994; Sisk, 2011; Tumwijekye, Motevalli, Nambi, & Kyeyune, 2013). The second is publications written almost exclusively by faculty identifying individual, disciplinary and institutional predictors of success in competitions (Liebert, 1977; Monahan & Fortune, 1995; Muffo & Coccarri, 1982; Muir, 1979; Neumann, 1978; Nguyen & Meek, 2015; Wolfe, 1982). Publications addressing barriers and enablers to grant writing began to appear in the 1990s (Boyer & Cockriel, 1998, 2001; Carr, McNicholas, & Miller, 2009; Dooley, 1994; Easterly & Pemberton, 2008; Kleinfelder, Price, & Dake, 2003; Monahan, 1993; Walden & Bryan, 2010). Since 2000, these have been joined by numerous publications and internet-based materials, workshops, and webinars on how to write successful funding proposals. To keep the literature review manageable, and to maintain a focus on scholarly publications, these latter resources were not included in this review. The 13 resources on writing groups addressed how such groups benefit writing; four specifically writing for funding (Banta et al., 2004; Dopke & Crawley, 2013; Frantz, 2013; Houfek et al., 2010), and the remainder writing for postsecondary courses and/or for publication (Badenhorst et al., 2013; 2016; Bruffee, 1984; Bryan, 1996; Friend & Gonzalez, 2009; Linder, Cooper, McKenzie, Raesch, & Reeve, 2014; Salas-Lopez et al., 2011; Steinert, McLeod, Liben, & Snell, 2008; Whitney, 2012).

### *Predictors of Success*

The earliest publications focused on identifying predictors of success with theories of meritocracy, institutional reputation, size, resources and privilege, as well as disciplinary differences the focus of these inquiries. Meritocracy, measured as the number of peer-reviewed publications by individual faculty members or prior funding success by institutions, was a significant predictor of

success in external grant competitions for both individuals (Liebert, 1977; Neumann, 1978) and institutions (Wolffe, 1982). The size of the effect, however, was shown to vary by: (a) discipline, with funding in chemistry, for example, more strongly influenced by meritocracy than funding in sociology (Neumann, 1978); (b) recency, with recent publications having a stronger effect on funding success than career total (Liebert, 1977); and (c) the stature of the funding agency, with a stronger effect on success in applications to 'major' than 'minor' league agencies (Liebert, 1977). Regardless of the number of publications of the researcher, disciplines differed in the funding their faculty garnered, reflective of differential costs of research and the sources of funding available (Liebert, 1977; Neumann, 1978). At the institutional level, Wolffe (1982) also demonstrated that the number of graduate programs positively influenced the amount of external research funding across the institution irrespective of indicators of prior performance by a researcher.

Although multiple other factors were found to influence external funding success when examined individually, prior performance, discipline, and emphasis on graduate education were the only predictors that retained statistical significance when multivariate analyses were conducted (Liebert, 1977; Muffo & Coccari, 1982; Muir, 1979; Wolffe, 1982).

### *Institutional Strategies*

John Mishler (1988) outlined a three-level strategy for small to mid-sized colleges and universities transitioning from a focus on teaching to an enhanced focus on externally funded research. Mishler stressed the importance of the institutional commitment and preparation of a mission statement, long-range strategic plan, and goal setting that reflected the shift toward increased research (1998, p. 19). A critical component of each was enhancing infrastructure at the institutional and departmental levels. At the institutional level, this included development of an administrative research unit; provision of internal research grants, modern laboratory space and equipment, and graduate research assistants; and research support from non-academic units such as computing services. At the level of the academic unit or department, incentives were included for faculty such as enhancement of salaries and reduced teaching loads, department goal-setting related to research, and identification of centres of excellence. At the level of individual faculty members, skills enhancement were included (e.g., through attending workshops or seminars sponsored by the department or administrative research unit, partnering with established researchers for proposal review) and participation in centres of excellence.

Several strategies described by Mishler (1988) have been examined in detail by other authors. The prime incentives documented by Michael Dingerson (1977) and Marilyn Banta et al. (2004) included internal research grants for small or pilot projects to develop and demonstrate competence, test or refine research procedures or instruments, and contribute to publications, all of which enhance the profile and competitiveness of researchers in funding competitions. T.L. Huong Nguyen and Vincent Meek (2015) stressed the need for administrative infrastructure to support research, especially in universities in low-resource settings. Workshops were included in almost all the literature as an important approach for building skills, providing information, enhancing motivation, and establishing supportive, mentoring relationships. Banta et al. (2004) provided an overview of their experience in a two-year fellowship program at a Colorado

university that included both a financial incentive and workshop program in the form of luncheon meetings and retreats, formal mentoring relationships, and a quality review team that reviewed the two external funding proposals that fellows were expected to submit over the course of the program. Robert Porter highlighted the importance of ongoing, in comparison to single or occasional, workshops for developing grant-writing skills and a grant-writing culture (e.g., 2004; 2011b). Polyanne Frantz (2013) described how a culture of grant-writing was created in faculty writing groups using a faculty learning commons model. Porter (2011b) further described how workshops and additional strategies, such as visits by grant program officers, sharing successful proposals, mock review panels, coaching and editing, mentor matchmaking, online tutorials, department writing retreats, and awards newsletters, could increase participation and success in funding competitions. These strategies were central to the curriculum in grant-writing courses described by Anne Sisk at the University of Rochester in the United States (2011) and Henry Tumwujukye and colleagues at Makerere University in Uganda (2013). Finally, the role of grant program officers and others in providing training, coaching, and encouragement was highlighted not only by Mishler (1988) and Porter (2011b), but also by Linda Easter and Eileen Schultz (1998) and Nicole Gibson (2015). Easter and Schulz (1998) detailed the contribution made by a standing committee that worked with faculty and increased the number of proposals submitted and funding received at a Pennsylvania university.

### *Individual Barriers and Enablers*

Articles describing barriers and enablers to success were similar in focus to the earlier “predictors of success,” but relied on faculty reports without considering their association with actual success. The most commonly reported barrier was time constraints. Most faculty reported being too busy to allocate time to preparing grant applications, citing heavy teaching loads, committee work, and pressure to publish (Dooley, 1994; Kleinfelder, Price, & Drake, 2003; Monahan, 1993; Monahan & Fortune, 1995). This was more often the case for non-tenured than tenured faculty (Walden & Bryan, 2010) and female than male faculty (Easterly & Pemberton, 2008). Other barriers included lack of familiarity with the grant process and lack of understanding of budgeting (Boyer & Cockriel, 1998; 2001), as well as lack of awareness of services provided by research offices in their institutions (Easterly & Pemberton, 2008) and the perception that writing grant proposals created more work with no direct financial benefits accruing to faculty (Walden & Bryan, 2010).

Enablers of increased submissions to external funding agencies included reduction in teaching load for the express purpose of writing grant applications, salary incentives for successful applications, inclusion of proposal submissions and success in tenure and promotion decisions, funds to travel to meet with peers and funding agencies in preparation for writing proposals, and institutional support both in educating faculty on the inner workings of the funding world and in developing the skills for writing successful grant applications (Boyer & Cockeriel, 1998; Dooley, 1994; Easterly & Pemberton, 2008; Kleinfelder, Price, & Dake, 2003; Monahan, 1993; Walden & Bryan, 2010). Walden and Bryan further identified awareness of the benefits that accrue with external funding as enablers to preparing applications (2010). These included increased research autonomy, funds for personnel support in the form of graduate assistants and clerical staff, flexibility in how time is allocated, and enhanced professional reputation. They suggested



an additional enabler or incentive would be to allocate a portion of the discretionary and indirect funds associated with external grants directly to faculty (2010, p. 91).

## Writing Groups

The 13 resources that we used on writing groups came primarily from English and creative-writing departments in American postsecondary institutions, with some from writing for research publications in health and education. Several authors emphasized the importance of the social dimension of writing groups for enabling or improving writing, building confidence, and/or maintaining commitment to the group (Badenhorst et al., 2016; Bruffee, 1984; Frantz, 2013; Linder et al., 2014; Salas-Lopez et al., 2011; Steinert et al., 2008). Commitment to group objectives and accountability were identified as essential to group success (Bryan, 1996; Banta et al., 2004; Frantz, 2013; Linder et al., 2014). These are fostered through collaboration among group members initiated during what Debbie Salas-Lopez and colleagues referred to as the “forming stage” (2011, p. 113). It is during this stage that personal relationships become solidified, allowing writing-group participants to feel safe and a general sense of acceptance. Participants in a writing group for new Education faculty at Memorial University, Canada, reported that the sense of safety and support system that emerged within their group led to increased productivity. Members successfully applied for funding for their own research (Badenhorst et al., 2013), and published collaboratively and individually (2016). From a review of published accounts of writing groups, the Memorial University team concluded that writing groups increase writing productivity (Badenhorst et al., 2013). However, the value of writing-groups may extend beyond enabling writing by providing a venue where new faculty may discuss broader issues such as “the politics of writing, the nuances of the tenure process, and even pedagogical practices” (Friend & Gonzalez, 2009, para. 2).

Julia Houfek and colleagues (2010) proposed writing groups as a strategy for faculty at a Nebraska College of Nursing to overcome barriers such as poor time management and procrastination (contributing to claims of time constraints), as well as negative emotions associated with writing (e.g., fear of rejection or inadequacy, anxiety, lack of confidence). Time constraints and procrastination were counteracted with the scheduling of group sessions and the homework expectations for work to be shared at sessions. Negative emotions were addressed through the co-mentoring element of writing groups. Anne Whitney, referencing experience with a writing group for public school teachers, credited group celebrations of success with counteracting what she refers to as “the dandelion feeling” (2012, p. 52), that is, a feeling that if you succeed too much you will be chopped down by colleagues like the dandelion flower that stretches above the grass. From a literature review on writing groups in higher education, Celeste Badenhorst and colleagues observed that such groups are proposed to address challenges facing academic writers, such as alienation, isolation, anxiety, and balancing teaching, research, and service (2016).

Ten of the 16 sources on strategies to enhance success in funding competitions identified grant-writing groups and writing workshops or courses as making an important contribution to increasing both applications for external research funding and success in funding competitions (Banta et al., 2004; Easterly & Pemberton, 2008; Frantz, 2013; Houfek et al., 2010; Mishler, 1989;

Monahan, 1993; Porter, 2004; 2011b; Sisk, 2011; Tumwijekye et al., 2013). Authors perceived groups and/or workshops as counteracting many barriers identified by faculty to preparing funding proposals, as well as including both many enablers of funding proposals and the general benefits of writing groups. The remainder of this article describes a grant-writing group that met during the 2014-2015 academic year at a mid-sized Canadian university.

### **Setting: University of Windsor**

The University of Windsor, Canada's southernmost university, is located in the city of Windsor on the Ontario-Michigan border. This mid-sized, comprehensive university has over 12,780 full-time and part-time undergraduates, 2,794 graduate students, and over 500 researchers in 9 faculties (University of Windsor, 2016). The university implemented a centralized research administration infrastructure in the 1980s. Since 2007, the Office of Research & Innovation Services has grown from four staff reporting to the Associate Vice-President, Research, to five staff and one senior administrator under the direction of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation. Since its inception, the office has supported research through institutional-level supports consistent with those described by Mishler (1988): managing internal grant programs, fostering partnerships with local industry, and coordinating the development of campus-wide research objectives. Initially, the small office reviewed institutional grant applications, and checked other applications for completeness and correctness before mailing them to funding agencies. Around 2007, the growing office began transitioning to a professional services model, where research coordinators engage in diverse activities designed to encourage researchers to write more and better grant proposals. These activities include those recommended by Porter (2011a, 2011b): publishing a grant newsletter; speaking at departmental meetings and facilitating workshops; collecting and sharing successful proposals; providing guidance and editorial advice for strengthening applications; and piloting a research leadership chair program in the faculties, with some positions designed to mentor colleagues in grant writing. In addition to the institutional-level activities of the Office of Research & Innovation Services, some faculties and departments encourage research and grant writing through workshops and brown-bag lunches, internal grant programs, and informal and formal peer review. The Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, for instance, requires that all applications for external funding be reviewed by the Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies. This position was created in 2002 to enhance success in external funding competitions. In 2014-2015, the Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences partnered with the Office of Research & Innovation Services to facilitate a grant-writing group for researchers from across the University of Windsor.

### **The Grant-Writing Group**

The University of Windsor grant-writing group for social sciences and humanities was offered to 14 researchers who responded to an open invitation in the 2014-2015 academic year: 4 established researchers (mid to late career); 6 emerging researchers (5 years or less into a tenure-track or tenured position); and 4 alternative academics (PhDs in academic positions other than tenure-track or tenured). With the exception of two guest speakers, workshops were facilitated by the Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies and a research coordinator from the Office

of Research & Innovation Services (authors Maticka-Tyndale and Wiebe). Sponsors hoped the grant-writing group would increase both the number of grant applications and the number of successful applications at the University of Windsor.

Participants generally met in a University of Windsor workshop room between 10 a.m. and noon on one Friday each month from November 2014 to June 2015. We chose Fridays because it was the weekday with the fewest scheduled classes. Most sessions were divided between work-in-progress groups and a workshop. Participants were invited to share their homework with us between sessions for additional feedback. We encouraged participants to bring their full grant proposals to the Office of Research & Innovation Services Writing Retreat in August 2015, where they could participate in mock review panels and finalize their proposals using reviewer feedback. Moreover, we invited participants to submit their finished proposals for a \$5,000 award for the best proposal offered by the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences.

The grant-writing group followed a consistent teaching format. Each two-hour session began with about 50 minutes during which participants discussed their homework in groups of two to four (depending on attendance), with members identifying strengths and making suggestions for improvement. We paused midway for a 10-minute refreshment break, and concluded with a workshop that introduced a new topic and assigned homework due by the next session (e.g., write a one-page knowledge mobilization plan).

### **Methods to Assess Success in Achieving Objectives**

Our program evaluation used four sources of data to assess the success of the grant-writing group in meeting its objectives: (a) participation records, (b) exit tickets, (c) a survey of participants, and (d) institutional data on submissions to internal and external funding competitions and success in these competitions. Participation records consisted of attendance records for each meeting, homework submissions to the group leaders, and submissions to the competition for the best proposal. These records were used as indicators of the level of sustained participation in the group. Exit tickets completed by participants at the end of each group session asked for anonymous feedback from participants on what went well and what could be improved. Two months after the last session in June, surveys were distributed to all participants (see Appendix 1). (We had planned to distribute the survey immediately following a mock review-panel session in August, but this event was cancelled due to low registration.) Participants were asked to (a) rate how well 6 aspects of the group process (e.g., format, time for peer feedback, homework) and 9 characteristics of the sessions (e.g., refreshments, location), worked for them on a scale ranging from “didn’t work at all” to “worked extremely well”; (b) rate the frequency of 8 personal experiences (e.g., feeling comfortable sharing work, feeling responsibility to do homework) from “never” (1) to “always” (5); and (c) assess whether their writing skills were strengthened in 9 areas required in grant proposals (e.g., statements of significance, student training plans, budget justification) and whether there were changes in 8 areas related to writing proposals (e.g., adopted new writing habits, feel more confident in applying for a grant) both rated as “yes,” “no,” or “not sure.” In addition, space was provided following each series of questions and at the end of the survey for open-ended comments. Given the small size of the group ( $n=14$ ), no questions were

asked about discipline, stage of career, or any other personal identifying information, in order to maintain confidentiality. Reminders to complete the surveys were sent via email at the end of August. The exit tickets and surveys were used to assess participants' subjective evaluation of specific administrative, logistical, pedagogical, and content characteristics of the grant-writing group and its usefulness and effect for them. The final source of data was university records on grant submissions and outcomes. These records comprised the "hard data" to assess whether the grant-writing group met its goal of increasing applications and successes in research funding competitions. These evaluation procedures were reviewed and approved by the university's Research Ethics Board.

## Results

### *Participation*

While many of our researchers are part-time residents of Windsor who leave for home on Thursday evenings, our grant-writing group averaged 79% attendance (11 of 14 participants). Attendance dipped to an average of 57% during the last two months (6.5 of 14 participants) due to conflict with a holiday weekend, the end of the academic year, and the onset of conference season. We began the group with 17 members, which stabilized at 14 after the first 3 months. Of these 14 members, 3 attended only half of the 8 sessions. Two of these were new hires who came directly from PhD programs into departments with faculty resources that were so depleted that they needed to focus on teaching responsibilities for at least two years. The remaining 11 participants attended an average of 6.5 of 8 sessions. The generally good attendance attests, in part, to a schedule that worked "extremely well" according to responses on the survey. "[I like] keeping my grantmaking ambitions *on timeline*," wrote one participant on an exit ticket. "Getting me out of the house today was useful," noted another. "I need structure.... I want to have writing time but I allow other things to interfere." Yet another participant emailed to say that "Meeting once per month forces us to space out the grant writing process and not to crunch all the work that needs to be done in the few weeks prior to grant application deadlines."

Two of three survey respondents noted that, as a result of their participation in the grant-writing group, they would begin working on proposals six months in advance of the deadline. However, the larger pattern of group writing behaviour suggests that these good intentions may not be realized. From the first workshop, group members were aware that \$5,000 would be awarded to the best grant proposal. During the penultimate workshop, we announced the August deadline for this competition. Nearly half of the grant-writing group (6 of 14) registered for an optional two-day writing retreat in late August, during which they could share their finished proposals with other participants on mock adjudication committees and revise their proposals for submission for the award. The session was cancelled, however, due to last-minute withdrawals. Moreover, only one-third of members (5 of 14) submitted proposals for the \$5,000 award in August, although nearly two-thirds (9 of 14) could have submitted the same proposal that they had already submitted to another competition during the grant-writing group. Two of the five proposals that were submitted for the dean's award did not meet reviewer expectations. Finally, while we averaged a 50% response rate on exit tickets for each workshop, only 21% of group members

(3 of 14) submitted surveys of the grant-writing group by the August deadline. This suggests that, without the structure of our ongoing monthly meetings, participants lost momentum on their proposals. All survey respondents agreed that “The group meetings and assignments have made developing a grant proposal more manageable.” Our group appeared to help participants overcome the common barrier of time constraints, but only while the group was in session.

### *Teaching Approach: Work-In-Progress Groups*

Participants commented on the division of group meetings into *work in progress* and *workshop* sessions on both exit tickets and the survey. The survey indicated that, generally, this format worked “extremely well,” and exit tickets suggested that the format was useful in that it was “grounded in the reality of grant proposal instruction” and provided a “good balance between active learning & active listening.”

Twenty-five percent of comments volunteered on exit tickets concerned the work-in-progress groups (46 of 182 comments) with participants generally positive in their comments. Over half of the comments on the work-in-progress groups (25 of 46 comments) highlighted the usefulness of sharing proposals and receiving feedback from peers. Common responses included “It’s a great experience to read, explain, justify my own proposal to people: face-to-face, from other different fields, with different experiences” and “Group feedback was very helpful. My perspective is narrow, so I really appreciate hearing other points of view. My proposal will be better as a result.” The survey indicated that suggestions for writing from the work-in-progress groups mostly worked, that respondents almost never felt uncomfortable sharing their writing, that respondents always felt comfortable making critiques of the work of others, and that respondents almost always felt safe receiving critiques from others. Moreover, respondents reported they almost always felt a responsibility to do their homework because they were presenting it to their group, and they almost always felt responsibility to attend the group even when they were unable to do their homework. In keeping with the literature on writing groups, the work-in-progress groups seem to have enabled writing and maintaining commitment to the group (Bruffee, 1984; Salas-Lopez et al., 2011; Steinert et al., 2008).

Comments about what was useful about the work-in-progress groups outnumbered suggestions for improvements to those groups by almost 3 to 1 (25 positive comments: 9 suggestions for improvement). We modified procedures based on suggestions for improvement together with our own observations. For example, we noted that some groups focussed on describing strengths in the proposals and made few suggestions for improvement. In the exit tickets, one participant thanked us for “making us switch groups,” and another asked for examples of feedback that the facilitators would offer. Accordingly, we decided to facilitate some intermingling of the groups. We also began to spend time with each group each week. Twenty-four percent of exit-ticket comments on the work-in-progress groups said that participants liked having one or both facilitators join group discussions (11 of 46), and the surveys said these visits worked well. In addition, we began to invite participants to share their homework with us between meetings for our feedback, if desired, and 79% of participants (11 of 14) did so at least once. Respondents to the survey perceived that sharing writing with facilitators outside the group worked extremely well. One participant

emailed to say that “Preparing a section of our grant application for each workshop and having the possibility to discuss it with peers has provided us with valuable feedback. Combined with the one you also give us, the feedback allows us to have stronger applications.”

### *Teaching Approach: Workshops*

Twenty-one percent of exit-ticket comments related to workshop format (17 of 81) concerned the usefulness of examples and handouts, although we learned at an early stage that we needed more examples of successful humanities proposals. Seventy-nine percent of comments concerning specific workshops (33 of 42) indicated that the participants liked a particular aspect of a workshop (e.g., “I learned how to separate goals & objectives and how to structure them in a more concise fashion. Thanks!”; “Liked help with *specifics* on daunting topics: KM/KT & budget”). The workshop that received the fewest “likes” was that on research methodology. This is perhaps because of the wide diversity in methodologies used across the humanities and social sciences, making it impossible to do justice to them all. The workshops that received the most positive comments were those on student training plans and knowledge mobilization/translation plans. About midway through the grant-writing group, exit tickets began to request content for coming workshops or suggest ways to strengthen the delivery of a specific workshop (e.g., “For training RAs are there any rules of thumb on how long different aspects of training take?”; “An opportunity for large group input on key lessons learned or key tips from review of methodology section would be helpful”). Exit tickets were uncharacteristically specific about stating participant needs for the final workshop on budget justifications (e.g., “I would like some info on navigating U of W’s finance system”; “provide us with estimates for the different budget items”; “discuss budgets for conferences/events as well”). This development may be because participants found grant budgets to be particularly challenging. However, the request for specific content to be covered during the final workshop is part of a general pattern of increasing requests for specific content and improvements during the grant-writing group. This development may be evidence of a growing sense of community and safety much like that experienced by the writing groups of Salas-Lopez et al. (2011) and Badenhorst et al. (2016).

In summary, in terms of teaching approach, participants reported the work-in-progress groups worked well. While requiring some fine-tuning (e.g., rotating members, incorporating visits from facilitators), the groups seem to have enabled grant writing, in part by creating accountability among participants. The groups also provided feedback from outside the writers’ disciplines that writers mostly found useful. Participants responded positively to examples and handouts shared during workshops. As a sense of community developed, participants became more vocal and specific about what worked in terms of workshop strategies and what content they would like to see in subsequent sessions.

### *Teaching Approach: Lessons Learned*

As workshop facilitators, we learned several important lessons about running such workshops. Commitment and attendance appeared to require regularity in the schedule, that is, that meetings occur monthly without interruption. Despite prior commitments and enthusiasm about a final

workshop during which participants would function as a grant review panel, after a two-month break in meetings, we cancelled this due to low registration, and surveys distributed after this break received a low response rate (3 of 14). Momentum appears to have been lost. To ensure regularity of meetings, attention must be paid to the natural breaks or interruptions that occur during an academic year such as exam periods, holidays, and conference season, with group meetings working around these. Moreover, to help members sustain their writing momentum after the group, administrators could encourage them to designate other events at the university for grant writing (such as writing retreats), or develop a writing group for returning members.

The division of sessions into work-in-progress group meetings and the more didactic introduction of new material appeared to work well. Both positive comments and suggestions for improvement from group members focused primarily on the work-in-progress groups. From this we gleaned several possibilities for future writing groups. These include inviting work-in-progress groups to debrief on their discussions with the group at large during each meeting; requiring members to submit draft proposals to facilitators mid-way through the program for feedback; and informing members of the final mock-panel review during the first group session, so that the entire group is spent preparing for this cumulative event.

### **Outcomes for Group Members**

The specific objectives of the grant-writing group were to use a series of workshops to (a) strengthen the grant-writing skills of participants; (b) to increase submissions to both internal and external funding competitions; and (c) to increase success rates in funding competitions. Did the group realize these objectives?

#### *Skills Development*

There were no comments about skills development volunteered on the exit tickets. However, one participant emailed to say that they developed “good grant writing reflexes during the last months. I used them in the last external and internal grant applications I made and one of them was successful.” Moreover, respondents to the survey perceived that they had significantly strengthened their skill in writing (a) for people outside their fields of research, (b) project/goals/objectives, (c) statements of significance, (d) outcomes, (e) theoretical frameworks, (f) methodology sections, (g) student training plans, (h) knowledge mobilization/translation plans, (i) budget justifications, and (j) an entire grant proposal. Respondents also agreed they were better prepared to offer other writers constructive, meaningful feedback on their grant proposals. In addition, two of the three respondents said that, as a result of participating in the group, they have adopted some positive new writing habits and are more confident about applying for a grant. This aligns with Houfek et al.’s (2010) observation that writing groups can overcome barriers such as lack of confidence.

Table 2. Number of Proposals Submitted and Successes in Receiving Funding in Internal and External Funding Competitions.

		2013-2014 Pre-GWG		2015-2016 post-GWG	
		submissions	successes	submissions	successes
<b>internal grants</b>	emerging & alternative	0	0	7	4
	established	3	2	4	3
	<b>total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>external grants</b>	emerging & alternative	1	0	2	1
	established	5	1	3	0
	<b>total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>all grants</b>	emerging & alternative	1	0	9	5
	established	8	3	7	3
	<b>total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>

Notes: emerging & alternative researchers n=10; established researchers n=4

### *Grant Success: Submissions to Funding Competitions*

The second objective for the grant-writing group was to increase submissions to both internal and external funding competitions. Table 2 provides data on both submissions and successes in applications to funding competitions during the 2013-2014 funding cycle immediately before (pre-GWG) and the 2015-2016 cycle during and immediately after (post-GWG) the grant writing group for the 4 established and 10 emerging and alternative academic researchers. Submissions to competitions increased by 80% (from 9 to 16) from the pre- to the post-GWG cycles. This increase was accounted for primarily by submissions of emerging and alternative academic researchers who had little experience in submitting applications prior to the grant-writing group and increased ninefold to the period during and after the group (from 1 to 9). The established researchers maintained a relatively “steady state” with eight submissions before and seven during and after the grant writing group. Thus, the second objective was met for emerging and alternative researchers, i.e., submissions to funding competitions were increased. The rate of submission for established researchers may well be at an appropriate maximum, averaging two or nearly two submissions per person in each of these funding cycles.



### *Internal Grant Success*

Submitting to grant programs at one's own university has traditionally been advocated as a good way for new researchers to build their research programs and history of funding success. Internal grant programs are also an important source of support for many established social science and humanities researchers who require only small amounts of funding for research assistance or travel. In 2015-2016, researchers from the social sciences and humanities submitted 45 applications to 3 internal grant programs administered by the Office of Research & Innovation Services at the University of Windsor. Of these applications, 30 were successful. Of the 14 grant-writing group members, 11 applications were submitted to the same programs. Of these, 7 were successful, producing a near equal success rate for group participants and the general university population.

The internal grant success rate of the four established researchers in the grant-writing group showed only a slight increase with two of the three submissions prior to the grant writing group and three of the four after the group successful in receiving funding, higher than the success rate for the general university population. The group members who were less experienced with grant writing progressed from no submissions prior to the group to seven submissions with four successes after. Although the rate of success was higher for the established than the emerging and alternative academic researchers, it is noteworthy that the researchers who were less experienced with grant writing achieved a near 60% success rate with their applications.

### *External Grant Success*

The University of Windsor has over 330 researchers who are eligible to submit grant proposals to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the largest source of funding available to them in Canada. In the 2015-2016 funding cycle, University of Windsor researchers submitted 16 applications to SSHRC Insight Development Grant competitions, of which 6 were successful. Five of these were submitted by grant-writing group members with one of these successful in obtaining funds. Of note is that the successful submission was by an emerging researcher who had not been successful in the past.

Group success rates in internal and external submissions combined suggest the grant-writing group met both its first and third objectives, improvement in grant-writing skills and increased success in funding competitions. The group's overall success rate increased from 33% before the group to 50% afterward. The success rate of the emerging researchers and alternative academics within the group increased from 0 to 55% (0 of 1 application funded before, 5 of 9 afterward). Similarly, the success rate of established researchers increased from 37% to 43% (3 of 8 applications funded before, 3 of 7 after). These successes are in keeping with Porter's perception that ongoing workshops help to develop grant-writing skills among participants (2004, 2011b).

In summary, the grant-writing group met its objectives to help (a) participants strengthen grant-writing skills, (b) increase submissions to internal and external funding competitions, and (c) increase success rates in funding competitions.

## Conclusion

The grant-writing group at the University of Windsor integrated several strategies perceived by Porter (2011b) to encourage more and better grant proposals. These included offering “homegrown” workshops that were ongoing rather than occasional, sharing successful proposals, coaching and editing, bringing together emerging researchers with established ones, and placing participants in reviewers’ shoes. These strategies were combined in a series of monthly sessions that required participants to write each section of a grant proposal and share it with others for feedback: project goals and objectives; significance, impact, and outcomes of the proposed project; theory; methodology; student training plans, knowledge mobilization/translation plans; and budgets. Participants perceived this approach to work well; it seemed to provide useful feedback and examples, and develop a sense of accountability and community. However, did the grant-writing group result in more and better grant proposals at the University of Windsor? In terms of encouraging more proposals, the group nearly doubled its productivity, moving from 9 applications in the granting period immediately prior to the group to 16 applications in the period during and afterward. The increase was primarily among the 10 emerging and alternative academic researchers with submissions of established researchers already high (average of 2 per cycle) prior to the grant writing group. In terms of producing better applications, the group approached the level of performance of the general university population. This is noteworthy considering that 10 of the 14 group members were new or less experienced with grant writing, with 9 of them submitting funding proposals. Of greatest importance is that the group experienced improvement in its own success rates. Moreover, the group seemed more effective in helping emerging researchers and alternative academics develop competitive proposals than it was in helping those mid to late career who were more experienced in writing for those competitions.

While we have been able to document successes in the greater number of submitted applications and successes as well in the positive feedback from participants, it is important to recognize that participants were a small, self-selected group of researchers. They had chosen to allocate a considerable amount of time to improve their grant-writing skills. Thus, the successes likely reflect the characteristics and commitment of the participants as much as the experience of participating in the group. That being said, grant applications themselves are submitted by a select group of researchers who choose to commit time to their preparation and to conducting funded research and the results of participation in the grant-writing group at the University of Windsor were consistent with those reported in the wider literature.

## Authors’ Notes

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## Appendix 1

### Evaluation of Grant Writing Group

Thank you for agreeing to complete this evaluation of the Grant Writing Group. We welcome your responses and appreciate equally those that are positive and those that provide critical commentary.

Using the scale provided, please rate how helpful each of the following components of the Grant Writing Group was for you.

	didn't work at all	mostly didn't work	both worked & didn't work	mostly worked	worked extremely well	not applicable
1. The format: Beginning each session with work-in-progress groups, & ending with a mini-lecture & homework assignment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The homework assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The amount of time for peer feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Suggestions for your writing from your work-in-progress group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The facilitators visiting the work-in-progress groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Sharing your writing with a facilitator outside of the group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Do you have any comments or suggestions related to the format of the groups?

Please rate how well each of the following worked for you on the scale provided.

	didn't work at all	mostly didn't work	both worked & didn't work	mostly worked	worked extremely well	not applicable
8. Meeting one Friday each month.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The 10 am start time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



	didn't work at all	mostly didn't work	both worked & didn't work	mostly worked	worked extremely well	not applicable
10. The 12 pm end time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The 2-hr duration of each session.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Starting the group in November and ending in June.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. The August follow-up session.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. The EPICentre workshop room.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. The refreshments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the scheduling or administration of the group?**

**Please rate how often each of the following experiences was true for you from 1 for never to 5 for always (i.e., every time the group met):**

	1 never	2	3 ½ & ½	4	5 always
17. I did not feel comfortable sharing my writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. I felt comfortable making critiques of the work of others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. I felt safe receiving critiques from others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. The work-in-progress groups did not help to strengthen my writing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. I had difficulty understanding what I was supposed to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. We had conversations about non-grant related issues in my group (e.g., family, publishing, tenure process, teaching).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. I felt a responsibility to do my homework because I was presenting it to my group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. I felt a responsibility to attend the group even when I wasn't able to do my homework.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**The next questions ask about skills that may have been strengthened as a result of participating in the Grant Writing Group.**

**I have significantly strengthened my skill in writing:**

	yes	no	not sure	not applicable
25. for people outside my field of research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. project goals/objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. statements of significance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. theoretical frameworks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. methodology sections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. student training plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. knowledge mobilization/translation plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. budget justifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. an entire grant proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**The next questions are about what might have happened as a result of participating in the Grant Writing Group. Please answer each as yes/no/not sure.**

	yes	no	not sure
35. I have adopted some positive new writing habits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. I feel more confident about applying for a grant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. The group meetings and assignments have made developing a grant proposal more manageable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. I am better prepared to offer other writers constructive, meaningful feedback on their grant proposals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. Since participating in the Grant Writing Group I am more likely to begin drafting a grant proposal at least 6 months in advance of the deadline.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Attending the grant writing group helped me develop at least one grant proposal that I submitted, or will submit, between January 2015 and April 2016.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. I would recommend the grant-writing group to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. I would participate in the Grant Writing Group if it was offered again.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43. I anticipate staying in touch with at least one person that I got to know through the grant-writing group (other than Natasha and Eleanor).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you anticipate staying in touch with a group member, please explain the nature of this anticipated ongoing contact (e.g., social, sharing writing, collaborating on a project).

44. What was most effective about the Grant Writing Group?

45. What was least effective about the Grant Writing Group?

46. Do you have any further suggestions or comments about how to improve the Grant Writing Group.

My responses on this survey may be used in writing the proposed publication.

- Yes       No

Thank you for sharing your views and experiences with us.

*Eleanor and Natasha*