

Anatomy **of a Grant Proposal**

by
Richard Lambert
© 2002

This booklet provides guidelines for writing each of the primary sections in a standard grant proposal. **Please note** that funding agencies may ask you for additional information or may require you to follow their own proposal formats. Always comply with the agencies' requests, using this booklet as a reference.

Table of Contents

Cover Letter	Page 1
Title Page	Page 2
Table of Contents	Page 3
Executive Summary	Page 4
Introduction	Page 5
Need Statement	Page 6
Goals and Objectives	Page 7
Methodology	Page 8
Evaluation	Page 9
Future Funding	Page 10
Budget	Page 11
Appendix	Page 12

COVER LETTER

Purpose: The cover letter is an important part of your proposal package because it introduces your organization to the prospective funding source and is usually read first.

Recommended Length: one page

What to include:

- The funding agency representative's name, title and address
- A brief overview of your organization and its purpose
- The reason for your funding request
- The title of your proposal
- The dollar amount of your request
- The name, title and phone number of your grant coordinator
- The title and signature of your fire chief

Tip: Always address the cover letter to an individual. Impersonal greetings such as "Dear Sir" or "To Whom it May Concern" will distance you. Your goal is to establish a personal relationship with the granting agency from the outset.

TITLE PAGE

What to include:

- Your proposal's title
- The name of your organization
- The name of the prospective funding source
- The request for proposal (RFP) name and number, if applicable
- The proposal's submission date

NOTE: Some grant programs, usually federal, will specify a title page format for you to follow. Also, if a title page form is provided by the funding agency, be sure to use it.

Tips on Titles. . .

- ✓ A good title, like an effective logo, creates a lasting impression.
- ✓ Make it short and easy to remember.
- ✓ Your goal is to capture the “essence” of your proposal in the title.
- ✓ Emphasize outcomes, outputs or benefits, rather than needs or activities.
- ✓ Instead of creating an overly long title, use a sub-title (if you feel it's needed).
- ✓ Don't try to be cute. Readers may infer that your proposal is not a serious one.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- The sections in your table of contents should be listed in the order in which they appear, with page numbers indicating where they can be located.
- The table of contents should be laid out so that it takes up one full page.
- Include a table of contents only if your proposal has five or more pages.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(Sometimes called the Abstract, or Narrative)

Purpose: The Executive Summary represents your best shot at capturing the reviewer's imagination and interest. This section should provide the framework from which your whole project can be visualized. The rest of your proposal serves to amplify and deepen this vision. Your challenge is to summarize the entire proposal in a few short sentences. At least one or two ideas should come from each of your major sections. The Executive Summary essentially ties everything in your proposal together.

Recommended Length: one page, placed at the beginning of the proposal.

What to Include:

- Your organization's name, history, purpose and activities: emphasizing your capacity to carry out the proposal. (one paragraph)
- The need: a description of the need your organization has recognized, and is prepared to address. (one or two paragraphs)
- The solution: What will take place, how many people will benefit, how and where it will operate, for how long, and who will staff it? (one paragraph)
- Funding requirements: An explanation of the amount of project grant money needed, and what your plans are for funding in the future. (one paragraph)

Tip: Grant writers sometimes write the Executive Summary first because it is the first section of the proposal. It's a better idea to write it last, when you have all your arguments and key points developed. Then you simply tie together your needs, goals, objectives, evaluation and budget sections to create the Executive Summary.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose: This section introduces your organization and your qualifications for funding to the prospective grantor. It also serves to establish your credibility. Your programs and accomplishments will be examined within the context of how you are currently addressing the needs of your community. The Introduction is your opportunity to demonstrate to the funder that you have the means as well as the creative ability to solve the community need your proposal addresses.

Recommended Length: one-two pages

A Well-Written Introduction. . .

- Clearly establishes who is applying for funds
- Briefly addresses the rationale for the funding request
- Describes your organization's purposes and long-range goals
- Describes your organization's current programs and activities
- Describes your customers or constituents
- Provides evidence of your accomplishments
- Establishes qualifications in the area for which funds are being sought
- Describes the qualifications of key staff members
- Leads logically to the Need Statement

Tip: Novice grant writers use this section to focus on their own need for funds. A more effective approach is to link your project with grantor's priorities and values. Use this test: After you've written your Introduction, count the "you's." There should be twice as many "you's" as there are "me's."

THE NEED STATEMENT

(Sometimes called the Problem Statement)

Purpose: The Need Statement presents the facts and evidence to support the need for the project you are proposing. It also establishes your organization as the best candidate to address the need. Your supporting materials for this section may come from authorities in the field as well as from your own organization's experience. Your goal here is to be succinct and persuasive.

Like a good debater, you want to assemble all your arguments and present them to the reader in a cogent, well-organized manner.

Recommended Length: two-three pages

An Effective Need Statement. . .

- Describes the target population to be served
- Defines the community problem to be addressed
- Is related to the purposes and goals of your organization
- Describes a need that is about the same size as the solution
- Includes both quantitative and qualitative supporting materials
- Is stated in terms of the grantor's (not applicant's) needs
- Is not presented as the lack of a program (circular reasoning)
- Does not make any unsupported assumptions
- Is jargon-free
- Describes the situation in both factual and human interest terms

Tip: Fire departments often focus on their own needs while overlooking the needs of the community and the funding agency. Make sure your Need Statement reflects a clear plan for helping all three succeed.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Purpose: Your goal is the end to which your objectives are directed, and the outcome of your project is measured by your objectives. So, when funding agencies approve projects they are literally "buying" the objectives. That's why your objectives need to be concrete, specific and achievable.

Format: List your specific objectives (one or two sentences each) in order of importance. A good objective emphasizes **what** will be done **and when**.

Recommended Length: one page

Guidelines:

- Include at least one objective for each need listed in your Need Statement
- Avoid confusing your objectives (what & when) with your methods (how)
- Describe the population that will benefit from the project
- State the time frame within which your objectives will be accomplished
- Make your objectives specific and measurable

Goals vs Objectives: Grant writers often confuse goals and objectives. Goals are long-term, objectives are short term. Goals are general while objectives are specific. Your **goals should complement** the mission of the funding source, and your **objectives should help move** the funding source toward that mission.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose: This section describes your “plan of action,” showing how you will meet your proposal’s goals and objectives. If your Methodology section is well-organized, it will help the reviewer clearly visually how your project will come together. It also demonstrates that you’ve planned the project thoroughly and will add credibility to your proposal in the eyes of the reviewer.

Recommended Length: one page

A Good Methodology Section. . .

- Flows naturally from the Need Statement and the Goals and Objectives Section
- Clearly describes your project’s activities and provides a time line for them
- States reasons for your selection of methods
- Describes the sequence of activities
- Describes staffing for the project
- Identifies the target population
- Lists any innovative techniques or strategies you intend to employ

Tip: If you have difficulty writing this section, pretend a check for the full amount of your grant request came in today’s mail. What is the first thing you’ll do after depositing the money? ...Hire additional staff? ...Order equipment? What will you do next? Just keep asking and answering the “what’s next?” question and you’ll lead yourself step-by-step through the methodology section.

EVALUATION

Purpose: Your Evaluation section pinpoints what is really happening (or has happened) in your project. It helps you effectively allocate resources, improve services and strengthen your overall performance. The Evaluation may also uncover needs to be served in your next grant proposal. The Evaluation is an important tool for the funder because it offers a way to measure the success of your project. In fact, the funder may want to collaborate on how the project will be evaluated because the evaluation represents your plan of accountability to the funding agency.

Recommended Length: one page

How to Evaluate. . . .a four-step process

1. Identify precisely what will be evaluated. If you have written measurable objectives, then you already know what to evaluate.
2. Determine the methods you will use to evaluate each objective. Describe the information you will need and how you propose to collect it.
3. Clarify the analysis you plan to make, then carry out your evaluation by collecting and interpreting the data required for each objective.
4. Summarize the data, indicating how it will be used for program improvements.

Note: Good tools for strengthening your Evaluation section include: surveys, questionnaires, data collection instruments and data analysis forms.

FUTURE FUNDING

(Sometimes called Continuation Plan)

Purpose: This section describes the plan for your project's continuation beyond the grant and/or the availability of other resources needed to carry out the project. If your proposal is for equipment or capital requests, it's important to demonstrate how the ongoing costs of operations and maintenance will be met. What the funder really wants to see is that you have a long-term vision and funding plan for the project.

Recommended Length: one page

This Section Should. . .

- Present a specific plan to obtain funding if the project is to be continued
- Describe how maintenance and/or other project costs will be covered
- Include a listing of other funders you've approached, showing name of funder, date of request, amount of request and current status
- Show minimal reliance on future grant support
- Be accompanied by letters of commitment (if applicable)
- Not indicate that the applicant will approach the funder for additional grant money after the grant period concludes

BUDGET

Purpose: A project budget is more than a statement of proposed expenditures; it is an alternative way of expressing your project. Grant reviewers will look at your budget to see how well it fits your proposed activities. Incomplete budgets are a reflection of sloppy preparation. Inflated budgets are signals of waste. Budgets that are too low cast doubt on your planning ability. In effect, your budget is as much a credibility statement as your Executive Summary.

Recommended Length: one page

Your Budget Should. . .

- Tell the same story, in financial terms, as your Executive Summary
- Relate line items to project objectives
- Include project costs that will be incurred at the time the project is implemented
- Contain no unexplained amounts in contingency categories
- Include all amounts/items asked of the funding source
- Include all amounts/items to be paid for by other sources
- Include all volunteers
- Include all consultants
- Show components of your fringe benefits: FICA, health, life, retirement, etc.
- Separately detail all non-personnel costs
- Include separate columns for listing all donated services
- Include indirect costs where appropriate
- Be sufficient to perform the activities described in the Executive Summary

APPENDIX

Purpose: The Appendix is a reference tool that contains information and supporting materials relevant to the proposal (which is not included elsewhere).

Format: The Appendix should be stapled together separately from the rest of the proposal to make the information easy to find. The Appendix may also have its own table of contents for ease of review.

Appropriate Items for the Appendix. . .

- Resumes of key personnel
- Letters of endorsement
- Letters of commitment
- Publicity
- Tables, graphs, charts, statistics
- Other funding sources
- Board members, donors, supporters
- Financial statements, annual reports, verification of tax status