Grant Proposal Writing
Tips for writing

The writing in a grant proposal should be clear, concise and compelling. It should reflect your grasp of the subject matter and your attention to detail. There are many ways to organize proposals. Most proposals include some form of narrative, a budget and timeline, and supporting documents.

Title
A good title:

- Clearly describes the focus of your project in as few words as possible
- Speaks to the desired outcome
- Is short and to the point

If the title is too long:

- Try removing some words
- Or, use a two-part title with the parts separated by a colon.

Title Page/ Cover Page/ Authorized Signatures
Check to see:

- Does the funding agency have specifications for the Title Page?
- Are authorized signatures of key people in your organization required?
- If your proposal is built on collaborating with other groups/organizations, it is a good idea to include their names on the Title/Cover Page.
- If authorized signatures are required, plan ahead to acquire them.

Narrative

Statement of Need/ Background/ Overview/ Executive Summary

The narrative is the written description that states the purpose, goals and measurable objectives of the project along with compelling, logical reasons why the proposal should be supported. Different funding agencies use different terms to describe the narrative differently.

The reviewer will read this first and it will make an important first impression, but it is best to write the narrative overview last, after you have a complete understanding of all aspects of your proposal. Be specific and concise. Do not go into detail on aspects of your proposal that are further clarified at a later point in your proposal.

Choose words carefully:

- Be specific rather than vague
- Avoid jargon, trendy or "in" words, abbreviations and confusing language
- Use action verbs and strong adjectives
- If you are not a native speaker, have a native speaker go over your draft.

Narratives typically satisfy these questions:

- What do you want to accomplish?
- What is the pressing problem you will address and why is it so important?
- What has been done in the past?
- What makes you qualified to undertake this?
- Who are your partners?
- Who is your clientele? How will they benefit?
- What specific objectives can be accomplished and how?
- How will results be measured?

Some narratives take the form of a Background statement.

- Background information gives perspective on the problem at hand.
- It may be useful to cite previous projects and studies that are similar to what you are proposing.
- Show the funding agency that you know what you are proposing because you are familiar with what has preceded you.

Position your project in relation to other efforts and show how your project will:

- Expand on the work that has been previously done
- Avoid the mistakes and/or errors that have been previously made
- Serve to develop stronger collaboration between existing initiatives, or
- Be innovative and unique since it does not follow the same path as previously followed
- Involve other organizations and address their interests

The "Hook"

There are a lot of project proposals out there. What makes yours particularly appealing to the funding organization? That's the hook.

- How does your project match the purpose, goals and priorities of the funding organization?
- Is there a compelling reason why you and/or your organization are uniquely suited to conduct the project? (Geographic location, language expertise, prior involvements in this area, close relationship to the project clientele, etc.)
- Clearly indicate how the problems you will address in your project will help the potential funding agency meet its goals.

Clientele

Convince the funding organization how important it is for them to care about your clientele. Persuade them that assisting your clientele is in their best interests.

Show the funding organization how much the clientele group has been involved with planning the project. (In the past foundations have funded a project only to find that the clientele group did not want to be involved!)

- Exactly who is your clientele? What is the total population of the target group and what subgroups are included?
- In what ways have you already had contact with the clientele group?
- What indications do you have that the clientele group is prepared to be part of the project?
- In what ways have members of the clientele group been involved in the preparation of the proposal?
- What other agencies are involved with this clientele and are they included in your proposed project?

Approach/ Method/ Methodology

- There should be a clear direct link between your objectives and the methods you employ.
- What are your methods? What makes them unique or innovative and likely to succeed?
- How will the methods fulfill your project's objectives and help deal with the needs/problems
- Are the specific methods you are proposing for your project very important to your unique clientele? Make sure you clarify this for the funding organization.

Your evaluation plan does not have to be elaborate but it is important to indicate to the prospective funding agency that you have not forgotten this important step.

Try to include a concern for both formative evaluation (process evaluation) -- ways to gain feedback while the project is being conducted -- and summative evaluation (product evaluation) -- ways to show that the project fulfilled its goals.

The formative evaluation/process evaluation is concerned with the activities of the project, focusing on collecting data on program operations: Is this working? It can point to challenges in the early stages of a program, indicating that changes or modifications are needed.

Summative evaluation judges the worth of a program at the conclusion of its activities. The focus is on the outcome. Has the project met its goal and expected outcomes?

An evaluation plan should include some sense of concern for what happens after the funding period:

- How will the initiatives that have been started under the project be sustained?
- Have new things occurred that will be continued in the future?
- How will other cooperating agencies assist in continuing the project after the conclusion of the funding period?
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Personnel/ Qualifications/ Credentials
Show the funding agency you have excellent people who are committed to the project. You are not asking the agency to "trust" you. The validity of your project is directly related to the people who will work on it.

- Describe the roles and the importance of each team member.
- Clarify how each role is essential to the success of the project and how each will operationalize the methods.
- Include name, title, experience, qualifications and other information if you it's important to the success of your project. (You may include résumés, or letters of reference in the Supporting Documents.)
- If there will be a Steering Committee (Advisory Committee, Governing Board, etc.) overseeing the project, describe how it will be organized and who will be included.
- Describe any collaborative relationships your project will be developing with other cooperating groups.

Budget and Timeline/ Work plan

Budgets are cost projections. They reveal to reviewers how projects will be implemented and managed. Many funding organizations provide mandatory budget forms that must be submitted with the proposal. Check with the agency to see if they have suggested/required budget categories that they want you to use.

If the potential funding agency doesn't have any suggested/required budget categories, organize your budget around a set of meaningful categories that work for the project you are proposing. Categories that you may want to consider for itemizing your budget are:

- Personnel (salary and benefits)
- Consultants (salary)
- Instruction
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Communication (telephone/postage)
- Materials preparation
- Travel
- Rental of facilities
- Evaluation
- Other expenses
- Indirect costs (costs that your organization requires that you include)

Well-planned budgets reflect carefully thought-out projects.

- Make your budget realistic.
- Carefully think through exactly what you will need from the funding agency to carry out the project and establish your budget around this amount. (Funding agencies can easily tell when someone has inflated a budget in order to procure funds for other purposes.)

Keep in mind that funding organizations use factors like these to assess budgets:

- Can the job be accomplished with this budget?
- Are costs reasonable for the market - or too high or low?
- Is the budget consistent with proposed activities?
- Is there sufficient budget detail and explanation?

Include only items that fall within the scope of the funding request. The value of in-kind support and matching revenue should be included, where appropriate.

Before you can estimate your expenses, you have to estimate the length of your project, and have a clear understanding of how the work will be phased in.

Project Timeline/ Work plan

Closely related to the budgeting process is the project timeline, which provides a clear indication of the time frame for the project and the times when each aspect of the project will be implemented. The time line:

- Paints a picture of project flow that includes start and end dates, schedule of activities, and projected outcomes.
- Should be detailed enough to include staff selection and start dates.

Try creating the time line as a graphic representation. If this is done well, it will help demonstrate the feasibility of the project in a very visible way.

ACTIVITIES / MONTHS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Task 1	**X**	X										
Task 2			**X**									
Task 3				X	X	X						
Task 4							X	X	X			
Task 5										X	X	X

Knowing your time line helps you determine how much money you will need.

Budgeting tips

Do you need a large amount of funding at the beginning of the project or will your project be "phased up" over a period of time? It's not always realistic to expect a new project to be able to be up and operating (and spending large amounts of money) during the first six months or year of operation.

- You may want to ask for a small amount of funding for the first phase of the project. Specify in your proposal what you expect to achieve during this "minimal funding phase" and when you will be returning to the funding agency to ask for funds for the next phase. This can suggest to the funding agency that they can terminate the relationship easily if your project is not successful (and then it is essential for you to make sure the first phase succeeds).
- Wherever possible, don't "guesstimate." Use bids and estimates whenever you can get them even if they are informal quotes.
- Don't pad your budget. Experienced reviewers will know the cost of goods and services and what salaries are reasonable.
- Include all sources of support, including volunteer time, donated space and borrowed equipment.
- More detail is better than less detail.

A budget format for a three-year or three-phase funding proposal:

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**
PERSONNEL	.	.	.
Person #1	.	.	.
Person #1	.	.	.
Person #3	.	.	.
Sub-Total	.	.	.
FACILITIES (list)	.	.	.
Sub-Total	.	.	.
EQUIPMENT (list)	.	.	.
Sub-Total	.	.	.
SUPPLIES (list)	.	.	.
Sub-Total	.	.	.
COMMUNICATION (list)	.	.	.
Telephone	.	.	.
Postage	.	.	.
Sub-Total	.	.	.
TRAVEL (list)	.	.	.
Fuel	.	.	.
Vehicle Rental	.	.	.
Rail Tickets	.	.	.
Sub-Total	.	.	.
.	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
TOTAL	.	.	.
SUM TOTAL			.

Supporting materials/ Appendices

Supporting materials are often arranged in an appendix.

Policies regarding inclusion of supporting materials differ widely among funding organizations. Whether to allow them usually depends upon how materials contribute to a proposal's evaluation. Restrictions on proposal length may prohibit use of appendices.

Find out early in the process if supporting materials are required, desired or not allowed. Be prepared to spend time to collect resources, produce a video, document capability, update a résumé, solicit letters, and include references, letters of intent from partners, or whatever is needed.

If required or permitted, appendices should highlight those aspects of your project that are of secondary interest to the reviewer. After presenting all the key points of your project in a concise manner, you are now providing additional information that:

- Endorses your organization
- Provides certifications
- Adds background information about project personnel and consultants
- Clarifies information with exhibit tables and charts, etc.
- Include endorsements or letters of intent from partnering agencies, if appropriate.

These are some items that might be included in Appendices:

Dissemination Plan
Funding organizations want to know how their financial support of your project will extend to a wider community and other audiences. You may consider using news articles, newsletters, workshops, radio broadcasts, presentations, printed handouts, slide shows, training programs, etc., to share the fruits of your project with others.

Letters of Support
Funding organizations want to know that others feel strongly about your project. Solicit letters from potential supporters that will be substantive and unique to their point-of-view. Have them address the letters directly to the funding agency.

Cooperating Agency Descriptions
If there are cooperating agencies involved, provide a detailed description of each of them. This can take the form of a single-page Fact Sheet that includes name/address of the agency, names of key personnel, and brief descriptions of the major services provided is sufficient.

Certifications/ Qualifications/ Resumes of Personnel
It may be necessary or useful to provide professional qualifications or CVs of project personnel.

Surveys or Questionnaires/ Evaluation Instrument
If your project involves surveys or questionnaires to carry out your program or evaluate its success, include a draft of the actual survey, questionnaire or interview guide you plan to use. Indicate DRAFT at the top and then make it look as real as possible. Do NOT say things like, "I think I may have a question that deals with...” or "Four or five questions will be included that examine Concern A.” If you plan to use an interview procedure or a focus group discussion, include a draft copy of the specific questions that will be used.

Submission Checklist
The complete proposal must be submitted on time in the requested format with the requested number of copies and original authorized signatures.

- Include only the number of pages allowed. Observe the format.
- Complete any forms that are required.
- If not specified otherwise, the proposal should be typed, single-spaced, on 8-1/2 x 11 inch pages of medium-weight white paper.
- Find out if cover pages are allowed or required.
- Make sure to provide authorized signatures as required.
- Be concise. Elaborations should add depth and scope, not be page fillers.
- Your report cover should look professional and neat. Do not waste time using fancy report covers or expensive binding.
- Before submitting, make sure you have included all required components and supplied whatever documentation is required.
- Strive to make sure that the proposal is received at least one day before the deadline.
- Check the address and delivery instructions. Make sure you have the right postage or fees for delivery service.