



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

**GUIDELINES
FOR
STC \$10,000 RESEARCH GRANTS**

Copies available from:

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Guidelines for STC \$10,000 Research Grants

About the Grants

Introduction

Upon approval by the Society for Technical Communication's board of directors, one-time money grants under this program may be awarded for research that supports the purposes of the Society: to advance the arts and sciences of technical communication, promote awareness of the latest trends and technology in the field, and provide innovative services for the education and professional development of its members.

Allocation of Funds

The maximum allocation for this grant program is \$10,000.00 (US). Researchers submit receipts for expenses incurred during the research and are then reimbursed out of the grant fund. Up to 75 percent of the grant is available for reimbursement throughout the research project, with 25 percent held back until the final report is received.

Timeframe

The typical grant is for a one-year period. Grantees are expected to prepare a paper worthy of publication in *Technical Communication* by the end of that one-year period. Normally, all funding must be disbursed within eighteen months of the award date. Exceptions to this policy, such as no-cost extensions for a specific amount of time, will be considered on an individual basis.

Subsequent Applications by Grant Recipients

All grants are for one-time projects. Awarding of a grant does not guarantee subsequent grants for projects related to the original grant. Grant recipients can apply for subsequent grants by submitting new proposals for evaluation during subsequent funding periods.

Who May Submit Proposals?

Proposals may be submitted by both members and nonmembers of the Society. Voting members of the STC board of directors may not submit proposals.

What Constitutes "Research"?

To qualify for STC \$10,000 research grant funding, your research must be a controlled activity through which you can learn and communicate new information to the STC membership. Attachment A includes examples of research topics approved by the STC board of directors. Activities such as developing new course curricula or teaching courses, while important and valuable, are not research as defined by STC.

Process

Submitting Proposals to the Research Grants Committee

1. Select a research area that meets the purposes of the Society as stated in the introduction to these guidelines, and preferably one that falls within STC's research agenda (see Attachment A).
2. Prepare a preliminary query following the instructions in "Required Sections for Preliminary Queries," below.
3. Send ten copies of your preliminary query to the following address:

Research Grants Committee
Society for Technical Communication
901 North Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203

Up to two finalists will be selected to submit full proposals.

4. If you are selected as a finalist, prepare a full proposal following the instructions in "Required Sections for Full Grant Proposals," below.
5. Send ten copies of your full proposal to the address above.

Deadlines and Review Schedules

The STC research grants committee reviews proposals in this program once a year, in a two-stage process.

In stage one, applicants submit a preliminary query describing the proposed research project. The preliminary query is to be submitted by June 30. The research grants committee will select up to two finalists who will be invited to submit a full proposal.

In stage two, finalists will be notified by September 30 and asked to submit full proposals by December 1. The research grants committee will recommend one proposal to the STC board of directors for approval. Finalists can expect to hear by January 31, whether a proposal was approved. (A winner will be selected and the grant awarded only if the Society has access to the funds at that time.)

Required Sections for Preliminary Queries

A preliminary query has three components: the Funding Approval Process Form—\$10,000 Research Grant (included in Attachment B), the two-page narrative description of the proposed research, and a two-page curriculum vitae for each proposed investigator.

The Funding Approval Process Form

The Funding Approval Process Form provides the research grants committee with a concise overview of the work you propose to do and its benefit to specific segments of the Society membership. Be as concrete as possible in completing this form.

The Two-page Narrative Description

The two-page narrative description of the proposed research should open with a problem statement/rationale in the same form as specified for full grant proposals: In two or three paragraphs, provide an explicit statement of your research question. Explain why this research question needs to be answered and how it will build our knowledge of the topic. It is common to identify a gap in the literature, in the state of current research, or in the state of current knowledge about theory, research, or practice. Explain how your question speaks to the gap you have identified.

Next, the two-page narrative description should relate the work you propose to do to the main research efforts (as reported in journals and proceedings of conferences) under way on the topic you propose to address. For the preliminary query, it is not necessary to be exhaustive; the goal is to demonstrate to the research grants committee that you are aware of the main existing research efforts relevant to your topic.

The two-page narrative should provide an overview of your expectations for the study and briefly justify your research objectives and methods. Your goal is to demonstrate to the research grants committee that you have thought carefully about the work you propose to do, have reasonable expectations of a successful outcome, and have sufficient knowledge and control of your method to achieve the outcome you anticipate.

Finally, the narrative should summarize the types of expenses anticipated and specify the total amount of research support requested.

The Two-page Curriculum Vitae

The two-page curriculum vitae (one for each proposed investigator on the project) should focus on the investigator's qualifications as a researcher. For each investigator, include full contact information. Describe the investigator's educational background (including degrees, years granted, and institutions), job experiences, and previous research. Include any publications or presentations and any service to the Society. If the experience or service has been extensive, emphasize the most recent work or the work most relevant to the proposed research.

Required Sections for Full Grant Proposals

If your preliminary query is successful, you will be invited to prepare a full proposal. The following sections are generally required in all full proposals. If a particular section does not apply to your proposal, include the section heading followed by an explanation of why it does not apply.

Cover Page

Include the title of the project and the name, mailing address, e-mail address, phone number, and signature of the project's principal investigator.

Table of Contents

List the headings and page numbers of the proposal's major sections.

Abstract

On a separate page, include an abstract that summarizes the need for the research, the objectives and methods, and the funding amount requested. Include a brief statement of the type of results you expect (such as a book or a paper reporting on the study) and how the project will benefit the profession. In particular, indicate the expected benefits to all of STC, especially practitioners.

Problem Statement/Rationale

In two or three paragraphs, provide an explicit statement of your research question. Explain why this research question needs to be answered and how it will build our knowledge of the topic. It is common to identify a gap in the literature, in the state of current research, or in the state of current knowledge about theory, research, or practice. Explain how your question speaks to the gap you have identified.

Literature Review

Your proposal should include a literature review that establishes the relevancy and need for your proposed research and presents a basis for the research design and methodology you will employ. The literature review should synthesize in a coherent narrative the literature relevant to the problem your proposal addresses, as stated in the Problem Statement section. The citations discussed in the literature review should be listed in a bibliography at the end of the proposal.

The literature review should

- Establish the context and significance of the problem you wish to study
- Identify existing work that can be extended or applied to your proposed research
- Support the importance and relevance of variables that you plan to use in your study
- Create a basis for the expectations, hypotheses, and assumptions of your research

Expectations/Hypotheses/Assumptions

Based on your analysis of the problem and your review of the literature, characterize the expectations you have for the study. If your research is exploratory, state your goals and describe what you anticipate your findings will reveal. If your research is experimental, state your goals and hypotheses. If you will employ a qualitative approach, state your goals and assumptions about the topic under study. Detail how you will modify or extend those assumptions by carrying out this work.

Statement of Benefits

Explain who will benefit from the results of the research. What is the value of the research to the profession as a whole? Explain not only how the research will increase knowledge about technical communication or technical communicators, but also how the implications of the findings will be of interest to practitioners of technical communication.

Objectives/Research Methods

Describe and justify the objectives and research methods for each phase of the research. Be clear about the objectives of the research, their scope, and their significance to the further study and/or practice of technical communication. Make sure that the research methods selected, and the anticipated results of your study, will support your objectives.

Possible research methods include case studies, historical studies, and surveys, as well as experimental studies with quantitative results and other empirical studies that may have quantitative or qualitative results. Other methods are welcome; however, you must make the case that the method fits the issues and will yield useful research results. You must explain the research methods to be used. If you state that your objective is significant to the work of all technical communicators, then select a research method that will allow you to gather and analyze information about technical communicators on a commensurate scale. On the other hand, if your objective is significant to a smaller group of technical communicators, such as independent consultants, make sure that the research methods you select are suited to gathering and analyzing that scope of information.

In an empirical study, make sure that you identify and define variables, and specify relationships between variables, if applicable.

Facilities

List libraries, laboratories, databases, research sites, participants, and consultants that you can use to accomplish the research goals. State any interdisciplinary support you have in implementing your research.

If you plan to use the facilities of your employer, your proposal must state that you have permission to use these facilities for an STC research project. If you are a student and plan to use the facilities of your college or university, you must have permission from your educational institution. A signed statement from your department chair or employer indicating that you may use the facilities for your research project will suffice. Any additional contribution from these sources is also welcome and indicates that your organization will support your STC research efforts; see the cost breakdown section.

Deliverables and Progress Reports

In addition to delivering the results of your research at regular intervals, be prepared to report on your progress to the STC board of directors.

In your proposal, explain what you will deliver to the Society as a result of the research. Be specific. Deliverables should be provided at least quarterly during the project. For example, a research project to develop a set of guidelines for embedding links in an online document could contain the following deliverables: test materials (after two months), a test report (after six months), and a guidelines document (after ten months).

In addition, plan to provide brief progress reports in time for the board of directors meetings that occur three times each year. The research grants committee manager will need these reports in August, in December, and in the spring (usually in April for a May board meeting). Your progress reports must be clearly written in English so that non-researchers on the board will understand what the research project is about, what has happened so far in the project, and what the researchers expect to happen in the next third of the year.

STC expects that your project will result in a paper that would be appropriate for publication in the STC journal, *Technical Communication*. Papers for the STC journal must be written in language that practitioners understand, since practitioners make up 96 percent of the STC membership.

Researchers are also free to write up their results for other audiences and to publish in other journals or by other means, but their first obligation is to write a paper for the STC audience.

If you believe you need more time to satisfy your obligations, you may request a no-cost extension for a specific amount of time beyond the one-year timeframe. Submit a written request for extension to the following address:

Research Grants Committee
Society for Technical Communication
901 North Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203

Milestone Schedule

Provide a schedule with dates for key milestones and deliverables. Ideally, research should be scheduled to commence within one month of funding approval from the Society.

Cost Breakdown

Explain in detail what you expect to spend for equipment, materials, and personnel (including costs for your own time) and when you expect to spend it. List all sources of support, such as financial aid, in-kind contributions (for example, mailing and telephone privileges), donated printing service, and computer time, as well as how much you need from the Society. Although your research budget may include a line item for overhead (usually for university-conducted projects), overhead may not exceed 8 percent of the total budget.

Any expense that the researcher can show is required for conducting a research project outlined in an approved proposal may be reimbursed up to the maximum \$10,000.00 (US) grant amount. Among the expenses that the Society will consider for reimbursement are travel, release time, office expenses such as telephone and mailings, and honoraria for test participants.

Explain in detail what you expect to spend for personnel (including costs for your own time), materials, and equipment. If the grant proposal includes funding for any equipment that will not be used up during the grant period, you must justify why it is more cost-effective to buy such equipment than to gain use of it some other way, such as through equipment rental or buying services. Because STC wants its grant funding to be spent entirely on STC research, purchases for equipment that will not be consumed or obsolete by the end of the grant period will be disallowed unless you clearly demonstrate the lower cost of this approach.

Qualifications

Describe the education (including degrees, years granted, and institutions), job experience, and previous research of the principal investigator and all co-investigators for the project. Also include information about your level of activity within STC, such as any positions you have held, what you have done for the Society, any earlier work published in Society journals or newsletters, and so forth.

Bibliography

The bibliography should list complete citations (APA style preferred) for all references in the literature review.

Criteria for Evaluating Proposals

The committee members use the following criteria to evaluate all proposals (both preliminary queries and full proposals):

Background

- Has the applicant demonstrated a clear sense of having researched the previous, relevant, and/or related studies?
- Does the literature review convince you that the applicant has discovered the major trends in the field?

Strength of Design

- Are the methodologies appropriate for the topic?
- Is the research plan reasonable? Can it succeed?
- Will the study further the goals of the Society?
- Will the study benefit the profession?

Proposal

- Is the proposal statement clear, concise, and well presented?
- Can a reviewer determine the organization of the project and its major components from the proposal?

Budget

- Does the budget seem reasonable? Is there any additional support, such as in-kind or matching?

Personal

- Does the proposer have a history of activity as a STC member?
- Does the proposer have the qualifications necessary to successfully complete the project?

Recommendation Process

- If the committee decides not to invite a full proposal based on a preliminary query, the committee manager notifies the proposer.
- If the committee decides to invite a full proposal based on a preliminary query, the proposer has until the published deadline to submit the full proposal.
- If the committee decides to recommend funding of a full proposal, the committee manager submits it to the STC board of directors at the next board meeting following the committee's decision. The Society will then inform the proposer whether or not the full proposal has been approved.

Research Funded by the Society: Responsibilities of the Researcher

- Conduct the research activities defined in the proposal.
- By the dates specified in the milestone schedule, send deliverables to the manager of the research grants committee.
- File progress reports with the manager of the research grants committee three times a year, before each STC board of directors meeting. In each report, explain how much of the planned research you have completed up to that point, and what you plan to complete during the next reporting period.

Failure to provide a progress report, given a one-month grace period, will release the Society from its funding agreement, and no further funding will be provided.

- Save receipts for all expenses incurred during the research. When you have enough receipts to total over \$100.00 (US), submit them to the Society office for reimbursement.

- Within one year of receiving research grant approval from the STC board of directors, submit a report (in a form suitable for publication) to the editor of *Technical Communication*, who will then consider it for publication in an upcoming issue. Also send one copy of the submission to the manager of the research grants committee.

When the final report is accepted by the research grants committee, the remaining 25 percent of the grant will be available for payment.

Attachment A: STC's Recommended Research Topics

The STC board of directors has approved the following research agenda. The research grants committee strongly encourages proposals in these research areas, but will consider proposals in other areas as well.

- Effectiveness of visual versus verbal methods for communicating computer, scientific, medical, and other technical information
- Professional, social, and environmental trends affecting technical communication
- Technical communication in an increasingly global, wireless, and mobile world
- How to meet the cognitive and affective needs of audiences with special requirements, such as children, older adults, and people with limited technical proficiency or language skills
- Knowledge, skills, and sensitivities needed by practicing technical communicators in the 21st century, and effectiveness of teaching in these areas using classroom, on-site, and distance learning methods
- Effectiveness of information design and expertise required to develop information for paper, electronic formats, and the Web
- Factors in the appropriate selection and combination of communication mediums, such as paper, online, and multimedia
- Influence of technical communicators on product design and development
- Usability of online information (Help, Web, and wireless), and how to use and learn from the results of usability testing
- Effective user interface and graphic design of on-screen information
- Implications of single-sourcing for multiple-use information
- Theoretical analysis of database approaches, such as use of object orientation, for technical content management

Attachment B: The Funding Approval Process Form — \$10,000 Research Grant

Investment type: \$10,000 Research grant

Proposal title:

Author's name:

Amount requested (US\$):

Executive summary

Tip: In no more than four sentences, describe the proposed research. Clearly state the research question to be addressed and the investigative method to be used. Attach a more detailed two-page proposal and a two-page curriculum vitae for each author.

How this proposal benefits STC

Alignment with STC Research Agenda

Use this section to identify how this proposal aligns with a specific item in the STC Research Agenda. NOTE: The STC Research Agenda can be found within the Guidelines for STC Research Grants. It is called Attachment A: STC's Research Topics 2003-2004.

STC Group(s) Affected

Tip: What specific STC groups will benefit from the proposed research?

You may select more than one.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academics | <input type="checkbox"/> Instructional designers | <input type="checkbox"/> Usability specialists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business analysts | <input type="checkbox"/> Interface designers | <input type="checkbox"/> Visual designers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractors/Independents | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing/sales writers | <input type="checkbox"/> Web designers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editors | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Needs | <input type="checkbox"/> STC local volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic designers | <input type="checkbox"/> Students | <input type="checkbox"/> STC society volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indexers | <input type="checkbox"/> Tech. comm. managers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information architects | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical translators | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information developers | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical writers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Benefits

Briefly describe how the proposed research will benefit each group identified above (no more than two sentences per group). If possible, include measurable benefits for each group. A measurable benefit should be a description of the benefit and the way in which the achievement of the benefit can be empirically observed and measured.

	Group	Benefit
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Research Budget

Tip: Do not include each itemized cost below. You only need to include a summary of the costs for the main categories of expenditure (personnel, equipment, travel, etc., as appropriate). The maximum funding available is \$10,000.

Please note: *Winners will be selected and the grant awarded only if the Society has access to the funds at that time.*