Funding sources for international business

Steven Loughrin-Sacco

Where do you find funding for international business programs and how do you write a winning proposal? Steven Loughrin-Sacco, co-director of the San Diego State University CIBER and chair of the international business program since 1997, demystified the process at the faculty development conference in Denver.

Loughrin-Sacco has received nearly 50 grants totaling over $5 million since 1988, including 14 from the U.S. Department of Education across seven different USDE programs. He also assists colleges and universities in securing international education grants. A professor of French and European studies at SDSU, Loughrin-Sacco holds a BA in French from Western Illinois University, an MAT in French from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and a PhD in foreign language education from Ohio State University. He teaches courses in Business French and Intercultural Business Communication.

There are several reasons to pursue grants, Loughrin-Sacco said. “Internal funding nowadays is nonexistent; external funding promotes collaboration; and funding fuels programs” that otherwise would die on the vine.

In the realm of grants, the U.S. Department of Education offers what can best be described as “low-hanging fruits,” easy to reach for if you know what you’re doing, he said. Foundations and private donors are perched farther up the tree, high-hanging fruits that are extremely worthwhile but harder to come by.

USDE grants:

- **Title VI-A**: Undergraduate International Studies & Foreign Language Program. Provides funds to institutions of higher education to plan, develop, and carry out programs to strengthen and improve undergraduate instruction in international studies and foreign languages.

  “In other words, it’s a curriculum development program. First and foremost you must significantly strengthen foreign language instruction and, second, foreign language folks have to work across the campus to develop a major program, a minor or a certificate program.”

  Grants range from $120,000-$150,000 paid over a two-year period. However, Loughrin-Sacco pointed out, “there’s a 50 percent cost-share match. So for every dollar that the institution looks for, the institution has to provide a dollar from its own coffers. The cost-share can be cash or it can be in-kind.”

  He added, “Probably 85-90 percent of all cost shares are in-kind and don’t really cost the institution anything.”

  Said Loughrin-Sacco, who reviews grant proposals for the USDE, “I have never seen a good solid proposal for the Title VI-A program that’s been turned down.”

- **Title VI-B. Business & International Education Program**: There are two requirements: “You must improve the academic teaching of the business curriculum and conduct outreach activities that expand the capacity of the business community to engage in international economic activities.

  “The external community in many cases complains they’ve never heard of the universities,” said Loughrin-Sacco. “The universities have never left the monastery to go ask the business folks
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what they want and what they need. The BIE program is designed to strengthen the university’s ties with the external community.”

The average BIE award in 2003 was more than $78,000 for projects extending over a two-year period. Cost sharing applies.

Title VI-B programs are renewable as long as proposals are developed around a different theme. “Once you get the first grant, start thinking about your second, even your third and fourth. Come up with an action plan for the next ten years.”

For technical assistance on Title VI-B programs, contact Tanyelle Hawkins Richardson at 202-502-7626 or e-mail her at tanyelle.richardson@ed.gov.

• The Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program: Provides grants to support overseas projects in training, research, and curriculum development in modern foreign languages and area studies by teachers, students, and faculty engaged in a common endeavor.

Projects must focus on the humanities, social sciences and languages, and must focus on one or more of the following areas: Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Near East, Eastern Central Europe.

Eligible participants include modern language and area studies faculty at the college level, K-12 teachers, and a college junior or senior planning to teach in modern foreign languages or area studies.

“This program is wonderful for helping to train K-12 teachers who in the future will be sending students to your international business programs. Basically, they’re going to be your feeder system,” said Loughrin-Sacco.

“Many of our international business programs need continued sustained enrollments. Where are they coming from? They’re coming from the high schools and the community colleges. At San Diego State over 50 percent of our students come to us from the community colleges,” said Loughrin-Sacco, adding, “More and more of the CIBERs are interested in K-12 international business education.”

Grant awards, in the amount of $50,000 for a one-month summer seminar cover round-trip international and local travel, per diem expenses, purchase of project-related artifacts, books and other teaching materials. “You can apply for three of these each year at your institution as long as they’re for different regions,” said Loughrin-Sacco.

Program officer: Lungching Chiao 202-502-7624; lungching.chiao@ed.gov.

• FIPSE: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. FIPSE has numerous programs one of which is the US-Brazil Program. Another is the North American Mobility Program which involves creating an alliance of two American, two Canadian and two Mexican universities. “FIPSE not only accepts proposals for international education, they also accept proposals from every single discipline you can think of,” said Loughrin-Sacco. “It’s high-hanging fruit with only a 4 percent success rate among applicants. That’s one I’d stay away from until you get some other programs under your belt.”

• Foundations: “At some point you’re going to run out of US Department of Education funding sources and you’ll have to look at other places. Foundations offer much more money and funding
opportunities than the USDE," said Loughrin-Sacco. "The Coca-Cola Foundation has been good for us, but it only works if you only sell Coke products on campus."

There is a downside to foundations. "They are basically high-context cultures, they don't have technical review forms, and when they turn you down they usually don't tell you why," said Loughrin-Sacco. "So there's a lot out there you have to guess at. Also, there's stiff competition for foundation grants, and your institution may not let you apply."

- **Private donors:** They offer more money and more funding opportunities than the USDE and foundations. However, like foundations, they are high-context cultures and the competition can be fierce. Accessibility and institutional priorities are other factors to consider. "But if conditions are favorable, targeting private donors is worth the time and effort."

### Developing the proposal

"Grant getting is about three things," said Loughrin-Sacco. "Vision, seduction and intelligence gathering.

- **Vision:** "If you don't have vision and fail to come up with a visionary program, no one's going to fund you. No one funds white toast with no butter on it. So when you're coming up with proposals for new programs, make them as exciting and sexy as you possibly can. "The packaging, just like the packaging of any kind of product, needs to be attractive. It's not enough to say 'we want to internationalize our business curriculum.' Unless you can give specific details that are really attractive, you're not going to get funded."

- **Seduction:** "In French literature, the language, the way it's used, is part of the seduction. That doesn't mean you have to write your proposals in French, but it does mean you have to make the best possible argument for your particular program.

- **Intelligence gathering:** "You've got to know the funding source as much as possible," said Loughrin-Sacco. "You've got to gather intelligence about the norms, the mores, the values and, most importantly, the taboos of this particular culture. "The RFP will give you only 20 percent of what you need to know. And so many people write grants with only that information. Even within the Department of Education, each of the programs has a slightly different culture."

If you fall short in your intelligence gathering, "you will inadvertently violate taboos, which in many cases will keep you from getting funding."

It's important to talk to the program officer at great length. "Let them get to know you, ask questions," said Loughrin-Sacco. "When I review for the Department of Education, you'd be surprised how many times I've given a proposal a low grade only to have the program officer say, 'But I know them, you don't understand what they were trying to do.'

After you've completed the intelligence gathering, you need to craft your proposal. There are four questions you must answer as you build your case, said Loughrin-Sacco.

1. What is the problem to be resolved? "If there's no problem to be resolved, why should anyone give you money? The problem statement or assessment of need clearly defines the problem you're trying to solve, provides statistical evidence that addresses the need for the project, and describes your knowledge of the issues and your client's needs."

2. What's your solution? If you don't have a solution, why talk about the problem?

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**University of Colorado Denver**
**Institute for International Business and Global Executive Forum**
**Center for International Business Education & Research**
**Spring-Summer 2004**
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3. How are you going to pull it off? "If politicians wrote grants they would never get funded. They talk about solutions but not how they're going to pull it off."

4. Why you? Why should someone fund you versus 150 other applicants?

Loughrin-Sacco polled reviewers for the Department of Education, asking them to name their top 10 peeves when reading proposals. A summary of the top 10 fatal mistakes applicants make:

1. Applicant didn’t read the program guidelines well enough.
2. The applicant never contacted the Program Officer. "There is a high correlation between contacting the program officer and success in your bid. Develop a good relationship."
3. Applicant presented an insufficient problem statement.
4. Too much mud on the wall. Don’t use the shotgun approach where the pellets are all over the place. Be focused, thorough. You can never be too thorough in writing a grant proposal.
5. Applicant neglected to provide details of the project’s activities. This gets back to “How are you going to pull it off?”
6. Proposal lacked a strong evaluation plan and had minimum mention of qualitative and quantitative measures.
7. Applicant neglected to provide a budget narrative or the budget narrative didn’t match the proposed budget. “The narrative should describe exactly why you’re asking for money and how it’s going to be used. Go to your accounting professors and have them check it over with a fine tooth comb.”
8. Applicant supplied lukewarm institutional letters of support with minimal specifics on institutional support after the grant. “Make the letters as specific as possible,” said Loughrin-Sacco, offering to send examples of good letters to anyone who asks.
9. Applicant neglected to describe plan of management in “plan of operation.” A grant organizational chart should be included along with specifics on management such as frequency of project meetings and description of managerial duties.
10. Beware if you’re an accomplished grant-getter. “Experienced grant-getters sometimes get cocky and submit a sloppy and poorly executed proposal,” said Loughrin-Sacco. “Don’t get complacent,” he urges. “Do your homework. Regardless of how many grants you get, you’re going to have failures as part of the game.”

The key to success, he said “is a well-written, effectively organized proposal and a compelling approach.” If you feel unsure about the process, he suggests, “Find a recent reviewer. Those of us who review for the Department of Education have inside information about how the process takes place that not even the program officer has. Contact one of us, bring us in as a consultant to help you.”

And if you request it, Loughrin-Sacco will send copies of successful grant proposals to use as examples. “We are missionaries for the religion of international business; we’re willing to go and help schools at all times.”