

ORGANIZING A PROPOSAL

Expert grant writers and reviewers advise that the most important advice they can give is to have a logical flow from the beginning to the end of the proposal. Through a logical flow of activities you are much less likely to overlook an important component and you can often anticipate reviewer's questions.

Your Idea

When organizing consider the following:

1. What is the problem/need/gap in knowledge that you are addressing?
(PROBLEM)
2. What are the proposed outcomes that will address these problems?
(OBJECTIVES)
3. Why is it important to accomplish these objectives? What impact will it have?
(SIGNIFICANCE)
4. How will each objective be accomplished? What activities will take place and when?
(METHODS)
5. Who will carry out each activity? Why are they the right ones for the job?
(PERSONNEL)
6. What equipment and facilities are necessary to carry out the project?
(FACILITIES/EQUIPMENT)
7. What costs will be involved in the activities, personnel, equipment, and facilities. Why are they needed?
(BUDGET/BUDGET NARRATIVE)
8. How will it be measured whether or not the objectives were accomplished?
(EVALAUTION)

Each of these sections builds on and flows from the one before. The presentation of an organized, logical proposal is the most effective way of communicating to the reviewer the details of the proposed work an the skills of the investigator.

Translating your idea into a project format

Grantors fund activities, they do not fund ideas. You must take your good idea and translate it into a technical format that will convey what you will do, how you will accomplish it, with what resources, by whom, in what amount of time. There is no place for flowery academic writing in the world of grants. Your writing must be clear, concise and to the point. Potential funders want to know what you will do and how you will do it in order to determine if it the best use of their money. Irregardless of the type of project you propose the approach is the same. First define the problem or need, develop goals and objectives in response to the need, then decide what specific activities will need to be undertaken to meet the goals and objectives.

A good way to begin

Develop an outline using the following elements. Keep working on each section until you have established a logical flow between the activities and the resolution of the problem as defined by your goals and objectives.As you work on these sections, try to look at the project from the point of view of a potential funder. Don't make them hunt for the answers they need. For example, when developing a goal statement begin with "The goal of this project is . . ." rather than disguising the goal with flowery language and making the funder guess. Think about why

someone would support this activity, who will benefit from it, or what might be accomplished as a result.

The format of each proposal will be slightly different depending of the requirements of the sponsor. Federal and state agencies will have specific forms and very specific guidelines, while private sponsors may be less specific. The following is a list of certain elements that are generally contained in a proposal.

Title

More important than you think. Federal agencies use the title to assign it to a review group. A wrong phrase or word and it might go to the wrong group. The title should be simple and describe what you plan to do. Avoid catchy titles or acronyms, if a funded finds your title silly, it may prejudice them against the project.

Title Page

Most grants have some sort of cover page that includes the title, name of the applicant and PI, contact information and address, project dates, funds requested, and signature of the authorized representative. This is most often a form.

Abstract

This section is usually no more than one-page long. It is a brief description of the overall project goals, objectives, methodology, and evaluation and dissemination. This section should be written last.

Statement of the Problem or Need (Hypothesis in Science grants)

This is critically important, and often poorly written. You need to convince the funding source that you understand the need and can help them solve the problem. You must prove the need by citing evidence and illustrating with graphs and charts. This section must be rooted in factual information. Document, document, document. You must demonstrate the need is pressing and that the probe is an important problem to be solved. This section should contain background information from current literature review and serves as a rationale for the project. Test your assumptions and anticipate questions of others.

Goals and Objectives

This is the “what” of the grant. The goal is the overarching statement of purpose while the objectives indicate what you will do to meet the goal, who will do it, when and how it will be measured. For example: If the goal is to improve the economy of Indiana and Kentucky by getting the people to interact. An objective might be “To improve trade (what) within five years (when) between residents of southern Indianan and northern Kentucky (who) as measured by each state’s economic development indicators related to interstate commerce (measure).

Plan of Action, Project Design, or Methodology

This is the most important section and often is awarded the most points. It is frequently poorly written or missing altogether. This is the “how”. Looking at the above mentioned goal and objective, a possible methodology might be “To construct a bridge over the Ohio River .” This section should be task oriented and specific. Walk the reader through your project as it relates to the objectives. Develop a time-line or organizational chart.

Quality of Key Personnel

Who are these people, and why should we give them our money? Here is where you convince the funding agency that you are capable of carrying out the project. Weak qualifications and inexperience can be compensated for by adding appropriate consultants. If there is a position, but no person has been hired yet, include a detailed job description. Include responsibilities of each person and level of effort.