Developing and Writing Successful Proposals

UMKC Sponsored Programs & Research Support November 2, 2001

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First step: Don't think about the money; think about your goals. You want to match your goals to a funding agency's goals. Then you can work together to achieve.

I. Basic terminology

A. Grants, Contracts, Cooperative Agreements, Gifts

1. Grant
   - Purpose is to transfer money, property, services, or anything of value to recipient in order to accomplish a public purpose.
   - No substantial involvement is anticipated between sponsor and recipient during performance of activity.
   - Often called an "assistance mechanism" (help: not total payment)

2. Contract
   - Principal purpose is to acquire property or services for direct benefit or use of the sponsor.
   - Substantial involvement is anticipated between sponsor and recipient during performance of activity.

3. Cooperative agreements
   - Principal purpose is to transfer funds to recipient to accomplish a public purpose
   - Substantial involvement is anticipated between sponsor and recipient during performance of activity

4. Gifts
   - Irrevocable funding to support an activity without contractual requirements.

B. Solicited vs. Unsolicited

1. Solicited

An organization (private/public foundation, state/federal agency, etc…) has solicited proposals when it sends out an announcement of a grant/contract/cooperative agreement program and invites other organizations/individuals to submit proposals.

a. Common Solicitations
   - RFA: request for applications (grant)
   - RFP: request for proposals (contract –usually)
   - RFQ: request for quotation (contract)
   - PA: program announcement (grant)
   - BAA: broad agency announcement

b. Response to solicitation: your proposal *(application, proposal, quotation: all synonymous)*

Usually includes the following (as outlined in the application request/solicitation):

- Scope of work
- Work plan, methodology, aims
- Key personnel
- Resources
- Budget
- Budget justification

2. Unsolicited

Even if an organization has not solicited proposals, it might accept and fund projects based on an unsolicited proposal.

a. Common unsolicited agreements:

- Gifts
- Grants
- Contracts
- Cooperative agreements

b. You initiate the contact.

Many agencies accept unsolicited proposals. Depending on the agency, unsolicited proposals range from lengthy full-proposals, using agency-specific forms, to short letter proposals, which consist of 2-4 pages and are also called letters of inquiry.

II. Locating funding sources & programs

A. Where to go for funding sources and programs:

- **UMKC Sponsored Programs & Research Support funding opportunities WWW page:**
  http://www.umkc.edu/research/funding.html

- **Clearinghouse for Mid-continent Foundations**
  4747 Troost
  Kansas City, MO 64110
  235-1176, 235-1177
  (Formerly at the UMKC Bloch School)

- **UMKC Miller Nichols Library**
  5100 Rockhill Road
  Kansas City, MO 64110
  816-235-1534
  http://www.umkc.edu/lib/

- **Kansas City, MO Public Library (Main Branch)**
  311 East 12th Street
  Kansas City, Missouri 64106
  816-701-3400
  FC search on several computers,
  Reference area 2nd floor
  http://www.kcpl.org/

B. Resources to utilize:

1. Books

- The **Taft Foundation Reporter** and the **Taft Corporate Giving Directory** are published by:
  The Taft Group
  835 Penobscot Building
  645 Griswold Street
  Detroit, Michigan 48226
  Tel: 1-800-877-8238

The Taft Foundation Reporter profiles 1,000 of the largest private foundations in the U.S. The Taft Corporate Giving Directory analyzes the national and international giving programs of more than 1,000 U.S. corporations.

- The **Foundation Directory** is published annually by the
  Foundation Center
  79 Fifth Avenue
  New York, New York 10003-3076
  A CD ROM version is also available of the **Foundation Directory**. Both the Foundation Center and the Taft Group publish special purpose reference guides such as: The Fund Raiser's Guide to Human Service Funding; the National Guide to Foundation Funding in Health; Alcohol and Drug Abuse Funding; Directory of New and Emerging Foundations; and Guide to International and Foreign Funding; among others.

- **Directory of Missouri Grantmakers** is a comprehensive directory of grantmakers-foundations, direct corporate giving programs, and public charities-located in Missouri. Entries are also included for out-of-state grant makers with state funding interests in Missouri.

- Bibliography of other resources: **The Literature of the Nonprofit Sector**
  The **Foundation Center** provides an on-line bibliography of the literature of philanthropy including grant writing, tax and legal implication as well as funding opportunities for various types of organizations. It incorporates the unique contents of the Foundation Center's five libraries and contains 18,649 full bibliographic citations, 11,745 of which have descriptive abstracts. It is updated on a regular basis. http://lnps.fdncenter.org/

2. Newsletters & Publications

- **Federal Grants and Contracts Weekly** The newsletter alerts readers early to future funding, signaling specific solicitations often months in advance, unveiling agency grant plans in progress, tracking trends and forecasting areas of funding growth. Articles pass on advice from the experts, help readers calculate their chances and locate key prospecting resources.

- **The Grant Advisor** Since 1983, The Grant Advisor newsletter has been a leading source of information on grant and fellowship opportunities for U.S. institutions of higher education and their faculty.

- **Medical Research Funding Bulletin** A funding resource bulletin that is issued bi-monthly available through Science Support Center.

- **The Chronicle of Philanthropy** is the bi-weekly newspaper of the nonprofit sector. http://philanthropy.com/

3. Databases

- **FC Search (fee-based)** is produced by the Foundation Center. The database features a comprehensive listing of active U.S. foundations and corporate giving programs and their associated grants. It includes a **Grantmaker File** of more than 57,000 records, and a **Grants File** with more than 246,000 grants of $10,000 or more awarded by the nation's largest funders. You may also link directly to the Web sites of over 1,900 of the nation's top foundations, as well as more than 1,000 corporate Web sites.
  http://fdncenter.org/marketplace/catalog/product_cd.jhtml?id=prod30009
  http://www.fconline.fdncenter.org/

- **Foundation Finder**
  Even if you can't afford the Foundation Center's fee-based products, they provide a great deal of free information on-line. Their Foundation Finder includes private and corporate foundation information, such as contact names, addresses, phone numbers, WWW pages, and links to foundations' recent IRS filings. These IRS files contain information on past funded projects, such as amounts funded, geography of funded projects, and project subjects.
  http://lnp.fdncenter.org/finder.html

- **Community of Scholars/Science (COS) (fee-based)** is a multidisciplinary databases of experts and funding possibilities. COS includes a Funding Opportunities database which is up-dated daily and contains private and federal funding sources on the arts, development, education, humanities, and sciences.
  http://www.cos.com

- **Grantselect (fee-based)** is another multidisciplinary database of funding opportunities available through subscription. Grantselect is updated daily, and combines resources previously published in Oryx Press's printed publications. Grantselect includes information for funding in arts and humanities, biomedicine and health care, children and youth, community development, k-12 and adult basic education, international programs, and operating grants.
  http://www.grantselect.com

- The **Illinois Researcher Information Services (IRIS) (fee-based)** database contains federal and non-federal funding opportunities. Like COS, IRIS is a fee-based database. http://www.library.uiuc.edu/iris/

- **SPIN (fee-based)** is similar to IRIS and COS, and requires subscription to search its database of federal and non-federal funding opportunities, expert database, and funding alerts. http://www.infoed.org/spin.stm

- **Science Wise (fee-based)** A databases and an e-mail alert provider which includes funding opportunities from federal agencies and private foundations. ScienceWise used to be **FEDIX/MOLIS:** FEDIX used to be the federal information exchange; MOLIS used to be the Minority On-line information service. They were purchased by ScienceWise. A once free service, there is now a

charge of $100 per year for the service.
http://content.sciencewise.com/alertservice/search/index.htm

4. World Wide Web pages

- **Federal Register** is published daily. Federal agencies use the FR to announce funding opportunities and new programs: especially those targeted to universities, state agencies and non-profit organizations. http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html

- **Foundation Center** maintains links to private and corporate foundations on its web site along with a searchable database of private and corporate grant makers. It also provides tutorials on writing proposals and seeking funding opportunities. You can also sign up for free e-mailed newsletters with funding opportunity information. http://www.fdncenter.org

- **The Grantsmanship Center** provides fee-based classes and resources, but also provides links to good free services. They have a nice, easy-to-use version of the federal register. http://www.tgci.com/

- **Greater Kansas City Community Foundation** Kansas City's Foundation page. Includes a searchable database of foundation interests and current programs. http://gkccf.org/

- **UMKC Sponsored Programs & Research Support WWW** has information on funding resources, proposal writing, budget development, and university-specific information. http://www.umkc.edu/research

- **Federal Commons** In the next few years, the Federal Commons might become the most important bookmark on your browser. The goal of the federal commons is to create one-stop-shopping for all federal grants and funding assistance projects.

  The Federal Commons was created in accordance with the Federal Financial Assistance Management Improvement Act of 1999 (P. L. 106-107), under which federal agencies must develop plans for the electronic processing of grants by May 2001. The Act further requires agencies to adopt common forms and processes. These legislative requirements will be met by creating a government - wide portal for the administration of grants.

  This portal, the Federal Commons, will become a common face of the government, offering all grantees (state and local governments, universities, small businesses, etc.) full service grants processing across all functions in the grant life cycle. The Federal Commons will provide both public information, such as grant programs and funding opportunities, as well as the secure processing of e-grant transactions. The Federal Commons site is in its early stages of development. http://www.cfda.gov/federalcommons/

- **The Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA)** is a free, searchable database that describes all federally sponsored programs. Programs listed may not have current funding cycles.
  http://www.cfda.gov/

- **Commerce Business Daily (CBD)** is published daily by the U.S. Department of Commerce. It announces all federal contracts over $100,000. Free electronic access to CBD can be searched through the last 8 weeks or through archives previous to the last 8 weeks. Also available is an e-mail alert service called CBD select where you can enter key-words and have relevant CBD contract notices sent to your e-mail address weekly.
  http://www.govcon.com/

- **GrantsNet** at http://www.hhs.gov/grantsnet is an on-line grant information service provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). It provides information about HHS and other federal grant programs.

- **Nonprofit Gateway** is designed as a central starting point to help nonprofit organizations access online Federal information and services. Linked to all Cabinet Departments and many agencies, it contains information about grants, regulations, taxes, and other services as well as information on a wide range of other topics and programs. http://www.nonprofit.gov/index.html

5. Free E-mail alert services

- **Foundation Center's Philanthropy News RFP update**
  http://www.fdncenter.org/pnd/rfp/index.html
  After signing up for their list, you'll receive weekly updates on new grants. (Topics include education, youth/families)

A number of government agencies and institutes provide their own e-mail alert services and will notify you of new reports, program announcements, policy documents, proposal guidelines and more all customized to your interests. A few examples include:

Center for Disease Control
http://www.cdc.gov/subscribe.html

Department of Education
http://www.ed.gov/MailingLists/EDInfo/ei-annou.html

Environmental Protection Agency
http://esdev.sdc-moses.com/ncerqa/elists/elist.cfm

Department of Agriculture, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program
http://www.reeusda.gov/crgam/nri/nriinfo/nri-epubs.htm

National Institutes of Health:
http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/listserv.htm

National Aeronautics and Space Administration
http://spacescience.nasa.gov/announce/listserv.htm

National Science Foundation Custom News Service
http://www.nsf.gov/home/cns/

C. What to look for in funding sources and programs:

1. Private vs public funds

2. RFPs, RFAs, PAs, unsolicited, and more

(At UMKC, unsolicited corporate/private foundation applications are coordinated and supported through University Advancement. This funding opportunity search has been copied to Kathy Dunn, Sr. Director of Development for Corporate/Foundation Gifts (816-235-5777, dunnk@umkc.edu). If you are interested in submitting an unsolicited* proposal to one of the funding opportunities listed below, please contact Ms. Dunn. In addition, if one of the foundations listed below is currently targeted as a possible partner in the UMKC strategic plans, a representative from UMKC Development may contact you.

"Unsolicited" proposals are those without deadlines and without application guidelines. For example, if a foundation's WWW page includes something similar to the following: "To apply, please submit a letter of inquiry; letters of inquiry are due 1 month before the foundation's board meets in March or October." This type of proposal would be "unsolicited" because of the lack of direction in application guidelines and no real deadline.)

3. Funding opportunity constraints
   When you're searching for funding opportunities, check to ensure you, your institution and your idea all match the goals/funding program of the sponsor.

   - Person: Are you the right person for the opportunity? Often agencies or specific PA will restrict their grants to underrepresented minorities, or to Ph.D.s, or other personal/professional qualifications.

   - Place: Are you in the right place for the opportunity? Some agencies only fund universities/nonprofits; some agencies will not fund universities. Some agencies will not fund individuals. Some only want to fund in a specific state, or, for industries, in a specific location where the majority of their employees live.

   - Thing: Is your idea conducive with the goals of the agency? Are the things you need to implement your idea covered by the agency? For example: if you

want to buy equipment for your idea, does the agency fund equipment? Does the agency normally fund projects in your price range?

- Finding constraints
  To find all the constraints (for and against you, your idea and your place) check multiple sources of agency information. For example, if you're looking at a foundation's solicitation for proposals, check the foundation's entry in the following:
  - The Foundation Center's Foundation Finder (http://lnpdev.fdncenter.org/finder.html). The Foundation Finder will give you a short synopsis of the foundation and the foundation's latest IRS filing. Often the IRS filing will not only tell you to whom the foundation gave, but also how much the foundation gave per award.
  - The foundation's WWW site (read everything)
  - Look at past awards: Who received them? In what organization/state were they located? How much was funded? What was funded?
  - Foundation Center's, other publishers' books

III. What is a proposal?

- A good proposal is a good idea, well expressed, with a clear indication of methods for pursuing the idea, evaluating the findings, and making them known to all who need to know.

- A proposal is a marketing document that includes a statement of work or research plan and a budget.

- It is often a legal and binding contract.

- A proposal document should be an answer book to the RFA or application guidelines.

- A proposal is also a communications process--both inside your institution and outside to potential partners--including the potential funder(s) of your project. This means that the proposal document is also a series of coordinated and inter-related communication points, both written & oral.

- A proposal is a relationship building exercise.

- The proposal document, as submitted to your potential funder, is only one point in the process.

- The proposal document itself is not the first point, last point, or, in some ways, the most important point of that process.

- The proposal as a communication process often takes from 2-3 years from initial identification of a project and potential funding agency to the signing of a contract or grant award.

- Proposals generally fall into two categories: solicited proposals and unsolicited proposals.

Overall, a winning proposal…

- Meets the needs of the sponsors. (The sponsors do not meet the needs of the proposal writer.)
- Is directed to reviewers.

- Is clear and concise. It is readable the first time. And actually, the reviewers only need to read the first two sentences of any paragraph to get the main points of your proposal.
- Persuades and justifies. It answers these questions: Why me? Why this project? Why now? What is special about my project and my organization?
- Is organized.
- Follows application guidelines.
- Gives just enough information.
- Has no budget problems.
- Has a good overall presentation.

What a proposal is not:

- A proposal is not a scholarly paper.
- A proposal is not anything anyone really wants to read.
- A proposal is not something that can be successfully thrown together at the last minute.

IV. Reading and Analyzing Application Guidelines

Reading and analyzing the proposal solicitation or other proposal guidelines--and using them to prepare the outline and format specifications--is the single most important part of the proposal writing process. It is your first step in writing a **responsive** proposal and in managing the proposal effort for **compliance**.

The RFA (request for application) or application guidelines will determine:

- Initial bid/no bid decision
- Technical response and costing
- Proposal format, outline and content
- Proposal themes and sub-themes

How to read and analyze the guidelines:

A. Read the RFA and/or application guidelines word for word, cover to cover.

Look for the following:

- Inconsistencies that need to be cleared up, questions that need to be answered (If you find inconsistencies, e-mail or call the agency and ask for clarification. Often, proposal solicitations include the e-mail addresses of people at the funding agency whom you can contact. At UMKC, the SPRS office will be happy to help with this.)
- The "true" competitiveness of the opportunity. Does another institution have the "inside track"? For example, if warning signs are there (surprises, unusual requirements or special requirements), another agency may have the inside track for the funding opportunity. (This is more applicable for contracts rather than grants.)
- Goal, objectives and statement of work (what the funder wants done)
- Special contract or grant requirements (including eligibility, cost-sharing, etc…)
- Is there a bidder's or a grants seeker's conference? (If so, you need to go if you want to bid--no matter where it is located.)

Some organizations/proposal writing teams make reading the RFA cover-to-cover easier by:

- Schedule a group read
- Binding the RFA in a 3-ring binder with tabbing sections for easy reference
- Highlighting important points or questions to consider

B. Make a Proposal Data Sheet

On the data sheet, include all information from the RFA that you need at your fingertips during the proposal development/writing process. This includes:

- Program solicitation number (or other identification number used by funding agency)

- Exact title of the procurement or funding program (this will become the title, or part of the title of your proposal)
- Name and address of funding agency
- Due date and time of submission
- Submission address and instructions
- Format requirements
    - Page limitations
    - Font size
    - Spacing requirements
    - Number of required volumes
    - Number of required copies
    - Special instructions (stapled, not stapled, not bound, etc..)
- Length of contract or grant period and start date
- Funding level
- Program Officer name and how she/he can or should be contacted
- Special instructions or requirements you do not want to forget

C. Use the application guidelines to outline and format your proposal.

- Your proposal must be 100% compliant to the application guidelines.
- Give the funding agency exactly what it asks for in the application guidelines, in exactly the order and manner in which it is requested.
- Follow any format restrictions (type, margins, spacing, etc…) and all application directions to the letter.
- Use the evaluation criteria as your proposal's main headings. If both an evaluation criteria and specific main headings are listed, follow the directed main headings, and work language of the evaluation criteria into your narrative and/or sub-headings.

V. Developing the Conceptual Framework of your project: A proposal development guide

To develop your project, you will need to answer the following set of questions. The answers to these questions will become the content for your proposal.

Following this guide and answering these questions will help you develop a project out of an idea--and help you develop a proposal that answers your potential funder's questions (which include answering the questions of project partners, project director, project beneficiaries, as well as answering the questions of scientific reviewers, if applicable).

A. Background & significance
What is the problem or issue that your proposed project or research will solve or address?

> Why is this problem or issue important?
> To whom is it important? Who or what does this problem affect?
> Who is involved?
> What will be the significance or impact of solving this problem or addressing this issue?

B. Goals, objectives, plan of work
What activities will you undertake to solve the problem or address the issue?

- Why are your proposed activities the best way--most effective, cost efficient, most equitable--to solve this problem or address this issue?
- What other potential solutions have you considered? Why did you reject those solutions?
- What will result from your activities?
- What is your plan of work over the life of the proposed project? What will be done and when?
- Can the proposed work be broken down into tasks and sub-tasks? How do the tasks and sub-tasks relate to each other?
- What methods or means will you use to carry out the tasks and sub-tasks? Why have you chosen these methods and means of carrying out your activities?
- What is your schedule of work or project time line? (This can be most detailed in the early months and the first year, and less detailed for succeeding years.)

C. Impact
Who benefits from your project?

- Why does this project matter? Why does it matter more than other projects that could be funded?
- In what ways will people, their communities, the environment, etc… benefit from this project?
- Does the project address a problem as identified, defined and articulated by the groups the project is supposed to benefit?
- Why is this project of more benefit ***now*** than other projects that could be funded?
- Is your project--its activities and results--sustainable?
- If appropriate, how will you ensure that project activities or impacts continue when outside funding stops?
- How are you institutionalizing activities in your project design?

ⓘ Do not forget to consider how your own organization will benefit. Most foundations and funding agencies want to strengthen institutions and build capacity as well as support projects and research.

D. Project design & management
How will the project be managed and/or administered within your organization?

- Did the project's beneficiaries help design the project--the solution to the problem?
- Who is the project manager, director or principle investigator? Has she or he been given the authority and resources necessary to achieve the project objectives?
- Are there tasks or activity leaders? What are their duties and responsibilities on the project?
- How will project beneficiaries help implement and mange the project?
- Has the project been designed so that all involved groups have equitable and appropriate access to project resources: information, technologies, inputs, credit, funds?
- What effect, if any, will the project have on workloads and other priorities within your organization?
- Will you use special management tools, processes and/or principles to administer the project?

ⓘ Explain how your project is built on "lessons learned" and previous experience of your organization or other organizations working on the same issue or problem.

E. Expertise of key personnel
What is each person's role and responsibility on the project?

- Why have you chosen these people to be involved in your project? Why are you personally involved in this project?
- Prepare resumes or biosketches that clearly show how each individual's education, experience and achievements match his/her role on the project. If the funding agency does not give you a resume format to follow, create one for

yourself and place everyone's information into the same format. These resumes should not be academic C.V.s. Resumes should include:

- name
- proposed role on the project
- % of time proposed to be devoted to the project
- summary of qualifications (1-2 short paragraphs with competitive themes)
- professional experience (including title, position, place)
- education
- a category (or two) which would be most important to the reviewers. This final category could be languages spoken, publications, professional organizations, honors, etc…)

D. Project evaluation

How will the project or research be monitored and evaluated?

- Will you conduct a baseline survey? How and when?
- What are the indicators of project progress, impact and success?
- What are the potential barriers to success that may occur and when may they occur? What are some methods you will use to overcome these barriers if they do arise.
- How will you use information from project monitoring and evaluation to review activities and revise methods and processes?
- What is your schedule of evaluation?

ⓘ List potential barriers and potential methods to overcome barriers in an easy-to-read table. This shows you have thought out your project thoroughly and objectively and will hopefully answer any objections the reviewers have to your project.

ⓘ Project evaluation is usually an allowable cost--build the costs associated with evaluating your project into your project budget.

E. Sharing results

What is your information dissemination plan?

- How will you communicate "lessons learned" during the project?
- Who are your potential audiences? Who needs or would be interested in the information your project generates?
- How will you communicate to each of these audiences? And do your communication modes meet the situations and needs of the various audiences?

VI. Outlining Your Proposal

Now that you have developed the content for your proposal, now it is time to establish the master outline for your proposal.

If your proposal is in response to a solicitation or a Request for Application (RFA), read the guidelines or RFA carefully. It will usually include a required outline that must be followed for your proposal to be considered responsive and technically eligible for review and award. If it does not include a required outline, develop an outline based on the evaluation criteria.

If your proposal is unsolicited, determine if your potential funder (foundation, organization, donor or government agency) has established proposal procedures, formats, outlines and application forms. Some do and some do not.

If there are application forms and/or an agency grant proposal guide (in addition to the RFA), read through the forms and proposal guide word for word. Don't glance at the application forms, be sure you have all the information you need to complete the forms. At UMKC, we provide "boilerplate" information of commonly needed university information. (http://www.umkc.edu/research/boiler.html)

Pay close attention to editorial and format requirements. Many funders have strict requirements for such things as numbers of pages, type and font size, line spacing, margins, one-sided or two-sided copying, requirements for annex material, how to present budget information and what costs can be included.

Prepare a data summary sheet of essential information you do not want to forget or have to look up at the last moment.

Do not ignore the day and the hour when your proposal is due. Work out a careful writing, reviewing, product and mailing schedule to allow time to meet your deadline. Most institutions have at least one horror story of losing a proposal competition because of missing a deadline or failing to follow exactly the instructions given by the funder.

A number of federal and some private foundations are moving from printed proposal submissions to electronic proposal submissions. These electronic proposal systems often have bugs that are yet to be worked out, or can add new, unexpected delays to the proposal submission processes. If submitting electronically, give yourself (and your institution's grants authorities) even more time to understand their system.

If no guidelines are available and no requirements are specified, you may wish to use and adapt the format given below.

A. Cover
The cover usually includes the following information:

- Title of proposal (use the title given by the funding agency)
- Name and address of organization submitting proposal
- Name and address of agency to whom proposal is being submitted
- Date of submission

B. Title page
The title page usually includes the same information as the cover along with the names and organizational affiliations of the principle investigators (key personnel) and a data disclosure statement, if appropriate.

C. Letter of Transmittal

- Generally, not longer than 1 page
- Addressed to a specific person--usually the contact person listed in the application guidelines.
- Describes one key feature and one key benefit of your proposed project or research.
- Assures that principle investigator and project staff will be given all necessary resources to accomplish objectives of proposal.
- Is signed by the highest authority, as appropriate, within your institution.

D. Table of Contents and List of Illustrations

E. Glossary of Acronyms, Abbreviations and Special Terms

F. Proposal Index to the Evaluation Criteria

G. Executive Summary

- Keep it short: 1-3 page maximum (1 is better than 3)
- Write in a clear, direct style. Remember: this is a marketing document, not a technical summary. It will describe the major benefits to be derived from your project and the key features of your approach.
- Its tone is "from an executive to an executive"--from your organization's highest decision maker to the highest decision maker within the funding organization.
- The letter of transmittal and executive summary are companion pieces. They should be written at the same time, after the proposal is completely developed and written.

H. Introduction and Background

- Keep this section brief--a suggested limit of 3-5 pages
- Describe the problem or issue your project addresses, its significance and who will benefit
- Outline your project's purpose, goal and objectives
- Summarize your proposed activities

- Briefly describe your organization and the qualifications of the project leader or principle investigator.
- Include a "road map" to the rest of the proposal.

I. Project plan or statement of work
This section is the "meat" of your proposal. It will discuss in detail:

- what you are going to do,
- how you are going to do it,
- why you are going to do it the way you propose (rationale).

In this section, describe your

- monitoring and evaluation plan,
- information dissemination plan,
- Potential problems and constraints you may encounter and your plan for overcoming them.

ⓘ Include a project schedule or time line

J. Project management
This section discusses the roles, responsibilities and qualifications of project staff and others within your organization who are important to the project or research. Include the following:

- Resumes for key personnel
- Organizational charts and staffing schedules

K. Organizational capabilities and past experience
The section is your organization's "resume."

- Describe special facilities that your organization offers which are applicable to the project or research.
- Describe previous projects you or members of your organization have conducted that are relevant to this project and that show you have the expertise and experience to conduct the proposed work.

L. Budget and cost proposal
Read the guidelines carefully to determine if the sponsor excludes certain cost categories. Additionally, use the information found in the sponsor's past-awards. What is the sponsor's normal funding range? What and how much does the agency normally fund? Principal budget categories in most proposals are:

- Direct costs
- Salaries and wages of project staff
- Fringe benefits
- Travel, transportation and per diem
- Nonexpendable equipment
- Expendable supplies
- Subcontracts and consultant fees
- Facilities & Administration (F&A), also called Indirect costs

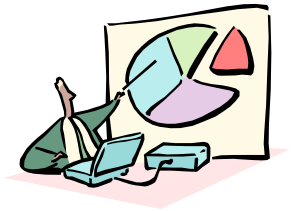
ⓘ It is vital to include a budget justification as well as a detailed budget. The budget justification is a narrative explaining budget needs, and how the costs are necessary for the project.

Your funder or client may require other elements in your cost proposal or budget. Examples include:

- Evidence of financial responsibility
- Audited financial statement for several years
- Adequate financial resources statement or yearly operating budget
- IRS nonprofit determination letter (IRS 501(c)3 designation letter)
- Satisfactory record of performance statement
- Integrity and business ethics statement
- Qualifications and eligibility statement

U.S. Government Certifications and Representations or various standard US government forms:

- Additional financial information
- Indirect cost rates statement
- Vacation, holiday and sick pay policies
- Detailed breakdown of fringe benefits
- Government agency approval of accounting system
- Personnel policies

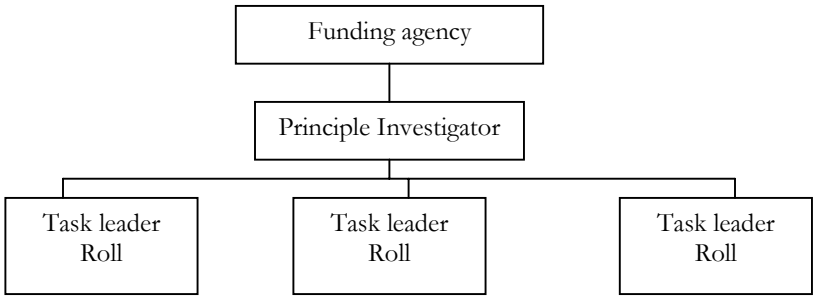


VII. Required icing: tables, figures

Determine and prepare graphs, figures and tables required or desired. Do not submit a 40 page proposal without any tables or figures. Tables and figures, if well designed, can present information efficiently and easily. A reviewer who has 20 proposals to review will be more likely to glance at a graph than he/she is to read an entire proposal. **Anything that is vital to understanding your project ought to be in both graphic and text form.** Use tables and graphics to persuade your reviewers and to make their jobs easier.
Some examples commonly used in a proposal include:

- Framework of proposed project action and actors
- Gantt chart (activities plotted against time line)
- Critical path
- Work breakdown structure
- Staffing schedule (staffing plotted against time line)
- Institutional and project organization charts
- Proposal index to evaluation criteria chart
- Constraints and solutions table
- Organization charts

Organization charts
For project organization charts, the funding agency is at the top. For example:



ⓘ When writing captions for tables and figures, write descriptive, positive sentences.
Good example: "Alternative health curriculum project combines expertise of conventional medical faculty, alternative health practitioners and specialists in curriculum development and delivery."
Poor example: "Project personnel"

Designing information
(Notes from Presenting Data and Information, a lecture by Edward Tufte, Ph.D.)

Goals of good information design
1. Dimensionality: Escaping Flatland
Most designs are on flat space (paper, computer screens, video screens, etc.) but represent a multi-dimensional world. Good design will escape flatland and represent multiple dimensions (including time).

2. Constantly strive to increase resolution
In all media, the more resolution, the more information and depth per inch, the better. The highest resolution we know of is our brains. We sort out millions of data sets every second. The best we can do is to create designs worthy of the human eye and the human mind.

3. Don't mess up the content. One of the best goals to strive for is just not to mess up the content.

4. Don't throw out information: improve your design. Confusion is not an attribute of information (or too much information); it is an attribute of bad design.

General guidelines of good information design
One of the mistakes in presenting information is forcing your audience to solve puzzles. An example of this is codes in information design. Examples:

A = seniors B = juniors	---------- = administrators _-_-_-_-_-_-_ = faculty members	****** = graduates ****** = undergraduate

These examples are just puzzles and decrease the clarity of your information. Put the labels with the graphic. Incorporate text and graphics to improve the clarity and decrease puzzle solving. Do not dequantify your data when you put it in graphic form. Always integrate the numbers, text, and graphics.

Also, there is no reason why you need to reinvent everything. Find exceptional designs and replicate them. Stealing others' designs is particularly important if your audience is already familiar with a design (ex: the Wall Street Journal's graphic design for stocks reporting). If you use what they already know, you have helped make your information clearer and more comfortable for your audience. They don't have to solve puzzles to understand your content.

Fight Chart Junk. Anything that is not directly active in representing the thinking task is chart junk and is statistically stupid. (Example: the drop shadows, fill effects, shine effects, etc...in Excel.) Chart junk hides your content-or at the very least, masks it.

Magic is disinformation. It is the corruption of optical understanding. It is a good idea to look at how magic works and how magicians present, and do the opposite. For example, magicians don't tell people what they are going to do and they don't like to repeat a trick. So, you should be sure to tell people what you're going to do, and be sure you repeat things often. Also: it is more interesting if you see what is coming. The interest is not in what will

happen, but how and why it happened. Tell you audience what is happening, what you are going to do. The content is what matters-not if you can hold your audience in suspense.

Help for thinking clearly when designing a graph or presentation:

1. Show me the causality. What causes what?
2. Show me the full data set. Don't hide the data that doesn't fit.
3. What would it take to convince me of this argument? Think about what that graph would look like, and create it.

Grand principles of design

1. Enforce visual comparisons

Answer the question: compared to what? Before the Challenger blew up, the engineers knew there could be a major problem because the o-rings would not seal properly in the unseasonably cold temperatures projected for the day of the launch. They presented their argument to NASA. They had evidence of recovered o-rings from almost all-previous launches. But in none of their charts did they directly compare the temperature at launch to the damage on the o-rings (which was the crux of their argument). In the end, NASA wasn't convinced of the argument, and the space shuttle exploded as predicted by the engineers.

Two important lessons from the Challenger:

1. All is persuasion. Great content deserves, and in this case pleaded for, great design/presentation. Without persuasion, content will suffer.

2. Presentations mean something. Too often we throw presentations together thinking the presentation is just the bells and whistles-nothing to see here-not the real work. But in this case, people died because the presentation was unpersuasive-despite the highly compelling content.

2. Show causality.

Information shouldn't be just descriptive. We want to know how something works. If the engineers could have made a chart comparing the launch time temps with the damage incurred on the o-rings, they could have demonstrated the causality of decreasing temps= increasing o-ring damage and danger.

3. Show multivariables and high dimensionality. Complexity with clarity.

The more information the better. Don't try to 'dumb' down your presentations or decrease the information to increase the clarity. Improve your design.

4. Integrate text and graphics.

Tables should be paragraphs of numbers. Don't break up your presentation according to information design departments (one column of technical writing, graphics on one part of the page, photography on another, etc.).

5. Your presentation will stand on the quality, relevance, and integrity of the content.

The best way to improve your presentations is to improve your content.

6. It is better to show two points of information/ two charts in comparison beside each other--don't make the audience remember what your first point/ first chart looked like. Page beside page is easier to understand than page, turn, page.

7. Use small multiples
Many small, near identical graphics are good for showing change. (For example, many little suns with changing sun spots to show rotation.) Small multiples are multidimensional and increase the density/resolution of your display. Also, they are easy on your audience because once the audience invests the time to understand the first graphic, --the rest of them are easy-no codes! It's a good use of the audience's investment --they figure out what you're talking about. Further, with small multiples, you have increased credibility. When people can see lots of data over time or space, they can see that you have spent some time on this project. You know what you're talking about. (Also, be sure you show the full data set-don't select specific plots or points of data to be seen.) The spirit of the small multiple is to lay it all on the table.

8. Use the smallest effective difference
Don't blow out the spectrum of color or sound or anything just for the sake of intensity. Shades of blue to display various depths of ocean is a good color scheme. A rainbow of shades to display the same ocean depths would be silly and confusing. Use the smallest effective difference to make your point or describe your information. Another example is Tufte's special graph paper. Very fine, off-white lines on white paper still accomplishes the purpose of having straight lines without over powering your thoughts (like traditional cyan/cream graph paper).

9. You can not achieve great design by committee.

10. Your information design should directly reflect the thinking task you are asking of your audience. Overall, principles of information design should be the principles of analytic thinking. If the purpose behind the presentation is to understand x+y=z, then the display should be designed to represent x+y=z. How we want the audience to think and how we show the information should be the same. Before designing, think: what is the thinking task I am asking of the audience? Then display that thinking task graphically. **Good design is clear thinking made visible.**

VIII. Writing letter proposals

Tips for writing a letter proposal adapted from Lynn Miner's Proposal Planning & Writing, Oryx Press:

- A letter proposal is a short grant proposal, usually not more than 2-4 pages long.
- It is usually written to private sponsors (corporations or foundations) and may also be called a letter of inquiry or concept paper. Occasionally, if you're writing an unsolicited proposal to a federal agency, the program director will also request a letter of inquiry/concept paper to determine if the agency is interested in your project.
- Most private sponsors and some federal agencies use letter proposals as a screening device and will request an expanded proposal if your proposed project matches their funding mission and captures their interest.
- Some funders have specific content requirements for their letter proposals. If your funder does not, you may wish to use these guidelines.

Your letter proposal can be broken down into seven components:

1. **Summary**
2. **Sponsor Appeal**
3. **Problem**
4. **Solution**
5. **Capabilities**
6. **Budget**
7. **Closing**

The **Summary** presents in 1-2 sentences you entire proposal. It has the following parts:

- **Self-identification**
- **Organizational uniqueness**
- **Sponsor expectation**
- **Budget request**
- **Project benefit**

An example:
Midwest University [**identification**], as Wisconsin's largest independent educational institution [**uniqueness**], requests your investment [**expectation**] in a $250,000 research project [**request**] that builds the long-term infrastructure for scientific advancements in biomedical research [**benefit**].

The **Sponsor Appeal** section explains why you are approaching this foundation or funder. An example:
Because of your demonstrated commitment to the needs of children and your leadership in our community, we are turning to Foundation X for support in expanding our hospital's child-care services.

The **Problem** section briefly summarizes the problem.

- Focus your discussion of the problem—or need statement—from the funder's point of view or perspective, not yours. Funding your project is not the funder's end goal. You must show how funding your project can be a means for the foundation to carry out its mission—the foundation's end goal.

- A need is a gap between "what is" and "what should be." Document that need with statistics, quotations, reasoning, and surveys and express it in human terms. Documentation should be brief but clear.

The **Solution** section describes your approach to the problem.

- Summarize your objectives.
- Show how your proposed project or research can close the gap between "what is" and "what should be."
- Do not include methodological detail in your letter proposal. Some funders request a timeline and task chart as an attachment.

The **Capabilities** section establishes your credentials to do the project.

- You want to show that you have a creditable organization proposing a creditable idea directed by a creditable principal investigator or project manager.
- You must show what is unique about your organization and proposed project.

The **Budget** section requests a specific dollar amount.

- Request a specific amount.
- Base request on the funding patterns of the foundation or potential funder. Make sure you are asking for a reasonable amount from the funder's point of view.
- Express request in meaningful units if possible. That is, this will support so many hours of instruction, so many students, so many patient services.

The **Conclusion** identifies the desired action you wish the funder to take.

- Identify a person funder can contact for more details.
- Have the highest ranking authority, as appropriate, in your organization sign the letter.
- An example:
  Your support will assist our university in providing needed health services to the under-served citizens of our community. If you need additional information about our proposed Center or the university, please call Dr. Ann James at 999-999-9999.

  More resources on letter proposals:
  The Foundation Center's FAQ on letters of inquiry & examples of letters of inquiry:
  http://fdncenter.org/learn/faqs/letter.html
  http://fdncenter.org/learn/faqs/loi.html

IX. Proposal problems and concerns most cited by peer reviewers

Below is a list of the most common reasons cited by reviewers for an application's lack of success (*from The Original How to Write a Research Grant Application*):

Lack of significance to the scientific issue being addressed.

Lack of original or new ideas.

Proposal of an unrealistically large amount of work (i.e., an over ambitious research plan). Scientific rationale not valid.

Project too diffuse or superficial or lacks focus.

Proposed project a fishing expedition lacking solid scientific basis (i.e., no basic scientific question being addressed).

Studies based on a shaky hypothesis or on shaky data, or alternative hypotheses not considered. Proposed experiments simply descriptive and do not test a specific hypothesis.

The proposal is technology driven rather than hypothesis driven (i.e., a method in search of a problem).

Rationale for experiments not provided (why important, or how relevant to the hypothesis).

Direction or sense of priority not clearly defined, i.e., the experiments do not follow from one another, and lack a clear starting or finishing point.

Lack of alternative methodological approaches in case the primary approach does not work out.

Insufficient methodological detail to convince reviewers the investigator knows what he or she is doing (no recognition of potential problems and pitfalls).

The proposed model system is not appropriate to address the proposed questions (i.e., proposing to study T-cell gene expression in a B-cell line).

The proposed experiments do not include all relevant controls.

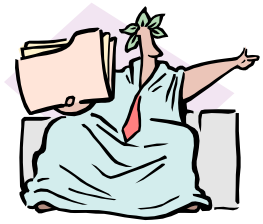
Proposal innovative but lacking enough preliminary data.

Preliminary data do not support the feasibility of the project or the hypothesis.

Investigator does not have experience (i.e., publications or appropriate preliminary data) with the proposed techniques or has not recruited a collaborator who does.

The proposal lacks critical literature references causing reviewers to think that the applicant either does not know the literature or has purposely neglected critical published material.

Not clear which data were obtained by the investigator and which have been reported by others.



X. Why proposals succeed

All winning proposals share six characteristics:

Responsive Proposals should be responsive to the application guidelines and responsive to the goals of the funding agency. (Do the research to ensure you are responsive to the agency's goals.)

Familiar Proposals should not be surprises. Use appropriate, familiar language. The proposal should look and feel like the funding agency's materials. Use their phrases, their language, their design.

Accurate Proposals should be accurate in big ways (the data must be correct, the plan must be possible, nothing overstated) and in little ways (no typos, the table of contents is correct). At the end of production, flip through every proposal copy that is going to the agency to ensure all pages are in every copy (often copiers will miss a page when copying large amounts).

Verifiable You're selling yourself and your ideas, but do not overstate the evidence. Give credentials for doing your project. It isn't usually enough just to have a good idea.

Benefit-oriented What are the benefits of the project? The proposal must focus on the benefits of the project. (Not why you need the money to do it.) Put yourself in the mindset of someone who wants to help society: you would want to give the money to someone who would do the project anyway if money wasn't a barrier, and you want to give the money to a project with the most bang for your buck.

Answers the funding agent's question, "Why me?" If a proposal is verifiable and benefit oriented, it will explain why the funding agent should fund your project , now, with you as the principal investigator.

References:

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Online guides to proposal development:

UMKC Sponsored Programs & Research Support proposal guides
http://www.umkc.edu/research/proposals.html

Foundation Center's short course on proposal writing
http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1_new.html

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