Grant writing in the Humanities and Qualitative Social Sciences
How to prepare and act instead of stressing

Start early.

You want to allow yourself time for research, consultation, drafting, and revision.

Read carefully.

Read the call for proposals (CFP). Read the instructions for applicants. Go online and read about the sponsoring organization or initiative.

You need to assess your eligibility, alignment of your research aims with the CFP and sponsor, and the suitability of the grant support for your needs. Mark the deadline, too.

Consult.

Consult with grant officers/managers by telephone or in person, if you have the opportunity. Prepare for these consultations by (1) reviewing public information carefully; (2) clarifying your questions; and (3) drafting a brief statement summarizing your research proposal. Share these with the grant officer in advance of your consultation, if possible. If examples of successful proposals are available, download or request them.

Consider your audience.

Grant-making is highly contextual. Most grant review boards in the humanities and social sciences are multi-disciplinary.

Understand the genre.

The structure of the proposal genre favors clarity, the front-loading of claims and justifications, and signposting your argument.

Draft. Get feedback. Revise.

This allows you to take a step back from material you are very close to. Ask friends and colleagues if they will read your proposal. Try reading your proposal aloud to a partner. Do the same for others.

Remember why you do what you do.

It will help you use the language of your field to better effect.

Submit early.

Things go wrong. Allow time for troubleshooting.

Finally, practice makes...skill and perspective.

If your career plans include research, program, or policy development in academic, educational, non-profit sectors, you'll have a lot of opportunity for writing grant and/or fellowship proposals.

One of the most valuable experiences you can have is serving on review committees for any kind of proposal or application, be it for a grant or a job.