

Secrets of Preparing A Winning Fund Proposals

1. How Grantmakers Review Proposals: Remember...your proposal is just one in a pile

The larger the foundation/corporation, the more layers of review

- Screened by administrative assistant for appropriate format, completed and signed forms, and required attachments
- Sent to a program assistant to skim for content and check for opening and closing paragraphs of each section, graphs and tables, gullet pointed objectives, budget spreadsheet/summary. Then, it is forwarded to program officer with summary of findings
- Program officer thoroughly reads the proposal and still may skim prior to reading if the proposal is long. He or she searches for key elements, critically reviews document making notations, and makes recommendation
- Board of Directors review based on recommendation of program officer, receives proposal before meeting for review, makes notes, reviews entire document, and makes decision

Government agencies

- Administrative staff review proposal for compliance with RFP and checks for eligibility, page length, required attachments, and completed forms.
- Government department finalizes review panels by soliciting peer reviewers in panels of up to 20 persons and prepares both electronic and print versions of proposals for distribution. The peer reviewers receive proposals (five to 20 proposals to review in two to three weeks and either travel to the government agency for one to five days OR work at home and conduct several conference calls.). Proposals are reviewed with a numerical scoring system based on points allowed for each section.
- Panel findings are final. Highest scores receive funding. Organizations can obtain review comments.

2. Typical reasons for rejection – RED FLAGS

- Need is overstated or too vague
- Only conjecture, no factual evidence to support need
- Either too narrowly focused on the community or too global
- Writing to impress – quoting opinions of the organization
- No citations of research or case studies quoted
- Plan for implementation has flaws
- Activities not described in detail
- No logical sequence of events to show “if-then” scenario
- Staffing issues
- Budget irregularities
- Vague expenditures
- Contingency or miscellaneous line on project budget
- Not identifying other sources of income for the project
- Lack of audited financial statement
- Unattainable outcomes
- Outcomes cannot be measured
- Goal too broad
- Outcomes do not tie to the mission of the organization
- Lack of attention to guidelines
- Not following format requirements

- Asking for funding outside of grantmaking priorities
- Rambling executive summary
- Not getting to the point
- Too much information without substance
- Too much jargon or undefined terminology
- Writing for the money
- Not identifying critical needs
- Explaining current deficit without a plan of action to correct it
- Use of small type font instead of writing concisely

3. Connect with Grantmakers

- Get to know the grantmaker before submitting your proposal
 - Always obtain guidelines from the foundation or corporate entity
 - Do not rely on websites – information can be out-of-date
 - Contact the grantmaker personally to request guidelines
- Research and read everything you can on them
 - Contact former grantees for details on the process
 - Review press releases to understand scope of grantmaking
- Request a meeting or conference call prior to submitting your proposal
 - Prepare a summary or draft of your proposal for their review
 - People from your organization attending the meeting or on the call
 - Executive director
 - Board president or member – especially if there is an existing relationship
 - Program person

4. Four C's of Effective Grant Proposals

- Clear
 - Active, engaging language makes it easy to read
 - Short sentences
 - Small paragraphs
- Comprehensive
 - Detailed
 - Anticipates every possible question of grant reviewer
- Concise
 - Well-organized
 - Gets to the point as quickly as possible
- Competitive
 - Attainable outcomes that will impact the community
 - Furthers the mission of the grantmaker
 - Persuasive

5. Components of a proposal template

- Cover letter – one page
- Title page (optional)
- Summary – one page
- Background of organization – one page
- Need statement – two pages maximum
- Project description – three pages maximum
- Evaluation – one-half to one page

- Budget – one-half to one page
 - Future or continued funding
- Attachments
 - Letter from IRS stating IRC 501(c)(3) status
 - List of board member with affiliations
 - Audited financial statement no more than two years old and/or IRS Form 990
 - Organizational budget for current fiscal year
 - Annual report (optional)
 - Logic model
 - Timeline, PERT and Gantt charts
 - List of other funders receiving a proposal for this project
 - Job descriptions and/or key staff biographies
 - Organizational chart
 - Organization brochure
 - Relevant newspaper clippings and video tapes (only if allowed)
 - Strategic plan (if available)
 - Letters of support (if required)

6. Other Hints

- Make Your Proposal Stand Out
- Always remember the Four C's
- Proposal writing is persuasive. It gets the reviewer to see your point of view, convinces them that you can achieve the outcomes, and always focus on achieving the mission of the grantmaker!
- Discuss the problem in the needs/problem statement in detail. Use case studies/best practices and models that are similar to yours. Use outside statistics (global, national, state, and local) and use current program statistics. This information is used to identify community needs/gaps in services.
- Speak in terms of quantity and quality
 - Discuss current and future target populations in detail (age, income, ethnicity/race, lifestyle attributes, and location)
 - Show numbers of those currently served AND those you expect to serve in the future
 - Discuss the distinctiveness of the program by identifying current and anticipated level of resources, sharing past evaluation data, and forecasting what will happen if the problem is not addressed.
- Discuss the planning that took place to create the solution
 - Logic model
 - Collaborative partners and their involvement
- Use your existing program's accomplishments, target population, current results, and future short- and long-term results.
- When introducing new programs
 - List accomplishments from similar programs/models
 - Identify short- and long-term results
 - Determine steps to reach the results
 - Describe theories and assumptions
- Prepare realistic and attainable process and outcome objectives
 - Process - quantifies the method: Empower parents to cope with everyday stressors.

- Outcome - quantifiable result: 90% of parents will identify key stressors in their lives.
- Express outcomes as changes made in behavior and/or product produced, along with people who benefit in the community.
- Identify the measurement tools for evaluation
 - Every outcome must have a measurement device
 - Determine frequency of measuring
 - State how this information will be used, who will see it
- Outline benchmarks for activities in spreadsheet format
 - Use calendar format with month and year references across top
 - Provide tasks and person(s) responsible for achieving the benchmark in left column
 - Express the start and end dates for each activity
 - May need to use several charts in one proposal to describe various stages of the proposed project or program
- Include a publicity plan if required.
 - Mostly corporations and large foundations
 - In two paragraphs under separate heading discuss the following:
 - State that the potential funder will be a partner in the project or program
 - How your organization will promote the name of the funder verbally and on printed materials
 - Outline any media outlets that will be approached for press coverage
 - Seek permission to use corporate logo on all printed materials
- Use short sentences and small paragraphs
 - First sentence of every paragraph
 - Must grab the attention of the reader, especially in opening paragraphs
 - Needs to convey the idea or item discussed in the paragraph
 - Should fit on a single line from margin to margin
 - Vary length of paragraphs
 - Minimum two sentences per paragraph
 - Provide no more than 10 lines per paragraph
 - Average sentence should have no more 15 to 17 words
 - No story-telling – proposals are non-fiction!
- Write in an active voice, avoid being passive
 - Writing in the past tense or passively can weaken your case for support and/or disrupt the reviewer’s focus.
 - “We will...” vs. “we would like to...”
 - Get rid of “would,” “could,” “should”
 - Restructure passive sentences into active ones
 - “All programs **are clinically supervised** by a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW).”
 - “A licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) supervises all programs.”
- Be conscience of voice
 - Third-person for narrative
 - First-person for cover letter
 - DO NOT mix voices
- Properly cite statistics and case studies
 - Use the Modern Language Association’s format for footnotes or endnotes
 - Do not use the American Psychological Association’s format for citing sources
 - Obtain a style and grammar book for quick reference!

- Format for skimmers
 - Opening and closing paragraphs
 - Introduce the contents of the section in the opening paragraph
 - Summarize the findings in the closing paragraph
 - Bullet point objectives and other lists
 - Number lists when you need to show sequential position
 - Bullet point lists when all items have equal significance
 - Use table and charts to make emphasis
 - Keep table or charts to a minimum in the narrative – one maybe two maximum
 - Place table or charts in the center of the page
 - If using a chart, remember to use gradient black tones, **color** doesn't always copy well
- Do not use jargon
- Always spell out acronyms
- Passive voice should be 10 percent or less of your entire document
- Flesch Reading Ease score needs to around 40 at an twelfth-grade level
- Budgeting tips
 - Follow the specific format required by the funder
 - All figures should reflect real, total costs of the project
 - Check with your financial officer for percentage of overhead/indirect costs
 - Anticipate salary and other increases if the budget is for a multi-year grant
 - Do not add contingency as a line item
 - Before submitting to a potential funder, remember what items or activities the foundation will not pay for and plan well ahead to find additional funding for these items if necessary
- Never bind or use covers
 - Let the cover letter float on top of proposal package
 - Bind the proposal with a large paper clip or binder clip – do not staple
 - If application form required, place as first page of narrative
 - If the narrative, including the summary is over 10 pages in length, create a table of contents
 - Create table of contents for attachments, label attachments
 - Attachment A - Program budget spreadsheet and identification of other grantmakers, if applicable
 - Attachment B - 501(c)(3) letter
 - Attachment C - Board list
 - Attachment D - Organizational budget for current fiscal year
 - Attachment E - Audited financial statement and/or IRS Form 990
 - Attachment F – Z - Additional attachments as required or desired
- Formatting is VERY IMPORTANT
 - Have as much white space as possible
 - One-inch margins
 - 12-point type font with serifs: Times New Roman, CG Times, or Garamond
 - Single space unless otherwise directed
 - Number each page
 - Automatic numbering in upper right or left or bottom center
 - Use header or footer to also include name of organization on each page
 - DO NOT number first page of narrative

- Left justify ONLY – never fully justify
 - Keep right margin ragged
 - Easier on the eyes of the reviewer
- Avoid using **bold face** type and underlining within the narrative
 - Slows down the reader
 - Skimmers will only see the emphasis words
 - Acceptable for section headings and subheads only
 - Section headings should be in CAPS and underlined
 - Subheads should be in Upper and Lower Case and underlined
 - *Italics* are acceptable when referring to the name of the project/program
- Proposal narrative should not be more than eight pages in length especially for foundation or corporate requests
 - Always create a proposal template
 - Cut and paste to accommodate specific grantmaker formats
- Most importantly – your proposed project/program must make an impact on the community you serve!
 - Successful proposals describe changes that will be beneficial to the community
 - Grantmakers want to see collaboration among organizations to work together to make change
 - Grantmakers are *venture philanthropists* who want to *invest* in your organization to further their mission

7. Recommended Reading

- *A Guide to Proposal Planning and Writing*, Jeremy T. Miner and Lynn E. Miner.
<http://209.61.189.163/gs/miner.htm>
- *Successful Grantsmanship: A Guerrilla Guide to Raising Money*, Susan L. Golden (Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1997) ISBN 078790306X
- *The Due Diligence Tool for Use in Pre-Grant Assessment*, Lisa Culick, Kristen Godard and Natasha Terk, LaPiana Associates, Inc. (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, December 2004) http://www.lapiana.org/downloads/DDTool_Final.pdf
- *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*, (The United Way of America, 1991) Item number 0989
- *Logic Model Development Guide*. (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2001)
<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>