

WRITING A GRANT PROPOSAL

Writing a grant proposal can be an intimidating process. While all funders have their own requirements, most proposals stick to a general format, outlined below. Be sure to follow the format the funder requests *exactly*, answering all questions clearly and specifically.

It's important to remember that most grants receive many more applications than can be funded. Be sure you meet the guidelines of the grant you are seeking. And do everything you can to make sure that if you aren't funded it's for reasons you can't control—i.e., not because you misspelled the name of the funder!

BASIC PROPOSAL FORMAT

I. Summary (one page)

- ✓ A concise overview of the entire proposal
- ✓ Make a good first impression using clear, compelling language
- ✓ Write the summary last, when you have already written the proposal

II. Introduction (half a page)

- ✓ Introduce your organization—your history, your achievements, your mission
- ✓ Establish credibility—show that the funder's money will be well-spent
- ✓ Show how the project for which you are seeking funding flows from your organization's mission

III. Needs Assessment (half a page)

- ✓ Show why the project you want to undertake is important and how it meets the needs of the community you are targeting
- ✓ Provide evidence: statistics (be sure they are accurate!) and stories—but be careful not to overwhelm the reader with figures

IV. Goals & Objectives (half a page)

- ✓ Identify the goal of the project—the final result you want to achieve
- ✓ Outline the specific objectives—concrete, measurable targets—that you plan to accomplish along the way, using bullet points

V. Methods (one to four pages)

- ✓ The heart of your proposal—a step-by-step description of what the project will do and how
- ✓ Include **where** and **when** the project will take place, and **who** will be involved in implementing the project

VI. Evaluation (half a page)

- ✓ How you will measure the success of the project
- ✓ Closely linked to the project's goals and objectives
- ✓ Identify the methods you will use to evaluate the project's achievements, such as surveys, photos, attendance records, etc.

VII. Budget

- ✓ List the specific items you will need to accomplish the project, along with their costs

- ✓ There should be no surprises here—all items should reflect the description of the project in the Methods section

VIII. Attachments

- ✓ Can be used to flesh out your proposal with more information about your group and its achievements
- ✓ Don't overwhelm the funder with too many superfluous attachments—include a few key pieces
- ✓ Examples of good attachments include press releases or flyers from previous events, letters of support from government officials or other groups, copies of your group's newsletter, press clippings about your group.

TIPS TO REMEMBER WHEN WRITING PROPOSALS:

1. DESIGN your project well

- ✓ Clearly describe your project and your plan. Know what you want to accomplish, who will benefit, and the specific tasks involved. Provide a timetable and a budget.
- ✓ Be realistic. Funders will be most impressed by a project that your group is clearly capable of handling.

2. Make your proposal ENGAGING and EASY TO READ.

- ✓ Use your proposal to tell a story. Remember, the funder knows nothing about your project. Paint a picture.
- ✓ Make the proposal as easy to read as possible—use clear headings and sub-headings.
- ✓ Write clear, declarative sentences using the **active voice**.
 - YES: "We will hold three concerts and collect names and addresses from sign-in sheets at the events."
 - NO: "Three concerts will be held. Names will be collected on sign-in sheets."

3. FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

- ✓ Get your application in on time; funders are serious about deadlines.
- ✓ Make sure to include all requested information, and don't put in things that you've been asked to leave out. Don't try to make square pegs fit into round holes—if your project doesn't fit the funder's criteria, you won't get funded.
- ✓ Choose your attachments carefully. Attach a handful of your best newsletters, flyers, press clips, etc. that demonstrate your group's overall credentials and specific ability to carry out the proposed project.

4. Be POSITIVE

- ✓ Say, "we will," not "we hope to."
- ✓ Don't appear desperate. Funders like to support programs with a proven track record. Even when seeking funds for new initiatives, demonstrate how your past efforts show that you'll be able to succeed this time around.
- ✓ Funders like to be part of a good idea; they don't respond well to the argument, "If you don't fund us, the project won't happen."

5. Get a SECOND OPINION

Adapted from "Tools & Tactics for Building Neighborhood Organizations," Citizens for NYC, www.citizensnyc.org.

- ✓ Have someone unconnected to your group read your completed application. You may understand what you're talking about, but a stranger may not.
- ✓ Proofread thoroughly—your presentation (neatness, spelling...) matters *a lot*.

7. CALL the funder with any questions

The administrators of most small grants programs are more than happy to answer your questions—do not be afraid to call them.

8. KEEP A COPY of the complete application and attachments for your records

9. MAINTAIN THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FUNDER—WHETHER YOU RECEIVE THE GRANT OR NOT

- ✓ Remember that applying for small grants is a very competitive process. Many programs aren't funded simply because available funds are limited.
- ✓ If you don't get the grant, it can be useful to call the funder to find out why so that you can write a better application next time. Remember to send a thank you note even if rejected