



Writing Spencer Research Grants: Practical Tips

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Not speaking today on behalf of Spencer

Just from personal experience



Our Spencer Grants

1. Small Research Grant	2. Research Practice Partnership (RPP) Grant
\$50,000	\$400,000
Co-PIs Guerrettaz, Marcos-Miguel & Bell	Co-PIs Guerrettaz, Sobotta & Webb
2019-2020 (plus, multiple 'no cost' extensions due to COVID & PI maternity leave)	2025-2027 (Active grant)

About Spencer: In Their Words

“The goal of all...our research grants is to support rigorous, intellectually ambitious and technically sound research... scholarship that develops new foundational knowledge that may also have a lasting impact on policy-making, practice, or educational discourse”

- *“Most pressing questions...in education”*
- *“Creative and open-minded scholarship”*
- *“Deep inquiry”*
- *“Robust questions”*
- *“Education research that cultivates learning & transforms lives.”*

– From Spencer websites



Spencer Research Grants: Our Understandings

1. Research with...

- practical educational implications
- *and* rigorous, cutting-edge, scholarly contribution to the broader discipline(s)

2. Spencer also champions research with societal impact (broadly): Examples...

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Societal betterment, harmony, civility & reciprocity
- Learning advancements
- Teacher workforce & capacity building



Comparing Spencer Grants to Other Agencies: Anecdotal

**U.S. Department of
Education (Federal)**

Spencer

**1.
Focus
on...**

“Implementation” and
“evaluation” of an
educational innovation

VS

***“Foundational”
research*** (only)

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	U.S. Department of Education (Federal)		Spencer
1. Focus on...	<i>"Implementation"</i> and <i>"evaluation"</i> of an educational innovation	VS	<i>"Foundational" research</i> (only)
2. Types of research (maybe?)	<i>Quantitative</i> research favored? Some secondary interest in qualitative?	VS	Quantitative but also more appreciative of (cutting edge) <i>qualitative</i> research?

Tips: Years Before Winning First External/Spencer Grant

- Build track record: Smaller research grants
- Grant writing training through WSU
 1. Full semester introductory series (ORSO?)
 2. Day-long “Grant Writers” workshop
 3. Semester-long, individualized, intensive “Grant Writers” coaching: Peg AtKisson MD, PhD (Pros and cons)
 4. “Community Engaged Research Program” for faculty (WSU ORAP), specific to our RPP grant
 5. Other WSU grant-writing workshops/supports

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Interdisciplinary Proposal Successes: Anecdotal Observations

Very familiar with 5 funded Spencer proposals:

- 3 (most) included disciplinary expert co-PIs
 - Outside education or at periphery
 - Linguistics, History & Native American studies faculty
- 2 funded proposals that did not include such interdisciplinary co-PI teams were:
 - By world renowned education scholars
 - At highly exclusive universities (UC Berkley, University of Pennsylvania)

Suggestion:

As appropriate to proposal...

**Consider co-PIs who are
disciplinary experts
outside education**

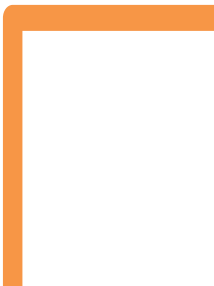
**(e.g., humanities, physical sciences,
other social sciences, etc.)**

Tips: Writing the Grant

- ***Re-submission*** key: Both our funded Spencer grants; Within 1 year of initial submission
- Start very ***early*** & ***revise*** frequently
- Become expert on the ***grant proposal instructions***
 - 3 different guides for Spencer RPP grant (60 pages)
- Get ***feedback*** early (and often, as feasible):
 - Laura Girardeau & Jason Johnson
 - Senior faculty, ORAP foundations expert if available, colleagues, friends, spouse/family member, etc.

Tips: Grant Proposal Itself

Section



Tips: Grant Proposal Document Basics

- Use ***language/terminology of grant instructions***, authentically (e.g., RPP grant “practices,” “processes,” “policy,” “capacity building,” etc.)
- ***Give many specifics*** in example research plans: Specific timeline, specific sites, participant numbers, etc.
- Especially if large, ***give your project an impactful name*** in grant proposal (e.g., CAMINOS, Project Himyunéewit [Kinship])
 - Projects confidence & significance
- Include a ***dissemination plan***: Table at end of narrative

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Dissemination Plan Table: Example

(2019 Spencer Small Research Grant)

Be specific: High impact journal/conference names, submission date, specific sub-topic as needed, etc.

Table 4

Dissemination strategy

Activity	Audience	2020	2021
Pilot typology	MUSE International (our research consortium)	Jan.-Dec.	
Workshop	American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages Convention	Nov.	
Round-table	American Association for Applied Linguistics Conference		March
Presentation	Hispanic Linguistics Symposium		Oct.
Publish	- <i>Modern Language Journal</i> - <i>Foreign Language Annals</i> - <i>Journal of Spanish Language Teaching</i> - <i>Hispania</i>	Oct. 2020	- Dec. 2021

Tips: Strategically Scale Up Research

- Why? → More competitive proposal
- Not as difficult as expected (2019 Spencer grant):
e.g., Idaho 5 miles from Pullman

Research Site	National Region
Washington (Pullman)	1. Pacific Northwest region
Idaho (Moscow)	2. Rocky Mountain Region
Find a co-PI/collaborator in 1 other state	3. Midwest, Southwest, or New England, etc.

**We made a national
research proposal !**

3 national
regions

Tips: General Readability

Make proposal *easy for reviewers to read*

- Lots of *space* on pages:
 - Crammed text: Off-putting to reviewers
 - 12-pt font, double spaced text: Projects confidence
- Avoid *acronyms*; Hard for reviewers to remember
- *Consistent terminology*
 - Pedagogical materials vs. teaching materials vs. language teaching → choose 1
 - Precise use of theory & jargon

Tips: Readability, Figures & Tables

Make proposal easy for reviewers to read

- Lots of ‘easy to read’ ***tables & figures***
 - Appealing & helpful to reviewers
 - ***To highlight key information*** in grant; Easy to identify
 - Can help word count
 - Most figures created ‘from scratch’ by co-PI authors or significantly adapted
 - Not many ‘stock’ figures

Figures & Tables in Our Proposals

2019 Small Research Grant

10-page narrative

- 5 figures
- 6 tables

2025 RPP grant

25-page narrative

- 5 figures (with several more in appendices)
- 5 tables (with several more in appendices)

Example Content of Our Figures & Tables

- Provisional coding schema
- Visual of pilot praxis model
- Overview: Expected data
- Researcher roles/
contributions
- Illustration of key innovative
concept
- Overview: Research sites &
teachers
- Other aspects of study design
- More!

Simple Example Table

Table 6

Expected contributions

Investigators	Expertise	Project leadership	Spanish
PI Guerrettaz	<i>Seminal scholarship:</i> <i>Materials-in-action</i> (see Tarone [2014] on Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013)	-MDA	Near-native
Co-PI Marcos-Miguel	<u><i>Spanish:</i></u> -Linguistics -Textbooks	-Textbook analyses - Quantitative research	Native
Co-PI Bell	<u><i>Pragmatics:</i></u> -Discourse analysis -Quasi-experimental	-Discourse analyses	Spanish research experience

Example Coding Schema

Table 3

Instructional materials: Provisional coding

Category	Codes					
Task type:	Controlled	Open-ended				
Goals:	Communicate	Produce/analyze form(s) (e.g., grammar)	Display understanding	Analyze text	Increase automaticity	Non-linguistic
Information distribution across students:	Same information	Different information (e.g., jigsaw)				
Language/Text:	Amount	Difficulty	Genre/Text-type	Language(s) used		
Content/Topic:	Traditional Hispanic cultures	Entertainment	Grammar	Vocabulary	Personal	Current events
Mode:	Written	Still-Image	Video	Audio	Multimodal	
Medium:	Paper	3D Objects	Digital device	Blackboard/whiteboard	Body (i.e., gestures)	
Source:	Teacher	Textbook	Other professional	Student		

Pilot Study Data: Proof of Concept

First, student 1 responds to teacher, while observing houses in materials:

T: *Si je vous demande de parler de ces deux maisons...* describe, compare them
[If I ask you to talk about these two houses... describe, compare them]

S1: *La maison un est plus petit que la maison deux.*
[House one is smaller than house two.]

T: *ok, quoi d'autre?*
[Okay, what else?]

Next, student 2 describes houses, building on student 1:

S2: *La maison deux est plus grande que la maison un.*
[House two is bigger than house one.]

T: *Par exemple*
[For example]

Next, student 3 describes houses, building on students 1 and 2:

S3: *La maison deux a deux étages.*
[House two has two floors.]

T: *Oui. Quoi d'autre?*
[Yes. What else?]

Finally, student 4 describes houses, building on students 1, 2 and 3:

S4: *La maison un a moins de lumière que la maison deux.*
[House one has less light than house two.]



Figure 3. "Snowball language"

A figure can be
worth a
thousand words

- Land crucial in our tribally-driven grant proposal (RPP)
- No map existed with exact information needed; We created this one

Figure 2

1857 Map of Tribes in U.S. Northwest (Adapted from Carlton, ill., 1857).



Map Key:



Nez Perce
Language
Program,
Lapwai, ID,
Nez Perce
Reservation,
Current day,
2024



Washington
State
University,
Pullman,
WA, Current
Day, 2024

“Spencer Portal”: Submission Platform

- Good interface
- Challenging & time-consuming management
 - Many steps for co-PIs: long before submission
 - (1) Create extensive profile, (2) link accounts
 - Budget for Spencer proposals
 - No one in ADR office can access directly
 - Format different from WSU eREX
 - Spencer reporting & budgetary procedures unfamiliar to many SPS/ORSO officials

“Spencer Portal” Submission Platform

- Upon submission, “Spencer Portal” sometimes requires information that was not requested anywhere else.
 - E.g., Mandatory “research questions” (rather than research objectives, etc.) required *only* in Spencer Portal for RPP grant upon submission
 - E.g., Long list of new survey-type questions about proposal
 - Very stressful to do at ‘last minute’ → Check ahead!

Post Script

- Experience with 2 additional Spencer awards:
 - Spencer Mentor Award nomination of WSU colleague
 - Spencer Dissertation Fellowship of a PhD student
- Various other Spencer awards on website

Acknowledgements

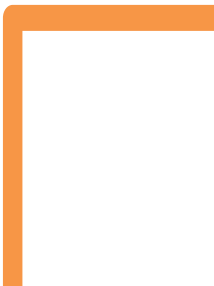
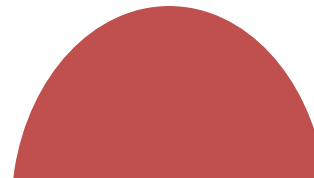
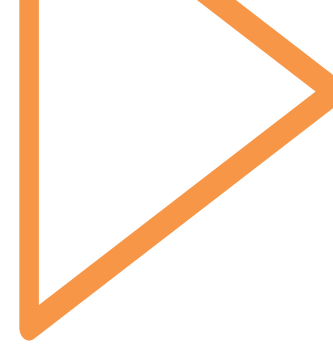
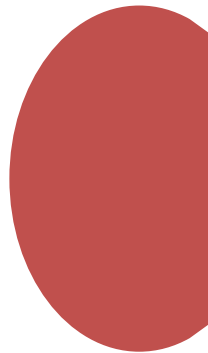
- Nez Perce Language Program
- Dr. Yvonne Sherwood
- Dr. Amy Roth-McDuffie, Laura Girardeau, Jason Johnson & Sola Adesope
- Pilot research funding for these Spencer grants:
 - Office of Research funding for Tipiziwin Tolman and pilot grant
 - WSU Transformative Change Initiative
 - WSU Advance
 - CESHs Professional Leave (Sabbatical) funding (2023-2024)
 - WSU Native Programs support



Thank You

Questions?

SPENCER



Interdisciplinary Spencer Proposal

Successes: 3 Examples

Grant focus	PI/co-PIs
How Spanish language textbooks/materials shape classroom discourse in U.S. Spanish classes	• Co-PI Guerrettaz, Education faculty • Co-PI Bell, Linguistics faculty • Co-PI Marcos Miguel, Spanish applied linguistics faculty
How land-grant universities can honor commitments to regional tribes by supporting tribally-led Indigenous language revitalization	• Co-PI Guerrettaz, Education faculty • Co-PI Sobotta, Education & Native American studies • Co-Webb, Field expert in nimipuutímt (Nez Perce language)
Foundational American and Latino/a/e studies history research, with K–12 impacts	Sole PI: John Nieto-Phillips, Latino/a Studies faculty , not an education scholar