



How to Write a Grant Proposal

USDA Rural
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Cooperative
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CD Techniques

- ❖ Is your community planning to seek funds from foundations or corporations as part of an overall fundraising plan?
- ❖ Have you already applied for funding and been turned down?
- ❖ Has your community already created a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) development organization and is that organization ready to receive grant monies?
- ❖ Are you wondering how you can get started on funding your community's needs?

If so, you may want to consider these tips for writing effective grant proposals.

How To Prepare

- 1) **Define your project** by clarifying your underlying purpose. Determine general project goals and specific objectives to accomplish. You should consider a timetable, anticipated outcomes, a method for evaluating results, and estimated staffing needs. You also should determine how your project adheres to the philosophy or mission of your agency. Potential funders will consider more favorably well thought out and practical project plans.
- 2) **Estimate costs and identify the right funding sources** by looking for consistency between the purpose/goals of your project and those of the funder. Direct contact with the funder is imperative. Be sure to inquire into the maximum amount of money available, the average size of awards, and whether the funder has a geographic preference for applicant projects. You also should find out how they make decisions and what types of projects it funds (project funding, capital funding, seed funding, etc.). If possible, identify a project officer to be your liaison to address your questions.
- 3) **Acquire proposal guidelines and submission requirements** by requesting this information from the funder. You should find a potential funder who will support your proposal so you are not caught trying to change your goals to fit those of the funder. To fully gauge this support, send the funder a "letter of intent" with basic information on your project idea to see if they would be interested in viewing your proposal. Follow up this letter with telephone calls or face-to-face meetings to develop a relationship with the funder, a key to the success of the proposal. The more the funder knows you, the more likely they will fund your project.

How To Write an Effective Proposal

- 1) The **Executive Summary** conveys all key information and serves to convince the reader of the importance of your project and its potential in successfully addressing your goals. It should include a brief statement of the problem/need recognized by your organization and a concise description of the proposed solution. You also should explain the amount of grant money required for your project and any plans for future funding. You may wish to briefly state the name, history, and activities of your organization, emphasizing its capacity to carry out the proposal. Also, list any experts or partnerships associated with your organization (particularly those that are associated with the project proposal).

- 2) The ***Statement of Need*** presents the facts and evidence that support your project. It should demonstrate that your program addresses a need in an inventive manner that is particularly effective in meeting the need. Remember to include goals and measurable objectives, provide a compelling narrative of the need, and ensure that the focus of the document is placed on the particular, unique need(s) of the community (and not the needs of your organization).
- 3) The ***Project Description*** presents your plan by aligning your project with the purpose/goals of the funding source. It should include specific details of the method and process by which the goals and objectives will be accomplished. Be sure to note the distinction between methods, objectives, and goals. You should also outline the proposed activities and their expected outcomes. A description of personnel functions with names and credentials of key staff/consultants often proves beneficial in this portion of the proposal.
- 4) The ***Evaluation Plan*** indicates that you take your objectives seriously and want to know how well you have achieved them. There are three types of evaluations—formative (showing the small changes brought by the project over time), summative (a pre-test of needs before the project and a post-test of needs at the end of the project to show progress), and outcome (a description of how the community was improved overall by the project). You should describe the manner in which evaluation information will be collected and how it will be analyzed and the results reported. Ask funders for their evaluation preference.
- 5) The ***Budget*** lists all the personnel and non-personnel items included in your project, specifying estimated costs. Costs should be grouped into subcategories, reflecting the critical areas of expense. A narrative portion might help explain unusual items in the budget, though it is not always needed. Be sure to budget *for all expenses*, no matter how trivial. More often than not, organizations do not consider the full costs of project operation, leaving out smaller costs like supplies (pens, paper, etc., an average cost, in 2007, of \$150 per project employee per year) and transportation. Also, be sure to highlight the contributions of your own organization to this project—whether money or in-kind support. The more in-house resources you can chalk up to the effort, the more likely the funder will fund your project. Even volunteer hours can be counted as in-house contributions, complete with a dollar value (depending upon the fair-market value of the jobs they are given or the generally accepted “volunteer rate,” which was \$18.77 per hour for 2006).
- 6) Find out if ***Supporting Materials*** are allowed or desired by the funder. If so, you may wish to attach a résumé of your nonprofit organization, describing its structure, programs, and special expertise. Attach a list of the board of directors. Examples of supporting materials include letters of recommendation, certifications, or information about project personnel.
- 7) The ***Sustainability Component and Conclusion*** calls attention to the future, perhaps outlining possible follow-up activities. It should state how the project might carry-on without further grant support to assure the funders that they are making an investment in something that will last. A good way of assuring the funders of a proposal’s sustainability is to show that the project has a large amount of public support, and that fundraising or fund generating will be a part of and help accomplish the project’s mission. A good way of assuring funders of this quality is to show that the project arose from your community’s strategic planning process and that the project is a part of or is in keeping with its strategic plan (carrying with it a great amount of influence). As this is the last chance to make an appeal for your project, you may want to briefly restate what your organization wants to do, its importance, and why you need funding to accomplish it.

Additional Resources

- Idealist.org Nonprofit Resources/FAQs –
<http://www.idealst.org/if/i/en/npofaq>
- Foundation Center, “Learn About Proposal Writing” –
<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/learnabout/proposalwriting.html>
- Rural Information Center’s Guide to Funding Resources –
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/funding/fundguide.html>
- Independent Sector “Value of Volunteer Time” –
http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html