

50 Tips on How to Write Grant Proposals

Procedure

1. FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS!
2. Personalize and tailor your proposals for each individual funder.
3. Know as much as you can about your prospective funder before starting to write your proposal.
4. Talk to other grantees about their proposals to the funder before writing yours. Ask about the funder's preference in:
 - length
 - complexity
 - budget details
 - statistical support
 - personal contact before proposal submission
5. FOLLOW DIRECTIONS!
6. Involve the project staff member(s) in program design and planning before writing a full-scale proposal.
7. Don't use a committee!
 - The fewer writers's involved, the better the proposal.
 - Preferably, the project innovator should be the author, with editorial assistance from a grant writer.
8. Don't finalize your budget until you discuss it with the accountant or bookkeeper. (Make sure all administrative costs have been considered.)
9. The budget and proposal must tell the same story. Then make sure your proposal supports each item in that budget.
10. FOLLOW GUIDELINES!
11. Write your summary last, after you have finished the major parts of your application.
12. Don't try for perfection on your first draft. Get down your ideas, then edit and rewrite.
13. Use a proposal review committee to give you input on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.

14. Have an associate or friend not directly involved in your project proofread your proposal.

Looking for:

- grammatical mistakes
- logical inconsistencies
- unjustified budget items
- undefined or confusing terms
- ways to improve the overall impact
- unsupported arguments, unfound assumptions, weak documentation

15. FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS!

Content

16. If the proposal is a long one (10 pages or more) prepare a table of contents.

17. Don't make a mystery out of your proposal. Start right in with the most important point.

18. Use models (a model three-step program could be a triangle, each corner representing a step, each side representing the relationship between the steps).

19. Use graphs, charts, and maps to illustrate your points whenever appropriate

20. Use captioned photographs

21. Use one or two clear statistics rather than a number of ineffective, ambiguous ones.

22. Fill in all blanks on applications completely. Write N/A (not applicable) when appropriate

23. When responding to a specific request for a proposal (RFP), follow the suggested format as closely as possible.

24. Always include "donated" and "requested" columns in your budget.

25. Show how your project fits the intent of the grant making organization. If appropriate, quote enabling legislation, or the foundation founder's words, the corporation's or foundation's annual report, or the published program description.

26. Make sure you say why this funding is the best source of money for this project.

27. Always include your plan for funding your project after the grant ends.

28. In your summary, emphasize client benefits of your work, and why the project should be funded now.

29. Include copies of endorsement letters and letters from satisfied clients in the appendices of your proposal.

Style

30. Use a title that suggests the results you will achieve rather than what you plan to do. ("Improving Reading of 5th Graders in Trenton" is better than "A Proposal for Reading Machines for Trenton Schools.")
31. Have a strong first sentence.
32. Use quick openers -- like a good newspaper story. Catch the reader's attention early, and keep it
33. Use short sentences
34. Use short paragraphs (4 to 6 lines if possible)
35. Don't use jargon and "buzz" words - they won't impress the funder.
36. Don't be afraid to be humorous in a low-key way.
37. Use metaphors, analogies, parables
38. Write in the third person. It is easier to brag about "they" than "I".
39. Use the singular form of personal pronouns.
40. Use simple words, but don't insult the readers' intelligence.
41. Use active, not passive voice. ("ACT will build the theater in 1982" is better than "The theater will be completed in 1982.")
42. Tell a story about people
43. Write as though you were writing to an individual.
44. Let a client or expert state your need through a quotation. This lends more credibility than if you state it yourself.
45. When possible, state the need in terms of one person.
46. Beware of "iffy" and "hopeful" statements. Be positive.
47. Move from a specific case to a general problem

48. Accentuate the positive.

- Emphasize "opportunities" rather than problems
- Funders would rather know "where it's at" than "where it isn't".

49. State the amount of money you're requesting at the beginning of your proposal

50. Have a strong ending