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## **Fundamentals of Grant Proposal Writing or How to support your business case for funding**

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### ***Abstract***

*You intend to start up an organization or agency, or perhaps it is already operating but you need to seek funding to get it going, or growing. However, before you can secure the funding you have to convince the funder of the feasibility of your project. This paper focuses on the fundamentals of a grant proposal that would support the business plan of an organization seeking funding from a granting agency. The special emphasis is on non-profit organization, for example, a National Library Association. It provides information on the several areas that the proposal must cover. Some of the areas covered in this paper are similar to those one would cover in a business plan.*

### **1. Introduction**

When an organization requires a significant infusion of capital the people providing the money will ask to see something in writing – a proposal which includes a complete description of the situation accompanied by a financial proposal. This proposal should place you and the organization in the best light possible. In general, this is what the funding agency wants from you.

### **2. Concept**

In preparing the proposal there are several steps to go through, namely:

**i) Vision.** The mission of the organization should be in sync with areas which the funding organization supports and should lead to a concrete program to either enrich the human condition or trigger social change. Every proposal, no matter how isolated the goals or modest the grant amount requested, should reflect an ambitious vision. The organization must therefore, identify a funding institution that shares this vision and has the resources to become a funding partner.

**ii) Philanthropy.** Organizations engaged in philanthropy have strict guidelines concerning what they will support. It is important therefore, that you have a good sense of how the project fits with the philosophy and mission of the granting agency. The need that the proposal is addressing must be documented. These concepts must be well articulated in the proposal. Funders want to know that a project reinforces the overall direction of an organization, and they will need to be convinced that the case for the project is compelling. Therefore, to strongly support your proposal gathering credible evidence regarding the problem / opportunity, is crucial. In addition, the appropriateness of a funding source or the competition level in a particular granting cycle are important factors which influence the outcome of the application. Careful attention must be paid to these aspects.

**iii) Translating the Vision into Action.** The vision must be translated into concrete terms with clear goals, measurable objectives, and specific outcomes. These can be based on empirical evidence, personal experience, or experience of others.

**iv) Submission.** The proposal must be submitted for evaluation by the granting institution within the timeframe specified. The innovative nature or critical importance of the proposed project is a deciding factor in whether or not the project is funded.

**v) Sustainability.** If the proposal is funded, future charitable activities should grow out of this initial success in order to provide continuous funding on a self-sufficient basis. This is usually key to persuading a funding agency to look upon your proposal positively and therefore fund it. Granting bodies do not want to take on the financing of a project indefinitely.

**vi) Grant-writing Skills.** The skills of the grant-writer in building a compelling case cannot be underestimated. If you have a good project to propose and cannot present it in a compelling way to the potential funder then the possibility of failing to receive the grant is highly likely. Therefore, it is wise to get someone who has been successful in getting grants to review your proposal before submitting it.

**vii) Program.** The program should be clearly described and in as few words as possible. Here is a check list of the program information you require:

- A statement of your goals and objectives
- the nature of the project and how it will be conducted;
- the timetable for the project;
- the anticipated outcomes and how best to evaluate the results; and
- staffing and volunteer needs, including deployment of existing staff and new hires
- accompanying budget.

### **3. Design of the Proposal Package**

The package must be designed in such a way that it is easy to read. Aim for a maximum of 5 - 7 pages of well thought out and well documented facts that allows the reviewers of the application to get a full understanding of all aspects of the project. Additional information can be contained in appendices making it available, if required, to confirm or support certain aspects of the proposal. The main part of the proposal should be able to stand alone and tell the story without one having to read the appendices.

#### **i) Executive Summary.**

This is an umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal. This is generally contained in 1 page but no more than 2 pages.

This first page of the proposal is the most important section of the entire document. Here you will provide the reader with a snapshot of what is to follow. Specifically, it summarizes all of the key information and is a sales document designed to convince the reader to read the rest of the proposal that this project should be considered for support. Be certain to include:

- ii) Problem** — a brief statement of the problem or need your agency has recognized and is prepared to address (one or two paragraphs);
- iii) Solution** — a short description of the project, including what will take place and how many people will benefit from the program, how and where it will operate, for how long, and who will staff it (one or two paragraphs);
- iv) Funding requirements**— an explanation of the amount of grant money required for the project and what your plans are for funding it in the future (one paragraph);
- v) Organization and its expertise**— a brief statement of the history, purpose, and activities of your agency, emphasizing its capacity to carry out this proposal (one paragraph).
- vi) Statement of Need** - why is this project necessary - this should be a strong and convincing statement.

Your next task is to build interest in your project by enabling the funder to understand the problem that the project will solve.

The statement of need will enable the reader to learn more about the issues. It presents the facts and evidence that support the need for the project and establishes that you understand the problems and therefore can reasonably address them. As stated before, the information used to support the case must come from authorities in the field, examples of where there was successful implementation of a similar project supported by a reputable funding agency. It can also come from your own experience.

You want the need section to be succinct, yet persuasive. Therefore you must assemble all the arguments and then present them in a logical sequence that will readily convince the reader of their importance. In developing this section you must be guided by certain considerations. For example:

- Which facts or statistics best support the project. Be sure the data you present are accurate.
- Portray the need as solvable with the funding you are requesting – do not let it sound insurmountable or the funder may think there is no chance that the project will succeed
- Say what would be gained as well as what will be lost if the project does not get funding
- Present the information in short, concise format so that it captures the reviewer's attention.

Taken together, the five subsections mentioned above present an interlocking picture of the total project

#### **4. Areas Which The Project Description Must Cover:**

Together, objectives and methods dictate staffing and administrative requirements. They then become the focus of the evaluation to assess the results of the project. The project's sustainability flows directly from its success, hence its ability to attract other support. In other words, if you have good results for the initial project you can use those results to attract further support either from the original funding agency or from others. There are at least six areas which the project description must cover:

##### **i) Objectives .**

Objectives are the measurable outcomes of the program and must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable, realistic, and achievable in a specified time period. With competition for funding so great, well-articulated objectives are increasingly critical to a proposal's success. It is imperative then that objectives are presented very clearly and not lost in

verbiage or cliché. The funder will want to see in the final report back to them that the project actually accomplished these objectives. So, do not promise what you cannot deliver.

## **ii) Methods.**

The methods section describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve the objectives. Your methods should match the previously stated objectives. The methods section enables the reader to visualize the implementation of the project. Methods describe the how, when, and why.

- **How:** This is the detailed description of what will occur from the time the project begins until it is completed.
- **When:** The methods section should present the order and timing for the tasks. It might make sense to provide a timetable so that the grants decision-maker does not have to map out the sequencing on his or her own. The timetable tells the reader "when" and provides another summary of the project that supports the rest of the methods section.
- **Why:** This describes why the planned work most effectively lead to the outcomes you anticipate. Supporting arguments may come from expert testimonials including examples of other projects that work.

Describe the aspects of **Method** so that the reviewer is convinced that you have the ability and understanding to achieve the stated objectives, thereby establishing credibility.

## **iii) Staffing/Administration**

You will have mentioned staffing for the project while describing the methods. In this section you will discuss the number of staff, their qualifications, and specific assignments. In the interest of keeping the main part of the proposal within the ideal number of pages, you may append this section as subsidiary documentation. Details about individual staff members who can be paid staff, volunteers, or consultants must show how their expertise/skills will be used in the project along with associated cost of having each member of the staff.

## **iv) Evaluation**

Evaluation is also a sound management tool and including an evaluation plan in your proposal indicates that you take your objectives seriously and want to know how well you have achieved them. It helps you to refine and improve the program during and after the plan has been rolled out. An evaluation can often be the best means for others to learn from your experience in conducting the project. Most sound evaluation plans include both qualitative and quantitative

data. You should present your plan for how the evaluation and its results will be reported and the audience to which it will be directed.

**v) Sustainability**

As mentioned above, sustainability of a project must be outlined in the proposal unless the project has a start-up and an end date. Most funders will not want to take on a permanent funding commitment hence they expect to see evidence of how fiscal sustainability will be achieved.

**vi) The Budget**

Depending on the complexity of your proposal the budget may be contained in a one-page statement of projected revenue and expenses. More complex proposals may require a more complex presentation, perhaps including a page on projected support with notes explaining your proposed streams of revenue generating activities. The budget must clearly identify each line item and the projected expense or revenue. This can be done as a table with Budget Notes that clearly explain each item. For example:

<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Manager	Supervises project	\$40,000  25% Benefits =\$10,00	Hired for 8 months
Administrative	All aspects of support	\$30,00  25% Benefits=7,500	
Office	Space for project activities  120 sq ft @ \$30 per sq ft	Approx.\$350	Occupy non-prime space at low cost

**5. Organizational Information**

It is not necessary to overwhelm the reader with facts about your organization. This information can be conveyed easily by attaching a brochure or other prepared statement. In two pages or less, tell the reader when your nonprofit came into existence; state its mission, being certain to demonstrate how the subject of the proposal fits within or extends that mission; and describe the organization's structure, programs, leadership, and special expertise. This assumes that the organization is in existence or is at the start-up stage and needs the funding to move it forward.

Discuss the size of the board, how board members are recruited, and their level of participation. Include the full board list in an appendix. If your organization is

composed of volunteers or has an active volunteer group, describe the function that the volunteers perform. Provide details on the staff, including the numbers of full and part-time staff, and their levels of expertise.

Describe the kinds of activities in which your staff engage. Explain briefly the assistance you provide. Describe the audience you serve, any special or unusual needs they face, and why they rely on your organization. Cite the number of people who are reached through your programs. Cite your organization's expertise, especially as it relates to the subject of your proposal.

Every proposal should have a concluding paragraph or two. This is a good place to call attention to the future, after the grant is completed. If appropriate, you should outline some of the follow-up activities that might be undertaken to begin to prepare your funder for your next request. Alternatively, you should state how the project might carry on without further grant support.

This section is also the place to make a final appeal for your project. Briefly reiterate what you want to do and why it is important. Underscore why your organization needs funding to accomplish it.

## **6. The transmittal letter**

The transmittal letter should be one page. The letter should be short and succinct. It should state why you are writing and how much funding is required from the particular granting agency. Describe the need in a very abbreviated but clear manner explaining why there is a need for this project.

## **7. What Happens Next?**

Grant review procedures vary widely, and the decision-making process can take anywhere from a few weeks to six months or more. During the review process, the funder may ask for additional information either directly from you or from outside consultants or professional references. If you are unclear about the review process, do not hesitate to ask. You also need to find out whether the funder has specific forms, procedures, and deadlines for reporting on the progress of your project. Clarify your responsibilities at the outset, particularly with respect to financial reporting. This will prevent misunderstandings and more serious problems later.

If you are awarded the grant, it is important to acknowledge the funder's support with a letter of thanks. If rejection is the result of the application that does not mean it is necessarily the end of the process. If you are unsure why your proposal was turned down, ask for the reason. Did the funder need additional information? Would they be interested in considering the proposal at a future date? Put them on your mailing list so that they can become further acquainted with your organization. Remember, there's always next year.

## 8. Conclusion

It is small consolation to know that even a perfectly written proposal submitted to the right prospect might be rejected for any number of reasons. However, if you are unsuccessful with one funding agency try another. Sometimes it takes several attempts before you are successful. It is important to learn from each rejection and improve subsequent proposals. Preparing a good proposal is hard work!

Foundations gave an estimated \$23 billion to nonprofit organizations in 1999, according to the *Foundation Center* so you have a good chance of succeeding.

Finally, it should be noted that the process described in this paper is a suggested approach that can be adapted to fit the needs of any nonprofit organization as well as the peculiarities of each situation.

### Bibliography

**Note: The Foundation Center** which contains a storehouse of excellent information on the topic, has a lofty vision of philanthropy, namely:

***“A world enriched by the effective allocation of philanthropic resources, informed public discourse about philanthropy, and broad understanding of the contributions of nonprofit activity to civil society”.*** Quoted from the *Foundation Center website*.

### A. Books

1. ***The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing***, 5th ed. (New York: The Foundation Center, 2007), by Jane C. Geever, chairman of the development consulting firm, J. C. Geever, Inc.
2. ***The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing*** and other resources on the subject are available for free use in Foundation Center libraries and Cooperating Collections.
3. ***Grants for Foreign & International Programs***  
ISBN 1-59542-115-7
4. ***Guide to Funding for International & Foreign Programs*** , 8th Edition,  
Foundation Center

5. **Grants for Foreign & International Programs** is one of 12 subject-specific Grant Guides published by the Foundation Center, December 2006 , 427 pp.

**B. Websites:**

<http://www.grantproposal.com/>

[http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/gws\\_priv/priv.html](http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/gws_priv/priv.html)

[http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/gws\\_corp/corp.html](http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/gws_corp/corp.html)

<http://www.nozasearch.com>

<http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/cnl/newacq/corp.html>

<http://www.cafonline.org/Default.aspx?page=12481>

<http://lnps.fdncenter.org:80/>

Here you will find The Catalog of Nonprofit Literature which is a searchable database of the literature of philanthropy. It incorporates the unique contents of the Foundation Center's five libraries and contains more than 25,000 full bibliographic citations, of which more than 17,000 have descriptive abstracts. It is updated daily. *The Catalog was formerly known as Literature of the Nonprofit Sector (LNPS).*

<http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/fundingsources/printcd.html> (Provides information on sources of funding). A list of the 100 largest U.S. grantmaking foundations ranked by the market value of their assets, based on the most current audited financial data in the Foundation Center's database as of March 7, 2007.

**C. Private Foundations That Fund Innovative Projects**

Some of these are: the **J. P. Getty Trust**, **Bayer Foundation**, **Pew Foundation**, **Intel Foundation**, **Merck Foundation**, and **AOL Foundation**, **Gates Foundation**. Their Web sites define their interests and the procedures for obtaining funding from them.