

Proposal Components

While funding sources vary widely in their requirements for submission, the following 10 components (sections of information) are fairly standard and will provide the basis to craft individual proposals for each prospective funder.

- **Cover letter**
- **Proposal Summary**
- **Introduction**
- **Problem Statement or Needs Assessment**
- **Goals and Objectives**
- **Methods, Project Plan or Design**
- **Evaluation**
- **Future Funding**
- **Project Budget and Financial Information**
- **Appendices and/or Attachments**

Above is the order the components are presented **if** the funding source does not provide a format or instructions for presentation.

When the prospective funder asks for a “brief proposal” send a one to two page summary that includes a four to five sentence budget narrative. The budget narrative paragraph covers the total program cost, the request cost, source of additional funding and an indication of the financial size of the organization. Prepare this brief proposal as you would a summary statement - complete all the components then abstract the relevant information for the proposal.

When the prospective funder provides an application form the information contained in the components is transferred to the application as responses to specific questions or requests.

“If you can’t follow instructions in the application process what guarantee does the funder have that you will follow the project plan or report as required?”

Components Two Ways!

Following is a description of each of the components. Two versions of each component are presented:

- First for foundations and corporations as well as for use in soliciting individuals.
- Second for governmental agencies. The information has been taken directly from the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) – Writing the Grant Proposal*.
www.cfda.gov General Information Guide

Introduction

This part describes what your organization is all about, what your agency has done in the past and why your group is uniquely qualified to carry out the proposed project. To strengthen the impact of this description:

1. Describe your organization in a way that will convey that you are qualified and capable of carrying out the proposal project.
2. Briefly describe the history of your organization. What was the motivation to begin? Is that still the overriding mission?
3. Demonstrate how the subject of the proposal fits within or extends your mission.
4. Briefly describe your agency's structure, programs and special expertise.
5. Offer evidence of your significant activities and accomplishments.
6. Discuss the size of the board, how they are recruited and their level of expertise and participation. Give the reader a "feel" for the board. Append a list with brief bios.
7. If your organization is totally volunteer or has an active volunteer group describe the functions that volunteers fill. If your volunteers have specialized skills or expertise relevant to the project include this information.
8. Provide details about staff, including the numbers of full and part time employees and their level of expertise. If volunteers hold key "staff" positions include them in this section.
9. Mention other grants and awards received.
10. Include supporting statements from individuals and agency's (to be appended.)
11. Describe the relevant demographic of the target population to be served, relate the data to the population in the service area.
 - The approximate the number of individuals to be reached,
 - The geographic area to be reached.
 - Convey the socioeconomic status of the target population.
 - Describe the ethnic origins of the target population related to the general population in the service area.
 - Describe the gender distribution among the target population, if relevant to the need or approach.

CFDA Introduction: Presenting a Credible Applicant or Organization

The applicant should gather data about its organization from all available sources. Most proposals require a description of an applicant's organization to describe its past and present operations. Some features to consider are:

- A brief biography of board members and key staff members.
- The organization's goals, philosophy, track record with other grantors, and any success stories.
- The data should be relevant to the goals of the Federal grantor agency and should establish the applicant's credibility.

Problem Statement or Needs Assessment

This section describes the specific problem or need of the target population to be addressed by the proposed solution. This section contains two components:

- The statement of need or problem statement.
- The data and statistics to support or document the need.

The Statement of Need

Condensed from The Foundation Center's *Proposal Writing Short Course* - www.fndcenter.org

The statement of need will help the reader learn more about the issues facing your target population. It presents the facts and evidence that support the need for the project and establishes that your organization understands the problems and therefore can reasonably address them. The information used to support the need can come from authorities in the field, as well as from your agency's own experience and assessments.

You want the needs section to be succinct, yet persuasive. Present the facts in a logical sequence that will readily convince the reader of their importance. Consider these points:

1. Decide which facts or statistics best support the project.
2. Give the reader hope.
3. Decide if you want to put your project forward as a model.
4. Determine whether it is reasonable to portray the need as acute.
5. Decide whether you can demonstrate that your program addresses the need differently or better than other projects that preceded it. If possible, make it clear that you are cognizant of, and are on good terms with, others in your field.
6. Keep in mind that today's funders are very interested in collaboration. They may even ask why you are not collaborating with those you may view as competitors. So at the least you need to describe how your work complements but does not duplicate the work of others.
7. Avoid circular reasoning.

The statement of need does not need to be long and involved. Short and concise information captures the reader's attention.

Accentuate the Positive

It is easy, when writing a proposal (or presenting need in any fundraising setting), to emphasize the needs, problems, the challenges that your organization and your constituents face. It is critical to your fundraising success, however, that you do not whine or complain. Sidestep “negative speak”, instead, speak in terms of “opportunities” or “expanding access.” Avoid saying that your students need to “learn to read,” this implies that you haven’t been able to teach them – this message would destroy your credibility and possibly sink your proposal. Make bold positive statements. If possible, imply that you are doing something and want to do more, do it better or expand your service reach. One can get lost in a labyrinth of need and begin confusing them with solutions. Students don’t need books; rather they need to be able to read them successfully. Nor do they need technology; they do however need the skills and knowledge necessary to compete and succeed in the world.

CFDA - The Problem Statement: Stating the Purpose at Hand

The problem statement (or needs assessment) is a key element of a proposal that makes a clear, concise, and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed. The best way to collect information about the problem is to conduct and document both a formal and informal needs assessment for a program in the target or service area. The information provided should be both factual and directly related to the problem addressed by the proposal.

Areas to document:

- The purpose for developing the proposal.
- The beneficiaries -- who are they and how will they benefit.
- The social and economic costs to be affected.
- The nature of the problem (provide as much hard evidence as possible).
- How the applicant organization came to realize the problem exists, and what is currently being done about the problem.
- The remaining alternatives available when funding has been exhausted. Explain what will happen to the project and the impending implications.
- Most importantly, the specific manner through which problems might be solved. Review the resources needed, considering how they will be used and to what end.

There is a considerable body of literature on the exact assessment techniques to be used. Any local, regional, or State government planning office, or local university offering course work in planning and evaluation techniques should be able to provide excellent background references. Types of data that may be collected include: historical, geographic, quantitative, factual, statistical, and philosophical information, as well as studies completed by colleges, and literature searches from public or university libraries. Local colleges or universities which have a department or section related to the proposal topic may help determine if there is interest in developing a student or faculty project to conduct a needs assessment. It may be helpful to include examples of the findings for highlighting in the proposal.

Goals and Objectives

GOALS: A goal is a general statement of what your project hopes to accomplish or contribute toward accomplishing. The goal statement of a project:

- reflects the long-term desired impact of the project on individuals, the community as a whole, or other target groups; and
- mirrors the project goals of the funder, as contained in the RFP (Request of Proposal) or stated in the funder's published guidelines and application.

OBJECTIVES: An objective is a specific statement describing what you expect to accomplish within a given time (funding) period. All objectives should:

- Be measurable and time-phased.
- Describe in realistic terms the expected results.
- Avoid stating "why" the results should be achieved.
- Specify a target date or time for accomplishment.
- Be as specific as possible. One way to check for specificity is to ask yourself: Can I measure and report whether this objective has been met? If results are not obvious, indicate the measures to be used to determine success.
- Be significant. The objective should present a sufficient challenge to demonstrate the importance of the project and the need for funding, but not so difficult to accomplish that project is likely to fail.

Process and Outcome Objectives

Process Objectives define an activity and/or method essential for achieving a given outcome. Process objectives are important because they provide valuable information regarding the types of activities and the level of effort required to produce the desired result. They also serve as the basis for formulating your work plan and assist you in monitoring progress during each stage of the project.

EXAMPLE Process Objective: To conduct 15 one-day training sessions (**how**), each with at least 20 trainees (**how many**) covering the proposal writing (**what**) over the first nine months (**by when**).

Outcome Objectives define a measurable result the project expects to accomplish. (Note: The Federal evaluation process frequently refers to outcome as "product.") Outcome objectives are important because they can facilitate the monitoring of progress to change in behavior, knowledge or circumstances in a given population over time. Therefore, outcome objectives are described in terms that measure what change your project will bring about. When developing outcome objectives specify only one major result per objective, state:

1. **Who** is going to make **what change**
2. **when** it will be accomplished
3. **how much** will be accomplished and
4. **how** it will be **measured**.

EXAMPLE Outcome Objective: At the conclusion of the one-day training session (**when**) at least 70% of the participants (**who**) will demonstrate a pre/post test gain in knowledge (**what**) of (**how much**) at 90% on the evaluator's competency test (**measurement tool**) covering the area foundation research.

Avoid mistaking action (process) for progress (outcome.)

CFDA - Project Objectives: Goals and Desired Outcome

Program objectives refer to specific activities in a proposal. It is necessary to identify all objectives related to the goals to be reached, and the methods to be employed to achieve the stated objectives. Consider quantities or things measurable and refer to a problem statement and the outcome of proposed activities when developing a well-stated objective. The figures used should be verifiable. Remember, if the proposal is funded, the stated objectives will probably be used to evaluate program progress, so be realistic. There is literature available to help identify and write program objectives.

Methods, Plan of Action, Project Plan or Project Design

This section is typically the longest of the proposal because here you must carefully describe the major activities or steps to carry out in order to meet your objectives.

The basic requirements of this section are clarity and justification. The methods should be clear and accompanied by an explanation of the rationale of your choices. Ordinarily, the justification is drawn from a description of the applicant's past work and/or a presentation of evidence drawn from the work of others on the field. The following types of information may be included in this section:

- The major service components or types of effort to be undertaken and a justification for each of the methods chosen.
- The sequences in which the activities will be carried out.
- How the project will be managed and staffed.
- The specific techniques used, types and amounts of materials to be developed or purchased, and the level of service to be provided.
- Linkages with other programs/divisions within your organization.
- Linkages with local or state departments and other appropriate service groups and organizations.
- Publicity plans and timeline.
- Evaluation plans and reporting schedules accompanied by timelines.

To enhance clarity and improve understanding of organizational structure you might also include:

- A flow chart that highlights the major phases and lists the beginning and end points of each activity in the project.

- An organizational chart showing lines of authority and communication for the project.

CFDA - Program Methods and Program Design: A Plan of Action

The program design refers to how the project is expected to work and solve the stated problem. Sketch out the following:

- The activities to occur along with the related resources and staff needed to operate the project (inputs).
- A flow chart of the organizational features of the project. Describe how the parts interrelate, where personnel will be needed, and what they are expected to do. Identify the kinds of facilities, transportation, and support services required (throughputs).
- Explain what will be achieved through 1 and 2 above (outputs); i.e., plan for measurable results. Project staff may be required to produce evidence of program performance through an examination of stated objectives during either a site visit by the Federal grantor agency and or grant reviews which may involve peer review committees.
- It may be useful to devise a diagram of the program design. For example, draw a three column block. Each column is headed by one of the parts (inputs, throughputs and outputs), and on the left (next to the first column) specific program features should be identified (i.e., implementation, staffing, procurement, and systems development). In the grid, specify something about the program design, for example, assume the first column is labeled inputs and the first row is labeled staff. On the grid one might specify under inputs five nurses to operate a child care unit. The throughput might be to maintain charts, counsel the children, and set up a daily routine; outputs might be to discharge 25 healthy children per week. This type of procedure will help to conceptualize both the scope and detail of the project.
- Wherever possible, justify in the narrative the course of action taken. The most economical method should be used that does not compromise or sacrifice project quality. The financial expenses associated with performance of the project will later become points of negotiation with the Federal program staff. If everything is not carefully justified in writing in the proposal, after negotiation with the Federal grantor agencies, the approved project may resemble less of the original concept. Carefully consider the pressures of the proposed implementation, that is, the time and money needed to acquire each part of the plan. A Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) chart could be useful and supportive in justifying some proposals.
- Highlight the innovative features of the proposal which could be considered distinct from other proposals under consideration.
- Whenever possible, use appendices to provide details, supplementary data, references, and information requiring in-depth analysis. These types of data, although supportive of the proposal, if included in the body of the design, could detract from its readability. Appendices provide the proposal reader with immediate access to details if and when clarification of an idea, sequence or conclusion is required. Time tables, work plans, schedules, activities, and methodologies, legal papers, personal vitae, letters of support, and endorsements are examples of appendices.

Evaluation

A good evaluation plan not only provides for a summary of the results at the end of the project, but also is integrated into the process so that adjustments can be made as the project proceeds. Measurements must be made at the beginning and throughout the project, as well as at the

conclusion. To obtain information that you can use for evaluation information and data must be gathered regularly and systematically.

It is important that the plan be realistic, feasible and that it addresses all the objectives set forth. To evaluate both process objectives quantity of services delivered must be gathered. Outcome objectives require gathering quality of service or performance data.

In designing your evaluation consider:

- Constructing clear, specific objectives that have measurable qualities.
- Collecting some type of baseline data for pre/post comparisons.
- Determining an evaluation protocol that specifies by whom, when and how data will be collected, analyzed and reported.
- Building evaluation measures into the routine project procedures.
- Using multiple measures, rather than a single measure, when possible (similar results establish credibility.)
- Although satisfaction of participants is important consider orienting evaluation measures toward changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors,
- When possible employ established measures rather than locally created ones.
- Using project documents and record-keeping systems for on-going process evaluation.
- Collecting information on the project's cost to be correlated with efficiency and effectiveness.
- Providing evidence of the wider impact of your project. How replicable and lasting is the project.

An often overlooked evaluation is: How successful the project has been in attracting funds for continuation?

CFDA - Evaluation: Product and Process Analysis

The evaluation component is two-fold: (1) product evaluation; and (2) process evaluation. Product evaluation addresses results that can be attributed to the project, as well as the extent to which the project has satisfied its desired objectives. Process evaluation addresses how the project was conducted, in terms of consistency with the stated plan of action and the effectiveness of the various activities within the plan.

Most Federal agencies now require some form of program evaluation among grantees. The requirements of the proposed project should be explored carefully. Evaluations may be conducted by an internal staff member, an evaluation firm or both. The applicant should state the amount of time needed to evaluate, how the feedback will be distributed among the proposed staff, and a schedule for review and comment for this type of communication. Evaluation designs may start at the beginning, middle or end of a project, but the applicant should specify a start-up time. It is practical to submit an evaluation design at the start of a project for two reasons:

- Convincing evaluations require the collection of appropriate data before and during program operations; and,

- If the evaluation design cannot be prepared at the outset then a critical review of the program design may be advisable.

Even if the evaluation design has to be revised as the project progresses, it is much easier and cheaper to modify a good design. If the problem is not well defined and carefully analyzed for cause and effect relationships then a good evaluation design may be difficult to achieve. Sometimes a pilot study is needed to begin the identification of facts and relationships. Often a thorough literature search may be sufficient.

Evaluation requires both coordination and agreement among program decision makers (if known). Above all, the Federal grantor agency's requirements should be highlighted in the evaluation design. Also, Federal grantor agencies may require specific evaluation techniques such as designated data formats (an existing information collection system) or they may offer financial inducements for voluntary participation in a national evaluation study. The applicant should ask specifically about these points. Also, consult the Criteria For Selecting Proposals section of the Catalog program description to determine the exact evaluation methods to be required for the program if funded.

Future Funding

This section in the written portion of the proposal explains to the funding source what will happen at the conclusion of their funding cycle. This component is short and conveys that your organization has definite plans to continue (if appropriate) the proposed program and are committed to securing the funder's investment in the program.

If the funding was for a capital campaign this section explains how the structure will be maintained and how the programs it will house will be funded.

CFDA - Future Funding: Long-Term Project Planning

Describe a plan for continuation beyond the grant period, and/or the availability of other resources necessary to implement the grant. Discuss maintenance and future program funding if program is for construction activity. Account for other needed expenditures if program includes purchase of equipment.

Budgets and Financial Information

Although a budget only represents an estimate of the cost of the proposed project the amounts should be accurate and the minimum sufficient to support the project.

While budget guidelines vary among funders, they are generally divided in to two categories: personnel and non-personnel. These may be further divided as follows:

Personnel:

- Salaries and wages
- Fringe benefits (health insurance, taxes, etc.)
- Consultants and contract services

Non-Personnel:

- Space (including utilities, janitorial services, normal maintenance, etc.)
- Equipment purchases, leases and/or rental
- Telephone, technologies and communications
- Consumables supplies
- Travel
- Photocopying and supplies
- Postage and mailing services
- Training
- Materials development
- Other categories specific to the services provided

Proposals may also have indirect costs, normally necessary if the project is connected in some way with an organization that is to manage certain aspects common to many projects. Indirect cost item might include:

- Occupancy and utilities
- Accounting and bookkeeping
- Maintenance costs
- Shared personal

Typically supporting financial information is required as part of the proposal. This information includes:

- Current audit
- Board approved current organizational operating budget
- Project budget
- Project budget narrative explaining each line item in the budget

CFDA - The Proposal Budget: Planning the Budget

Funding levels in Federal assistance programs change yearly. It is useful to review the appropriations over the past several years to try to project future funding levels (see Financial Information section of the Catalog program description).

However, it is safer to never anticipate that the income from the grant will be the sole support for the project. This consideration should be given to the overall budget requirements, and in particular, to budget line items most subject to inflationary pressures. Restraint is important in determining inflationary cost projections (avoid padding budget line items), but attempt to anticipate possible future increases.

Some vulnerable budget areas are: utilities, rental of buildings and equipment, salary increases, food, telephones, insurance, and transportation. Budget adjustments are sometimes made after the grant award, but this can be a lengthy process. Be certain that implementation, continuation and phase-down costs can be met. Consider costs associated with leases, evaluation systems, hard/soft match requirements, audits, development, implementation and maintenance of information and accounting systems, and other long-term financial commitments.

A well-prepared budget justifies all expenses and is consistent with the proposal narrative. Some areas in need of an evaluation for consistency are: (1) the salaries in the proposal in relation to those of the applicant organization should be similar; (2) if new staff persons are being hired, additional space and equipment should be considered, as necessary; (3) if the budget calls for an equipment purchase, it should be the type allowed by the grantor agency; (4) if additional space is rented, the increase in insurance should be supported; (5) if an indirect cost rate applies to the proposal, the division between direct and indirect costs should not be in conflict, and the aggregate budget totals should refer directly to the approved formula; and (6) if matching costs are required, the contributions to the matching fund should be taken out of the budget unless otherwise specified in the application instructions.

It is very important to become familiar with Government-wide circular requirements. The Catalog identifies in the program description section (as information is provided from the agencies) the particular circulars applicable to a Federal program, and summarizes coordination of Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Programs" requirements in Appendix I. The applicant should thoroughly review the appropriate circulars since they are essential in determining items such as cost principles and conforming to Government guidelines for Federal domestic assistance.

The Summary or Abstract

This is written once all the other components of the proposal have been developed. It contains:

- A clear concise description of the organization
- An accurate description of the problem
- A statement of the objectives – what will you accomplish?
- The length of time it will take to develop and implement the project.
- A statement of cost.

9 How-to-Steps for Writing a Summary

1. Read the entire original.
2. Reread and underline (hi-lite) key points in each component.
3. Edit the hi-lited data.
4. Rewrite it in your own words.
5. Put it aside for one hour.
6. Edit your version – cross out unnecessary words and combine related ideas.
7. Check your version against the first “hi-lited” version.
There must be **nothing “new.”** All information and language must come from the proposal.
8. Rewrite you edited version.
9. Document your sources.

Letter of Request

The summary or abstract is used to develop the letter sent to a foundation or corporation requesting a “brief one to two page letter of request.”

CFDA - The Proposal Summary: Outline of Project Goals

The proposal summary outlines the proposed project and should appear at the beginning of the proposal. It could be in the form of a cover letter or a separate page, but should definitely be brief -- no longer than two or three paragraphs. The summary would be most useful if it were prepared after the proposal has been developed in order to encompass all the key summary points necessary to communicate the objectives of the project. It is this document that becomes the cornerstone of your proposal, and the initial impression it gives will be critical to the success of your venture. In many cases, the summary will be the first part of the proposal package seen by agency officials and very possibly could be the only part of the package that is carefully reviewed before the decision is made to consider the project any further.

The applicant must select a fundable project which can be supported in view of the local need. Alternatives, in the absence of Federal support, should be pointed out. The influence of the project both during and after the project period should be explained. The consequences of the project as a result of funding should be highlighted.

Cover Letter or Letter of Transmittal

The cover letter briefly describes what is being submitted (if the funder offers more than one type of funding include identifying information - name and number if it has a number.) Include a one sentence description of the proposal (purpose, target audience, time frame) and the amount requested. Contact information is included in this letter.

Do not put any critical information in the cover letter; most times it does not remain with the proposal.

The cover letter should be addressed to a specific individual at the funding source and **must** be signed by the Chairman/President of the Board or the highest managing official within your organization.

CFDA - REVIEW

Criticism

At some point, perhaps after the first or second draft is completed, seek out a neutral third party to review the proposal working draft for continuity, clarity and reasoning. Ask for constructive criticism at this point, rather than wait for the Federal grantor agency to volunteer this information during the review cycle. For example, has the writer made unsupported assumptions or used jargon or excessive language in the proposal?

Signature

Most proposals are made to institutions rather than individuals. Often signatures of chief administrative officials are required. Check to make sure they are included in the proposal where appropriate.

Neatness

Proposals should be typed, collated, copied, and packaged correctly and neatly (according to agency instructions, if any). Each package should be inspected to ensure uniformity from cover to cover. Binding may require either clamps or hard covers. Check with the Federal agency to determine its preference. A neat, organized, and attractive proposal package can leave a positive impression with the reader about the proposal contents.

Mailing

A cover letter should always accompany a proposal. Standard U.S. Postal Service requirements apply unless otherwise indicated by the Federal agency. Make sure there is enough time for the proposals to reach their destinations. Otherwise, special arrangements may be necessary. Always coordinate such arrangements with the Federal grantor agency project office (the agency which will ultimately have the responsibility for the project), the grant office (the agency which will coordinate the grant review), and the contract office (the agency responsible for disbursement and grant award notices), if necessary.