

Writing Effective Proposals

1. *Cover Letter.* In the letter, remind the funding officer of any previous contact with him or her. Briefly outline the need addressed in the proposal, and say how it contributes to the funder's mission. Present your organization's credentials. Have the highest officer sign the letter.
2. *Abstract.* Think of the abstract as a summary of the request. It may be the only piece of the proposal read in the first screening, so it needs to be complete but brief (less than one page). The following points should be included:
 - State the need in one or two sentences.
 - Summarize purpose, objectives and methods.
 - Give a one-figure cost estimation.
 - Briefly state the evaluation design.
 - Outline the dissemination plan.
 - Describe how the project relates to the funding agency's mission and goal
3. *Introduction.* In this section, the agency is introduced to the funding source. Briefly describe the history of the organization, its mission and accomplishments to date. Briefly present the credentials of the professionals and board of directors. Cite any recommendation of your group or project from a well-known person or organization. Demonstrate community support of the organization and project. Describe why your organization is best suited to do the project.
4. *Problem Statement.* This statement should define and delineate the proposed idea by establishing the background, purpose and significance of the project. The following questions can be considered when developing the statement:
 - What is the current problem or situation?
 - Who is affected by it?
 - What geographic area is affected by it?
 - How long has the problem existed?
 - What has already been done in this area?
 - What will happen if the problem is not addressed?
 - What evidence exists to support the position taken by your organization?
 - Can the organization realistically do something about it?
5. *Objectives.* Specific objectives or expected outcomes of the project should follow the problem statement. Do not confuse objectives with methods. Objectives identify what you expect to happen, while methods describe how you will reach those ends.

6. *Project Plan or Narrative.* Each objective needs a specific action plan describing a reasonable scope of activities that can be accomplished within the resource and time constraints of the grant. The inclusion of any innovative or unusual methods in the plan should be justified. Be sure to identify any inter-agency or partner involvement since it will usually strengthen the proposal.

7. *Evaluation.* There are two forms of evaluation. An evaluation of EFFORT is measured by assessing the extent to which the activities are accomplished for the overall project (sometimes called Process Evaluation). An evaluation of EFFECTIVENESS is measured by assessing the extent to which objectives are accomplished (sometimes called Impact Evaluation). Remember that evaluation is a continuing process and should be conducted periodically, not only at the end of each planning period. Each objective listed in the project plan should have a related evaluation metric.

8. *Budget.* The budget should be a summary of the proposal. There should be a direct relationship between the budget items and the objectives/activities contained in the narrative. Every item in the budget should be justified in the document. The amount of detail depends on the nature of the project and the breakdown of costs requested by the funding source. The following guidelines may prove helpful in developing the budget:

- Be concrete and specific; do not overlook any category (for example, long distance phone calls, copying, employee benefits or insurance).
- Be conservative, but realistic, in your budget figures. Pay the staff market value, include raises in multiyear projects; include cost quotes as needed.
- If appropriate, include your in-kind services and contributions. Do not minimize the labor it takes to do the job or the contributions your agency or others are making.
- Do not underestimate overhead or indirect costs. Calculate as close as possible all costs of the project. Most funding organizations set a maximum on allowable indirect costs.
- When the budget is complete, look at the cost effectiveness of the project. Is it reasonable? If any of the line items seems unusually high, defend them in the budget justification.

9. *Appendix.* Materials that enrich the proposal but are not essential to the document should be placed in the appendix. Examples include endorsement letters, lists of board members and officers, resumes of key staff, supporting data. An appendix should be cross-referenced by letter (for example, Appendix A) in the body of the proposal.

Writing Measureable Objectives

1. Objectives must answer the questions for WHOM, WHAT, WHEN (within a reasonable time frame), and TO WHAT EXTENT (must be realistic).
2. The question of TO WHAT EXTENT is often difficult to answer. Using past experiences of others and/or your own professional judgment, estimate as best as you can. Remember, if your estimate is too extravagant, evaluation will be extremely frustrating.
3. There are two kinds of outcome objectives: Health and Behavioral:

A. Health Objectives: focus on health indices specifically related to the project.

Example #1: To reduce the prevalence of anemia, as measured by a hemoglobin less than 11 gm/100ml, among 80% of children 6 months to 4 years attending health clinics by August, 2011.

B. Behavioral Objectives: focus on the behavior which is expected during or after the teaching effort. Behavior should be clearly described, e.g. the students will list, discuss or demonstrate particular nutrition education concepts; the students will drink 3 cups of milk daily, etc.

Example #2: At the end of the group counseling session, 80% of participants will be able to name three foods which are high in iron based on post-test results.

Example #3: By December 2011, 80% of the children will be consuming a diet which meets the RDI for calcium, iron, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and protein as determined by a 24 hour recall.

Connecting Objectives with the Evaluation

Example #1: All participants will have their hemoglobin screened upon entrance to the project and again at the end of the project by August, 2011. Results of pre and post hemoglobin screening tests will be analyzed to determine the resulting prevalence of anemia.

Example #2: At the end of the counseling session, all participants will take a post-test on iron-containing foods and the results will be analyzed to determine the percent of participants able to correctly identify three foods high in iron.

Example #3: After completion of the intervention, each child's dietary intake will be assessed with a 24 hour recall and analyzed to determine the percent of children meeting the RDI for all of the five nutrients specified.

Behavioral Objectives Guide

Behaviorally-stated action verbs can be used in writing behavioral (educational) objectives because they can be measured (examples below):

assess	instruct
build	interpret
chart	list
compare	measure
compute	name
conduct	outline
construct	perform
consume	plan
contrast	predict
describe	prepare
develop	recite
differentiate	report
eat	select
evaluate	sort
formulate	state
identify	utilize/use
implement	write

Verbs which should be avoided in writing behavioral objectives because they cannot be measured and are open to too many interpretations (examples below):

appreciate	know
become aware of	learn
believe	realize
enjoy	understand
internalize	grasp the significance of

Common Weaknesses of Grant Proposals

1. Guidelines for grant submission provided in the RFA are not explicitly followed
2. Weak, anecdotal or opinion-based statement of need, justification or background for the project
3. Lack of logical flow from statement of need to project plan
4. Not measurable and/or vague project objectives
5. Unclear or disorganized methodology; unrealistic to complete within project timeline.
6. No link between project objectives and evaluation measures
7. Lack of attention to details of activities planned for each objective
8. Lack of line item budget detail consistent with stated objectives and activities; missing budget justification
9. Unrealistic budget amounts requested for the proposed project
10. Equipment purchases included with inadequate programming to justify; or unauthorized items included in the budget
11. Proposal not spell/grammar checked prior to submission

A-B-C's of Grant-Writing

Ask someone who has written a successful grant to review a draft of your proposal and provide critical feedback.

Be problem driven, not funding driven. Identify your needs and design your proposal to address those needs, and then look for the funding.

Clearly indicate what outcomes or impacts will result from your proposed project.

Always focus on three to five specific aims or objectives; try not to be overly ambitious

Be considerate of reviewers: follow the RFA guidelines explicitly, stay at or below the recommended page length, use appropriate and readable fonts (**SPELL AND GRAMMAR CHECK YOUR DOCUMENTS PRIOR TO SUBMISSION**)

Clearly present your ideas in a concise and organized manner. Follow the format suggested in the RFA, using similar headings for each section.

Always include relevant statistics and other background information which justifies the need for your project. Remember to reference appropriately and to include your bibliography.

Budgets should be itemized and as accurate as possible. If allowed by the RFA, price quotes may be attached to your proposal as appendices. Reviewers are more likely to provide full funding of projects if the costs are well-justified.

Connect your evaluation methods with your objectives so your project will have established measurable outcomes.

**Don't be discouraged by rejection. Identify your weaknesses from the reviewer's comments and try, try again! **

Evaluation: Rural Health and Safety Education Grant-Writing Workshop

Overall, how valuable was this workshop for you? (circle one)

1	2	3	4
Not			Very
Valuable			Valuable

One thing I will do as a result of this workshop is:

Some things I really liked about this workshop include:

Some things I felt were missing or not covered well in this workshop include:

Additional comments and/or suggestions for improvement:

Thank you for participating in this workshop and for taking the time to fill out this evaluation!