

How to Write a Grant Proposal

Introduction

This document provides a broad outline of the information you should gather prior to starting a grant proposal. It also provides a roadmap to completing a grant application. Every grant application is different but the information requested by the funding agencies will be very similar. If you have gathered and developed at least this much, the application process will not seem so daunting.

Background

Background documentation is needed in three areas: **concept, program, and expenses**. By involving other stakeholders in the process, they can seriously consider the project's value to the organization. You should begin by gathering background information on:

- your organization,
- the need you propose to address.

Concept

It is important that your project fits with the philosophy, mission and needs of your organization and of the funding organization. Funders want to know that the project is compelling and reinforces the overall direction of both your organizations. It is also important that you have done adequate research, (i.e., literature search) to support the value of your proposal.

Program

Required program information:

- the type of project and how you will conduct it;
- the project timetable;
- the expected outcomes and the best way to evaluate the results;
- staffing and volunteer requirements, including the roles of existing staff and new hires.

Expenses

Although you will not know all the expenses related to the project at this stage, you must be able to outline the overall budget. This will ensure that the costs of the project are both reasonable and in proportion to the outcomes you anticipate. If it appears that the costs will be prohibitive even with this award, you will have to scale back your plans or remove the least cost-effective expenditures from your budget. Once the master proposal narrative has been written and the program details and timing have been clearly defined, more comprehensive financial data can be gathered.

How to Write a Grant Proposal

Components of a Proposal

Since every grant has different requirements, this table outlines only what is needed to move from idea to application. The first four highlighted steps of this process are required for presentation of a proposal to department management and entity reviewers. These along with the last two are typically required by the grantor to complete your grant application.

Steps	Definition	Length	Required for	
			Proposal	Final Submission
Executive Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview • Summary 	1 page	X	X
Statement of Need	Why is this project necessary?	2 pages	X	X
Project Description	Plan for project implementation and evaluation	3 pages	X	X
Budget	financial description of the project with explanatory notes	1 page	X	X
Organizational Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Management • Mission • Primary populations served • Activities • services 	1 page		X
Conclusion	summary of proposal highlights	2 paragraphs		X

The Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is the most important section of your proposal. It summarizes the key information and convinces the reader to consider your project for support. The executive summary should include:

Problem

A statement of the problem or need to be addressed (one or two paragraphs).

Solution

A description of the project - what it will do, how and where it will be conducted, how long it will last, how many people will benefit from the program, and who will staff it (one or two paragraphs).

Funding requirements

An explanation of the budget required to conduct the project and of your plans to receive additional funding either during or after the term of the grant (one paragraph).

Organization and expertise

A statement of the organization's history, purpose, and activities, underscoring its capacity to implement the proposed project (one paragraph).

Collaborations

The interests and potential contributions of collaborators should be highlighted. Recognizing them here can help strengthen the collaboration (one paragraph).

The Statement of Need

How to Write a Grant Proposal

This section must be succinct and persuasive. The statement of need will familiarize the reader with the issues, facts and evidence that support the need for the project. Relevant information can come from authorities in the field or from your organization's unique experience. By conducting a needs assessment, you demonstrate your commitment to developing a strong program.

1. **Identify facts or statistics that best support your proposal.** Conduct a literature search so that you can cite relevant studies that are similar to yours. Be sure support data are accurate and current. Information that is too generic, broad or irrelevant will cause the reviewer to question the entire proposal. The information presented should be in balance with the scale of the project.
2. **Promote hope.** Overstatement and dramatic appeals should be avoided. If the need presented seems to be too great, any solution may appear hopeless and the funder may question the value of any investment in your program.
3. **Decide if your project can serve as a model.** Model programs sometimes enjoy a broader base of potential funders but they only work for certain types of projects. You will need to document how the problem you are tackling occurs in other communities/ organizations and how your solution could apply. You may use the information you find to suggest that the problem may require an ongoing rather than short term approach.
4. **Determine if the need your project addresses is acute.** If you believe that the problem you are addressing is more severe/pervasive than those addressed by others or that the solution you propose makes more sense than others, you must provide evidence to support this belief.
5. **Decide whether your program addresses a need differently or better than similar projects.** Without being critical of the competition, make it clear that you know that others are doing work in your field. Funders are very interested in collaboration and may even ask why you are not collaborating with key competitors. Minimally, you need to describe how your work complements, but does not duplicate, the work of others. If your project will serve to develop stronger collaborations between existing initiatives, make this known.
6. **Avoid circular reasoning.** The absence of your proposed solution should not be put forth as the actual problem. Instead of offering your proposed solution to remedy the problem, cite how this approach has been successfully implemented elsewhere. You might refer to a survey that underscores the potential benefits of your solution. Your conclusion can connect your proposed solution to these benefits.

The Project Description

This section should have five subsections that give a complete view of the project. These include:

- **Objectives,**
- **Methods,**
- **Staffing/administration,**
- **Evaluation, and**
- **Sustainability.**

It is important to differentiate between goals and objectives. **Goals** are broad statements of what you want to accomplish but are usually not measurable. **Objectives** are both specific and measurable and will form the basis for program activities and evaluation. The goals and objectives of your project should overlap those of the funding organization.

Objectives

Objectives are the measurable outcomes and define your methods. They must be tangible, measurable, specific, and achievable in the time period you specify. Objectives may be:

- Behavioral (anticipated human action),
- Performance (expected timeframe),
- Process (way of doing something),
- Product (tangible result).

How to Write a Grant Proposal

Format elements such as indentations, numbers or bullets may be used to make objectives stand out on the page.

Methods

The methods section describes the activities (how, when, and why) needed to achieve the objectives. There should be a clear link between the methods you describe and your previously stated objectives. Methods help the reader visualize the implementation of the project. Your methods should reflect any innovative and unique approaches you have to reaching your objectives.

- *How:* The detailed description of what will occur from the beginning to the end of the project. Innovation is an essential evaluation criterion and should be highlighted here. Describe how collaborative relationships will enhance the conduct of the project.
- *When:* The order and timing of tasks may be presented in the form of a timetable to facilitate review. The timetable can be viewed as a summary of project steps and sequence and supports the rest of the methods section.
- *Why:* Proposed methods may require defense, especially if they are innovative or unorthodox. This may be done by including expert testimony and examples of other projects where these methods worked. If you expect your project to have valuable outcomes to others outside the scope of your project, you should describe them here.

Staffing/Administration

"Staffing" may refer to volunteers, consultants or paid staff. Describe the importance of each staff role to the success of the project and how each will help to operationalize your proposed methods. The experience, qualifications, and commitment of key personnel on your team will lend validity to your proposal. A brief biographical sketch will be needed for essential staff, particularly for the project manager whose credentials may help influence a grant decision. Biosketches will help the funding agency determine whether the proposed staff is well suited to the conduct of the project. Staff qualifications will also be considered in justifying salary and project costs.

Volunteers: Typically staffing sections are not developed for projects that are primarily volunteer run. Descriptions of volunteer tasks can be helpful in highlighting both the value added by the volunteers as well as the cost-effectiveness of the project.

Paid Staff: For a project with paid staff, identify both full time and part time workers. Identify those to be recruited specifically for the project and those who are already employed by the organization. You may have to explain how individuals employed in another capacity will also be able to work on the proposed project.

Collaborators: Collaborations are valued by most funding agencies. When other organizations that are already committed to addressing the needs that you are addressing join forces with you, funding agencies regard your alliance as a way to extend their funding and the impact of your project. Since some funding agencies require letters of both support and collaboration, it is good to know early who you can rely on for these letters.

Evaluation

An evaluation is a management tool that should be built into the project conduct, not just at its conclusion. Like strategic planning, it helps to refine and improve a program. Evaluations can measure the product or analyze your process and/or strategies. You may choose to use either or both depending on the nature of the project and its objectives.

Most evaluation plans include both qualitative and quantitative data and seek to determine the measurable outcomes of your project. Whatever form your evaluation takes, you must describe how evaluation information will be collected, how the data will be analyzed, how results will be reported and to whom. Some funders suggest or mandate who should conduct the evaluation.

How to Write a Grant Proposal

Sustainability

Evidence of fiscal sustainability is an important characteristic of the successful grant proposal. You will most likely be asked to demonstrate the long-term financial viability of the project and to do so in concrete terms. Be very specific about current and projected funding streams, listing both new and ongoing expenses your project will be incurred to support the project.

You must prove either that your project is:

- finite (with start and end dates);
- capacity-building (that it will contribute to the future self-sufficiency of a program and/or enable it to expand services that might generate revenue);
- will make your organization attractive to other funders in the future.

The Budget

You may present your budget as a simple one-page statement of projected revenues and expenses or your proposal may require a more complex budget statement.

Expense Budget

The proposal narrative should be used as the basis for identifying expenses and preparing the budget. All personnel and non-personnel costs associated with the project should be listed including both new project-specific expenses and ongoing expenses to be allocated to the project. Categories that you may want to consider for itemizing your budget are:

- Personnel (salary and benefits)
- Consultants (salary)
- Training
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Communication (telephone/postage)
- Materials preparation (e.g., advertising, printing costs)
- Travel
- Facilities rental
- Evaluation
- Other expenses
- Indirect costs (costs that your organization requires that you include)

Each item and its associated cost should be summarized on a worksheet that can be used to develop the proposal, monitor the project's progress, and report interim and final results. Costs should be grouped into subcategories and all significant costs should be broken out within these subcategories. Nominal expenses can be grouped together as one line item.

Be careful when listing equipment. Funding agencies are usually much more willing to provide funds to support staffing than they are to support the purchase of equipment that may or may not directly benefit the funded project.

Don't short change yourself by underestimating related costs, but be as precise as possible so that your estimates will not be challenged. Consider whether your budget will be level for the duration of the project, be "phased up" over time or have higher costs at start up. A good strategy may be to request a small budget for the first phase of the project and link future funding to successful completion of phase 1 goals.

Support and Revenue Statement

The typical project does not require a support and revenue statement since the expense budget will indicate the amount of grant support needed. However, if project activities are expected to generate

How to Write a Grant Proposal

income or grant support has already been awarded to the project, a support and revenue statement should be prepared to provide an itemized account of expenses.

Budget Narrative

A budget narrative is used to explain any unusual line items in the budget. If costs are straightforward and the numbers need no explanation, a narrative should not be needed.

A budget narrative can be structured in either of the following ways:

1. Footnote the line items in the budget and key them to explanations in the footer.
2. Address the budget element in text if a more extensive explanation is required. Avoid repeating the project narrative or information about your organization in this section.

Organizational Information and Conclusion

Organizational Information

Organizational information should appear at the end of your proposal. Selling the need for your project first, then the organization's ability to accomplish it is usually the best approach.

In two pages or less describe:

- How long your organization has been in business;
- Organizational mission, (be sure the proposed activity fits the stated mission);
- Organizational structure, leadership, programs, and special expertise;
- Details about the staff, (number of full and part-time staff, and their levels of expertise);
- What activities your staff engage in and the assistance they provide;
- How your collaborators are/will be involved with your target population and in the development of your proposal;
- Population you reach and serve and any special needs they have;
- Number of people you reach through your programs and why and in what ways they rely on your organization;
- The importance of your target population to the funding organization.

Conclusion

Your proposal should have 1-2 concluding paragraphs. These can be used to outline follow-up activities that might signal future funding requests or to state how the project might continue after the funding period has ended.

Letter Proposals

Many funders prefer a brief letter proposal; others require that you complete an application form. It may take as much or more thought and data gathering to write a good letter request as it does to prepare a full proposal. Don't assume that because it is only a letter, it isn't a time-consuming and challenging task.

The scale of the project might suggest you write a proposal in a small-scale letter format. It may not require all the proposal elements or the sequence of elements recommended here. Although most letter proposals should follow the format of a full proposal, they should be no more than three pages long. The individual funder will determine the size, scope and format of your letter proposal. Refer to the basic proposal components to be sure that you have not omitted an element that will support your case. A good letter proposal includes:

How to Write a Grant Proposal

- **Request for funding:** If you have made prior applications to or have received grants from the funder, you should state it here. Explain why you are writing and how much funding you will need from this foundation.
- **Description of need:** Briefly describe why there is a need for this project, piece of equipment, etc.
- **Explanation of plan:** Describe precisely what will be done with grant funding. Give enough detail to stimulate the funder's interest.
- **Organizational data:** Familiarize the funder with your organization by including your mission statement, brief description of programs you offer, number of people served, and staff, and volunteer data, if appropriate.
- **Budget data:** State the total cost of the project. Your budget may be presented within the letter or in a separate attachment. Just because the proposal is shorter, the budget may still be half-page long.
- **Closing statement:** A strong closing statement is essential. Here you can offer to provide more details or to meet with the funder.
- **Attachments:** The size of the request does not necessarily imply that the back-up documentation is any less detailed.