

Tips on Proposal Writing
Sponsored Research Office
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I. PREPARATION

The preliminary steps of grant writing are likely to be the most time consuming. The following are some things to consider before you begin writing:

- A. Define your project
 - What is your project idea? Clarify the purpose and write a mission statement. You should be able to state this in 1-2 sentences.
 - Determine the broad project goals and specific steps you will take to achieve those goals. Do you have any preliminary data to show?
- B. Create a preliminary budget
 - What is the project going to cost? Consider what items you will need to consider in your budget (i.e. travel, field research expenses, lab supplies, equipment, student assistance, faculty salary or release time, facilities, maintenance, administrative expenses, or overhead.)
- C. Where will the project take place?
- D. Will you collaborate with anyone from Lewis & Clark or another institution?
- E. When will you do the project and how long will it take? Prepare a timeline for both the project itself and the proposal process (based on submission deadline). Be realistic about whether you have time to prepare a competitive proposal that will meet the deadline.
- F. Do you need the College to contribute its resources in any way? If so, you will need to obtain appropriate internal approval.
- G. What will be your end product? Will you produce a book, journal article(s), conference paper(s), or course?

II. IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT FUNDING SOURCE(S)

It is important that you have a good sense of how the project fits into the philosophy and mission of your potential funder. Funding for your proposal will come from a foundation, corporation, or government agency. Potential funding sources can be identified in books, online funding databases, free or paid subscription and funding alerts, the World Wide Web, and news from specific associations with whom you might be affiliated. Contact the sponsored research office (x7211) for more information.

Once you've identified 5-10 potential funders, do some more research to learn about them, as follows.

- Learn about your funding prospect – through their guidelines, annual reports, web sites, 990's. Identify their philosophy and funding priorities– does your project match priorities and contribute to their mission? Look at their past giving history and previously funded projects to see if they are close to your project.

- Don't "bark up the wrong tree": The goal of any funder is not to fund good research, but to fund good research closely aligned with their goals. Funders are unlikely to make exceptions to their program guidelines, even if you present a compelling case to do so. You should consider applying to many different sources, but be selective. If it appears that you don't qualify, don't apply.
- Confirm any eligibility requirements (geographical, educationally, citizenship, past grants, etc.)
- Verify deadlines and confirm they meet your timeline
- Funding Limitations. Know what the foundation does not fund as well as what the average awarded grant size of the organization is.
- Determine initial approach (phone call, letter of inquiry, etc.) Don't be afraid to call the program officer to ask questions.

III. **WRITING THE PROPOSAL**

There are many ways to organize proposals, the components of which are addressed below. If applicable, read the guidelines for specifications about required information and how your proposal should be arranged. For organizations or programs that do not require that you follow a strict set of guidelines, consider this proposal outline:

- A. **Introduction/Executive Summary**
This is an umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal; here you will provide the reader with a snapshot of what is to follow. Specifically, it summarizes all of the key information and is a sales document designed to convince the reader that this project should be considered for support. Be certain to include the problem (1-2 paragraphs), a solution (1-2 paragraphs), funding requirements (1 paragraph), and information about your expertise and ability to carry out this proposal (1 paragraph).
- B. **Statement of Need**
This will enable the reader to learn more about the issues; background provides perspective and can be a welcome component. This section presents the facts and evidence that support the need for the project and establishes that you understand the problems and therefore can reasonably address them. The information used to support the case can come from authorities in the field, as well as from your experience. Identify what you want to do and why, what problem exists that you propose to solve, and why this project is necessary. Provide a compelling, logical reason why this proposal should be supported. Why is it important that it be done? There must be a better reason than "it hasn't been done before." Identify anything distinctive about the proposed project. Also address how your funding request relates to the funders purpose, objectives and priorities.
- C. **Proposal Narrative: Goals, MEASURABLE Objectives, and Methods**
Goals are conceptual and more abstract; objectives are the measurable outcomes of the program. Your objectives must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable, and achievable in a specified time period. Specify how you are going to accomplish your objectives.

The methods section describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve the objectives. It enables the reader to visualize the implementation of the project. When and where will the project be done? Provide a proposed schedule and plan of work. The timeline paints a picture of the project flow, including start and end dates, schedule of activities and projected outcomes.

- Demonstrate that you have the necessary equipment and other resources to do the work, and address why you are the one to do this project. What special credentials do you have? Provide information that certifies your ability to successfully undertake the proposed project. Address staffing and/or administrative needs; describe specific personnel functions with names of key staff and consultants, if available and appropriate.

D. Evaluation/Assessment and Sustainability

An evaluation plan should be built into the project. How will you evaluate the success of your project? How will you disseminate the results?

- What good will come from this project? Who will benefit, and how? What contribution will this project make to the discipline, society, your career, teaching, students, the College?

- A clear message from grantmakers today is that grantseekers will be expected to demonstrate in very concrete ways the long-term financial viability of the project to be funded. Address how you will sustain the project after this (initial) funding is gone. It behooves you to be very specific about current and projected funding streams.

E. Budget

The budget for your proposal may be as simple as a one-page statement of projected expenses. Or your proposal may require a more complex presentation, perhaps including a page on projected support and revenue and notes explaining various items of expense or of revenue.

- Specify how much your project is going to cost. In addition to a basic budget (or required budget forms) provide a Budget Justification, which provides detailed information on each budget item. How did you arrive at your figures?

- Make sure your budget is consistent with the project activities. For example, if your end product includes a conference presentation in another state, make sure to reflect the appropriate travel costs in your budget.

- If applicable, list in-kind and matching funds

F. Appendix

IF ALLOWED, support materials are often arranged in an appendix. These materials may include a C.V., endorse the project and the applicant, provide certifications, include information about project personnel and consultants, exhibit tables and charts, and references. Policies about the inclusion of supporting materials vary widely among funders; find out if they are desired or even allowed.

General Tips on Proposal Writing

- Use a positive voice throughout the text; use confident words such as “will” instead of “would”. This will impart that you are convinced the project will be successful.
- Use simple language except when technical terms are necessary. Be concise and brief.
- Avoid jargon. Be specific.
- Make it easy for reviewers to find the answers to the questions they might have.
- Provide appropriate detail within each line item of your budget (i.e. if you are budgeting \$3,000 for student workers, document the number of students and amount each will be paid: Student Stipends: 3 x \$1,000 = \$3,000). Explain every line item listed in your budget as a short budget narrative.
- Address the goals of the program and/or funding organization. The HOOK tailors the description of your project to the interests and goals of a particular funder.
- It should be clear that you know what is happening in the field of the proposed research; cite references.
- Send out a perfect copy, ON TIME. There shouldn't be any typos, errors, or sloppy formatting.

General Tips in Response to a Specific Program or Request for Proposal (RFP)

- Read the guidelines carefully, and then read them again. Guidelines usually tell you about: submission deadlines, eligibility, required proposal format, budget specifications, funding goals and priorities, award levels, evaluation process and criteria, contact information, special instructions about items such as format and mailing.
- Follow all of the directions. Include all of the right forms, provide all requested information, answer all of the questions, and adhere to all requirements about length, format, font size, etc.
- Ask the funder if there is something you do not understand.