

WRITING A GRANT PROPOSAL

A grant is money your organization receives that normally does not have to be paid back. Most nonprofit organizations finance projects through the use of grants, which are awarded after submittal and approval of a Grant Proposal.

Before Developing a Grant Proposal, Do Your Homework.

Obtaining funds through a grant takes time. Don't wait until you need money to start working on your request; start **now** by:

1. Determining what organizations might provide your organization with funding

- Look for funding sources that have an interest in your organization and its mission.
- You have a better chance of getting a grant from a local organization than a national one or one in another part of the country.

2. Understanding the goals of the grant program. If possible, visit the funding organization and discuss the program. In many instances, the funding organization will ask you to follow a specific proposal format in applying for a grant.

General Rules to Follow in Preparing your Proposal

1. Organize your presentation so that it is clear and easy to understand.
2. Be concise and to the point. Avoid broad generalizations.
3. Be specific. State exactly how much you want, and why.
4. Keep use of professional jargon, buzzwords, and acronyms to a minimum.
5. Don't assume that the reader knows about your organization. Explain everything. Give examples.
6. Be impassioned, reasonable, and creative.
7. Show the reviewers what return will result from the funding they provide.

The Form of Your Proposal

1. If the funding organization has provided a Request for Proposal (RFP), read it carefully and organize your proposal according to its guidelines.

2. If the funding organization has not provided guidelines for your proposal (or if they have, but they're not specific), make sure to include the following sections:

Proposal Summary (also called the Management or Executive Summary)

This is the most important section of your proposal, because the reviewer will use it to determine whether the rest of the proposal is worth reading. Though it comes first in your presentation, you should prepare it *last*, to ensure that all essential points are included. Limit the summary to two or three paragraphs. In those paragraphs, outline the purpose, background, amount requested, and time limits. You'll go into more detail about all of these later on in your application.

Description of Your Organization

In this section, it's important to build *credibility* for your organization, and stress the relationship, if any, between you and the funding organization. Include:

- The Mission Statement and goals of your organization, as outlined in your Strategic Plan.
- Brief biographies of the members of your Board of Directors and key staff members.
- How long has your organization been in existence? What has been its performance to date? Include success stories about individual clients or statistics on clients successfully served.
- List previous foundation or grant-supported programs.
- What other organizations are active in the same or similar activities? What are the cooperating organizations, if any?
- Does your nonprofit have its 503(c) (3)?

Needs Assessment (or Problem Statement)

- What is the problem to be solved or issue to be addressed with the grant money provided?
- How serious is the need for this program? Include any data you have compiled as the result of a surveyor investigation to demonstrate the severity or effects of the problem..
- Show the connection between your organization and the problem being addressed.
- Establish the geographic area affected (e.g. Du Page County) and the target population (e.g. unwed mothers). How large is the area? The population? To what extent will the program benefit them?
- Emphasize your organization's experience and knowledge of the problem. Provide data on prior successes.
- Is this a new activity? Has the field been researched to find similar programs?
- Has a similar program failed? Succeeded? What has been learned from previous programs?
- Is this request competing with other requests from the same organization? If so, what priorities would the organization establish among these requests?
- Why is this project more deserving of aid than others competing for funds in the same field?
- What immediate and long-range results are expected? Will these results help other organizations?

Objectives

- List specific, reasonable, and achievable objectives that have measurable outcomes.
- Explain how these objectives satisfy the requirements of the grant.

Methods or Design

It's important to show what workers, materials and other resources will be used effectively to accomplish the objectives.

- a List the specific tasks that will be accomplished, by whom, and when.
- a If there are other approaches you could use, explain why the one you've chosen is superior.
- a Prove (perhaps by citing your performance on prior projects) that your organization is capable of accomplishing these tasks.
- a Provide a timetable with dates when major milestones will be accomplished.
- a How many staff are needed? Will additional staff be required? How will the staff be organized/supervised? What are the professional qualifications for doing the proposed work?

Budget

- How long will the program last?
- Is this a continuation of a program or project? How well has it succeeded? Is it a modification? If so, why was it modified?
- What is the current operating budget of the organization?
- What is the anticipated budget for this program? Give a complete breakdown, including:
 - Personnel cost (salaries, benefits, or contract amounts). Included expenses incurred to sustain volunteers (e.g., meals, travel, and training).
 - All other expenses: divided into fixed expenses (e.g., rent, property taxes) and expenses that varies according to usage (e.g., office supplies).
- What provisions have been made for independent audit of budget expenditures?
- Will the programs continue beyond the funding period? If so, who will provide the funding? How firm a commitment for this future funding has been made? Will this ensure ongoing funding? (From the viewpoint of the funding organization, there is a big difference between one-time funding and continual funding.)
- Have requests for financial support of this program been submitted to other foundations, government agencies, or funding sources? Has the program secured funding commitments from any of these sources? If so, for how much and from which source(s)?
- Do you have requests for other programs pending before other funding organizations? How are they related to this proposal? What is the probability of obtaining this funding?
- Will your organization provide matching funds? (If you do, this gives the funding organization an indication of your commitment).

Evaluation Monitoring

- Establish how you will evaluate the project, and the basis for evaluation. Who will perform the evaluations?
- What special criteria will be used to measure the success or failure of this project?
- What types of progress reports are planned? How often will they be prepared? Who will get them? (Some funding organizations require progress reports, some don't. Submitting these reports, even if not required, can help to establish credibility for future funding requests).
- Has adequate provision been made for the preparation of a final report?

Appendices

Include information that can provide a better understanding of your project proposal and enhance your credibility. This information might include:

- Evidence of your successful management of other grants.
- Letters of support or endorsement from individuals or organizations. (Do not overdo. One or two significant letters are sufficient).

Get an Independent Review

Once you have included these elements and answered these questions, you can be confident that you've prepared an application that gives its reviewers the information they're looking for. After rereading the application yourself, give it to other managers to read before submitting it to the funding source. (SCORE counselors will be happy to review it for you.)

Finally, be prepared to rewrite. Keep at it until you're sure that what you've said just can't be said any more clearly or convincingly --your funding may depend on it!

If at First You Don't Succeed.

If the funding organization denies your request, be sure to find out why. Knowing that will help you be successful when writing your next grant proposal.