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# How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal

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- Staffing needs, including use of existing staff and new hires or volunteers; and
- Preliminary budget, covering expenses and financial requirements, to determine what funding levels to seek.

When developing an idea for a proposal, it is also important to determine if the idea has already been considered in the applicant's locality or state. A thorough check should be made with state legislators, local government, and related public and private agencies which may currently have grant awards or contracts to do similar work. If a similar program already exists, the applicant may need to reconsider submitting the proposed project, particularly if duplication of effort is perceived. However, if significant differences or improvements in the proposed project's goals can be clearly established, it may be worthwhile to pursue federal or private foundation assistance.

## **Community Support**

For many proposals, community support is essential. Once a proposal summary is developed, an applicant may look for individuals or groups representing academic, political, professional, and lay organizations which may be willing to support the proposal in writing. The type and caliber of community support is critical in the initial and subsequent review phases. Numerous letters of support can influence the administering agency or foundation. An applicant may elicit support from local government agencies and public officials. Letters of endorsement detailing exact areas of project sanction and financial or in-kind commitment are often requested as part of a proposal to a federal agency. Several months may be required to develop letters of endorsement, since something of value (e.g., buildings, staff, services) is sometimes negotiated between the parties involved. Note that letters from Members of Congress may be requested once a proposal has been fully developed and is ready for submission.

While money is the primary concern of most grantseekers, thought should be given to the kinds of nonmonetary contributions that may be available. In many instances, academic institutions, corporations, and other nonprofit groups in the community may be willing to contribute technical and professional assistance, equipment, or space to a worthy project. Not only can such contributions reduce the amount of money being sought, but evidence of such local support is often viewed favorably by most grant-making agencies or foundations.

Many agencies require, in writing, affiliation agreements (a mutual agreement to share services between agencies) and building space commitments prior to either grant approval or award. Two useful methods of generating community support may be to form a citizen advisory committee or to hold meetings with community leaders who would be concerned with the subject matter of the proposal. The forum may include the following:

- Discussion of the merits of the proposal;
- Development of a strategy to create proposal support from a large number of community groups, institutions, and organizations; and
- Generation of data in support of the proposal.

many cases, the more agency or foundation personnel know about the proposal, the better the chance of support and of an eventual favorable decision.

Federal agencies are required to report funding information as funds are approved, increased, or decreased among projects within a given state depending on the type of required reporting. Also, grant seekers may consider reviewing the federal budget for the current and future fiscal years to determine proposed dollar amounts for particular budget functions.

The grant seeker should carefully study the eligibility requirements for each government or foundation program under consideration (see, for example, the Applicant Eligibility and Rules and Regulations sections of the CFDA program description). Federal department and agency websites generally include additional information about their programs. CFDA program descriptions and websites include information contacts. Applicants should direct questions and seek clarification about requirements and deadlines from the contacts. The applicant may learn that he or she is required to provide services otherwise unintended such as a service to particular client groups, or involvement of specific institutions. It may necessitate the modification of the original concept in order for the project to be eligible for funding. Questions about eligibility should be discussed with the appropriate program officer.

For federal grants, funding opportunities notices appear on websites such as Grants.gov at <http://www.grants.gov> or FedConnect at <https://www.fedconnect.net>. Applicants can search and sign up for email notification of funding opportunities, and download applications packages. To submit applications, registration is required. The grantseeker must also obtain Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) and register with System for Award Management (SAM): Grants.gov provides instructions and links. Deadlines for submitting applications are often not negotiable, though some federal programs do have open application dates (refer to the CFDA program description). For private foundation funding opportunities, grant seekers should contact foundations or check the Foundation Center's website for daily postings of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) at <http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/fundingsources/rfp.html>. Specified deadlines are usually associated with strict timetables for agency or foundation review. Some programs have more than one application deadline during the fiscal or calendar year. Applicants should plan proposal development around the established deadlines.

## **Getting Organized to Write the Proposal**

The grant seeker, after narrowing the field of potential funders, may want to approach the most likely prospects to confirm that they might indeed be interested in the project. Many federal agencies and foundations are willing to provide an assessment of a preliminary one- or two-page concept paper before a formal proposal is prepared. The concept paper should give a brief description of the needs to be addressed, who is to carry out the project, what is to be accomplished, by what means, how long it will take, how the accomplishments will be measured, plans for the future, how much it will cost, and the ways this proposal relates to the mission of the funding source.

Developing a concept paper is excellent preparation for writing the final proposal. The grant seeker should try to see the project or activity from the viewpoint of the grant-making agency or foundation. Like the proposal, the concept paper should be brief, clear, and informative. It is important to understand that from the funder's vantage point, the grant is not seen as the end of the process, but only as the midpoint. The funder will want to know what will happen to the project once the grant ends. For example, will it be self-supporting or will it be used as a

1. Cover letter
2. Proposal summary or abstract
3. Introduction describing the grant seeker or organization
4. Problem statement (or needs assessment)
5. Project objectives
6. Project methods or design
7. Project evaluation
8. Future funding
9. Project budget

## **Cover Letter**

The one-page cover letter should be written on the applicant's letterhead and should be signed by the organization's highest official. It should be addressed to the individual at the funding source with whom the organization has dealt, and should refer to earlier discussions. While giving a brief outline of the needs addressed in the proposal, the cover letter should demonstrate a familiarity with the mission of the grantmaking agency or foundation and emphasize the ways in which this project contributes to these goals.

## **Proposal Summary: Outline of Project Goals**

The grant 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 should be prepared after the grant proposal has been developed in order to encompass all the key points necessary to communicate the objectives of the project. It is this document that becomes the cornerstone of the proposal, and the initial impression it gives will be critical to the success of the venture. In many cases, the summary will be the first part of the proposal package seen by agency or foundation 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. When letters of support are written, the summary may be used as justification for the project.

The summary should include a description of the applicant, a definition of the problem to be solved, a statement of the objectives to be achieved, an outline of the activities and procedures to be used to accomplish those objectives, a description of the evaluation design, plans for the project at the end of the grants, and a statement of what it will cost the funding agency. It may also identify other funding sources or entities participating in the project.

- Stress what gaps exist in addressing the problem that will be addressed by the proposal.
- Remaining alternatives available when funding has been exhausted. Explain what will happen to the project and the impending implications.
- Most important, the specific manner through which problems might be solved. Review the resources needed, considering how they will be used and to what end.

One of the pitfalls to be avoided is defining the problem as a lack of program or facility (i.e., giving one of the possible solutions to a problem as the problem itself). For example, the lack of a medical center in an economically depressed area is not the problem—the problem is that poor people in the area have health needs that are not currently being addressed. The problem described should be of reasonable dimensions, with the targeted population and geographic area clearly defined. It should include a retrospective view of the situation, describing past efforts to ameliorate it, and making projections for the future. The problem statement, developed with input from the beneficiaries, must be supported by statistics and statements from authorities in the fields. The case must be made that the applicant, because of its history, demonstrable skills, and past accomplishments, is the right organization to solve the problem.

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.

## **Project Objectives: Goals and Desired Outcome**

Once the needs have been described, proposed solutions have to be outlined, wherever possible in quantitative terms. The population to be served, time frame of the project, and specific anticipated outcomes must be defined. The figures used should be verifiable. If the proposal is funded, the stated objectives will probably be used to evaluate program progress, so they should be realistic. There is literature available to help identify and write program objectives.

It is important not to confuse objectives with methods or strategies toward those ends. For example, the objective should not be stated as “building a prenatal clinic in Adams County,” but as “reducing the infant mortality rate in Adams County to X percent by a specific date.” The concurrent strategy or method of accomplishing the stated objective may include the establishment of mobile clinics that bring services to the community.

## **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. Just as the statement of objectives builds upon the problem statement, the description of methods or strategies builds upon the statement of objectives. For each objective, a specific plan of action should be laid out. It should delineate a sequence of justifiable activities, indicating the proposed

conclusion is required. Time tables, work plans, schedules, activities, methodologies, legal papers, personal vitae, letters of support, and endorsements are examples of appendixes.

## **Evaluation: Product and Process Analysis**

An evaluation plan should be a consideration at every stage of the proposal's development. Data collected for the problem statement form a comparative basis for determining whether measurable objectives are indeed being met, and whether proposed methods are accomplishing these ends; or whether different parts of the plan need to be fine-tuned to be made more effective and efficient.

Among the considerations will be whether evaluation will be done by the organization itself or by outside experts. The organizations will have to decide whether outside experts have the standing in the field and the degree of objectivity that would justify the added expense, or whether the job could be done with sufficient expertise by its own staff, without taking too much time away from the project itself.

Methods of measurement, whether standardized tests, interviews, questionnaires, observation, etc., will depend upon the nature and scope of the project. Procedures and schedules for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data will need to be spelled out.

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 stated 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. Many federal grants include a specific time frame for performance review and evaluation. For instance, several economic development programs require grant recipients to report on a quarterly and annual basis. In instances where there are no specified evaluation periods, the applicant should state the amount of time needed to evaluate, how the feedback will be disseminated among the proposed staff, and a schedule for review and comment. Evaluation designs may start at the beginning, middle, or end of a project, but the applicant should specify a start-up time. It is desirable and advisable to submit an evaluation design at the start of a project for two reasons:

- Convincing evaluations require the collection of appropriate baseline 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. Above all, the federal grantor agency's or foundation's requirements should be highlighted in the evaluation

- training to use new equipment, and
- photocopying, office supplies.

Some hard-to-pin-down 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. The applicant should be certain that implementation, continuation, and phase-down costs can be met. 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 should be considered.

A well-prepared budget justifies all expenses and is consistent with the proposal narrative. Some areas in need of an evaluation for consistency are as follows:

- Salaries in the proposal in relation to those of the applicant organization should be similar.
- If new staff persons are being hired, additional space and equipment should be considered, as necessary.
- If the budget calls for an equipment purchase, it should be the type allowed by the grantor agency.
- If additional space is rented, the increase in insurance should be supported.
- In the case of federal grants, if an indirect cost rate applies to the proposal, such as outlined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Circulars such as numbers A-122, A-21, and A-87 (see [http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants\\_circulars.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants_circulars.html)), the division between direct and indirect costs should not be in conflict, and the aggregate budget totals should refer directly to the approved formula.
- If matching funds are required, the contributions to the matching fund should be taken out of the budget unless otherwise specified in the application instructions.

In learning to develop a convincing budget and determining appropriate format, reviewing other grant proposals is often helpful. The applicant may ask government agencies and foundations for copies of winning grants proposals. Grants seekers may find the following examples of grants budgets helpful:

- Getting Your Grant Proposal Budget Right  
<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/foundationfundinggrants/a/grantbudget.htm>
- Grant Space, Knowledge Base: Examples of Nonprofit Budgets  
<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/faqs/html/samplebudget.html>
- Proposal Budgeting Basics  
[http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/prop\\_budget/index.html](http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/prop_budget/index.html)
- Sample Budget Form (National Endowment for the Humanities)  
<http://www.neh.gov/files/grants/sample-budget-january-2014.pdf>

In preparing budgets for government grants, the applicant may keep in mind that funding levels of federal assistance programs change yearly. It is useful to review the appropriations and average

Writing a Successful Grant Proposal (Minnesota Council on Foundations)  
<http://www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm>

Writing a Winning Grant Proposal (Education Money) [http://www.educationmoney.com/  
federal\\_write\\_proposal.html](http://www.educationmoney.com/federal_write_proposal.html)

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# Resources for Grantseekers

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## Who is Eligible for a Government Grant?

Many groups or organizations are eligible to apply for government grants. Typically, most grantees fall into the following categories:<sup>1</sup>

- Government Organizations
  - State Governments
  - Local Governments
  - City or Township Governments
  - Special District Governments
  - Native American Tribal Governments (federally recognized)
  - Native American Tribal Governments (other than federally recognized)
- Education Organizations
  - Independent School Districts
  - Public and State Controlled Institutions of Higher Education
  - Private Institutions of Higher Education
- Public Housing Organizations
  - Public Housing Authorities
  - Indian Housing Authorities
- Non-Profit Organizations
  - Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education
  - Nonprofits that do not have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education
- For-Profit Organizations (other than small businesses)
- Individuals (such as Pell Grants for needy students)

Some constituents may have seen or heard media advertisements claiming federal grants are available to help them. However, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, cautions grantseekers:<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes, it's an ad that claims you will qualify to receive a "free grant" to pay for education costs, home repairs, home business expenses, or unpaid bills. Other times, it's a phone call supposedly from a "government" agency or some other organization with an

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<sup>1</sup> Grants.gov website Who is Eligible for a Grant? at <http://www.grants.gov/aboutgrants/eligibility.jsp>.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Trade Commission, FTC Consumer Alert, "Government Grant Scams," September 2006; at <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0113-government-grant-scams>.

**Grants.gov**

<http://www.grants.gov>

**FedConnect**

<https://www.fedconnect.net>

After grantseekers identify federal programs in CFDA and contact agencies (see section below), they may be directed to register and apply at websites such as Grants.gov or FedConnect when application announcements for competitive grants become available. The websites allow grantseekers to register and download applications for current competitive funding opportunities from all 26 federal grants-making agencies. Grantseekers themselves can check on notices of funding availability (NOFAs) or requests for proposals (RFPs); sign up to receive e-mail notification of grant opportunities; and apply for federal grants online through a unified process. The sites also guide grantseekers in obtaining Dun and Bradstreet (DUNS) numbers (follow instructions at [http://www.grants.gov/applicants/org\\_step1.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/org_step1.jsp)), and registering with the System for Award Management (SAM; follow instructions at [http://www.grants.gov/applicants/org\\_step2.jsp](http://www.grants.gov/applicants/org_step2.jsp)), both required for all federal grants.

To download and submit an application from Grants.gov or FedConnect, registration is required. The sites provide a narrated tutorial on how to complete a grant application package and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page. Once an application is submitted, grants applicants can then track progress of their application using their unique ID and password. Applications can be identified by CFDA number, funding opportunity number, competition ID, or tracking number.

## **Federal Contacts in States and State Administering Agencies**

For eligible state and local governments and nonprofit organizations, after identifying appropriate programs it is recommended grantseekers contact federal and state agencies early in the process, before submitting formal applications. State-located federal offices may handle federal grant applications and disbursement of funds. State government departments and agencies administer federal formula and block grants, and also fund projects.

**Federal Agency Regional and Local Office Addresses** (from CFDA)

<https://www.cfda.gov/?s=appendix&mode=list&tab=list>

Many federal departments and agencies have state or regional offices that grantseekers can contact for additional program information and application procedures. Much of the federal grant budget moves to the states through formula and block grants. State, regional, and local federal offices often handle grants applications and funds disbursement. Each federal agency has its own procedures: applicants should call the department or agency in question before applying for funding to obtain the most up-to-date information.

**State Administering Agencies or Contacts**

Many federal grants, such as formula and block grants, are awarded directly to state governments, which then set priorities and allocate funds within that state. For more information on how a state intends to distribute federal formula funds, grantseekers can contact the State Administering

- Veterans Affairs State/Territory Offices  
<http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>

**State Single Point of Contact** (Office of Management and Budget)  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants\\_spoc](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc)

States often require federal grants applicants to submit a copy of their application for state government review and comment, and many (but not all) have designated a state Single Point of Contact (SPOC). The state offices listed here coordinate government grants development and may provide guidance to grantseekers.

## Related Federal Sources

**A-Z Index of U.S. Government Departments and Agencies** (General Services Administration)  
<http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal/index.shtml>

To better develop a grant proposal, search a department or agency's home page to learn more about its programs and objectives. The site also includes the following:

- Government Benefits, Grants and Financial Aid  
<http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Benefits.shtml>
- USA.gov for Nonprofits  
<http://www.usa.gov/Business/Nonprofit.shtml>  
Links to federal department and agency information and services, fundraising and outreach, grants, loans and other assistance, laws and regulations, management and operations, registration and licensing, and taxes.
- Businesses and Nonprofits  
[http://www.usa.gov/Business/Business\\_Gateway.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Business/Business_Gateway.shtml)  
Links to useful sites, including financial assistance, for small business, government contractors, and foreign business in the United States.

**Grants Management Website** (Office of Management and Budget)  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants\\_circulars](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_circulars)

OMB establishes government-wide grants management policies and guidelines through circulars and common rules. OMB circulars are cited in CFDA program descriptions. Circulars target grants recipients and audit requirements for educational institutions, state and local governments, and non-profit organizations.

## Private, Corporate, and Additional Funding Sources

**Foundation Center**  
<http://www.foundationcenter.org/>

Information gateway to the grant seeking process, private funding sources (including national, state, community, and corporate foundations), guidelines on writing a grants proposal, addresses of libraries in every state with grants reference collections, and links to other useful Internet

## Grant Proposal Writing Websites

A number of websites provide guidance, tips, and sample proposals. Constituents may also request from congressional offices CRS Report RL32159, *How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*, by Merete F. Gerli, which discusses standard content and formats. Websites that may be useful include the following:

- Developing and Writing Grant Proposals (CFDA)  
<https://www.cfda.gov/?static=grants&s=generalinfo&mode=list&tab=list&tabmode=list>
- Grants and Grant Writing: Examples of RFPs and Grant Proposals (University of California, Santa Barbara Library)  
<http://guides.library.ucsb.edu/content.php?pid=61909&sid=455330>
- How to Write a Grant Proposal for a Non-Profit Organization  
[http://www.ehow.com/how\\_5915785\\_write-grant-proposal-non-profit-organization.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_5915785_write-grant-proposal-non-profit-organization.html)
- How to Write a Non Profit Grant Proposal  
[http://www.ehow.com/how\\_7455798\\_write-non-profit-grant-proposal.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_7455798_write-non-profit-grant-proposal.html)
- Proposal Writing Short Course (Foundation Center)  
<http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html> (also has sample proposals)
- Sample Proposals (SchoolGrants.org)  
<http://www.k12grants.org/samples/>
- Tips on Writing a Grant Proposal (Environmental Protection Agency)  
<http://www.epa.gov/ogd/recipient/tips.htm>
- Writing a Successful Grant Proposal (Minnesota Council on Foundations)  
<http://www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm>

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