

General Outline for a Grant Proposal

Most requests for proposals or RFPs (also called a proposal solicitation, notice of funding opportunity, instructions, etc.) contain specific instructions about the format, required sections, review criteria, questions to be addressed, etc., to which you should give strict attention. Failure to follow RFP instructions may cause your proposal to be rejected without review.

Grant proposals generally follow the logical progression of explaining the need for a project, describing the intended project and how it will address the need, and explaining who will conduct the project and how it will be administered. If an RFP does not give specific requirements, you may follow the general outline for a proposal provided below. For all proposal writers, this outline is useful in understanding the logic of proposals in general.

ABSTRACT

Generally one page, including the following:

- Who is forwarding the proposal (first sentence).
- Problem – a brief description of the problem, need, or reason for the proposal.
- Solution – a short description of the project, including the project goal & objectives, what will take place, the intended outcomes, how many people will benefit.
- Impact – the potential impact of the project, its innovativeness, the scope of its benefits. (For NSF proposals – *Broader Impact & Intellectual Merit* – see page 4).
- Funding amount requested.
- Organization and its expertise – a brief description (where appropriate) to give credibility to the project.

NARRATIVE

A. Statement of need or problem, which may include the following:

- For needs-based grants, a discussion of the nature and scope of the problem in your area (not a discussion of the global problem) with supporting evidence; the needs of groups or individuals the proposal will target. (You should address needs that you plan to address through the objectives of the program.)
- For innovation grants, the context, background, reason for the innovation from a national/global perspective.
- For research grants, the context, background, reason for the research within the scientific/academic community.
- Briefly, how the proposed project will address the needs described.

This section should include relevant citations from verifiable and reliable sources. It may include tables, charts, diagrams and other visual information that clarifies, but does not replace the written text.

B: Goal, Objectives, Intended Outcomes

Goal - a broad statement of the intent or overall outcome of the program, conceptual and more abstract than the objectives. For a research proposal, your hypothesis.

Objectives – more specific, measurable, outcomes. (Objectives are generally tangible, specific, concrete, measurable and achievable in a specified time frame.)

Rationale – the scholarly basis for approach taken. For research proposals, a discussion of prior research results may be appropriate here.

Significance of the project to the target audience, institution, academic or research community.

C. Implementation/Plan of Work/Research Design

Activities – specific statements that identify the plan of action to be initiated in order to carry out the objectives. Each objective should have several activities identified.

Implementation plan - a description in narrative form of how you plan to implement the activities described for each objective, encompassing the How, When, Why, and Who (both participants and implementers). The section may include a project timetable of activities, persons responsible, intended outcomes, and milestones.

Rationale – you may place the rationale section here to explain why you have chosen to take the approach you have. You might cite academic literature showing that your approach is a proven best practice, or explain the basis for proposing a new approach. This section gives your project credibility.

Timeline table – a table that lists in each activity and gives the start time and completion time for each; it should also name the person or persons responsible. Sometimes this table can go in an appendix.

D. Management Plan

Project organization, who is responsible and to whom; who is fiscally responsible. May include a project organization chart. The section may describe the utilization of staff meetings, oversight committees, advisory board, etc. It should describe any external partnerships, including the roles and contributions of each partner.

Institutional Resources and Commitment – a narrative description of the facilities, equipment, supplies, personnel, funds, and other resources that your organization will contribute to the project and the value of these contributions to the project. This section may include a description of previous institutional efforts and successes that strengthen the proposal, an explanation of administrative policies and procedures that augment the project, and a description of equal opportunity and non-discrimination policies. The section may also discuss the institution's capacity to carry out such projects. This section is supported by letters of support, commitment and collaboration in an appendix.

E. Quality of Key Personnel: This section should include a description of the role and duties of each person identified in the implementation plan and the budget, and their time commitment to the project. The section may also include a summary of the qualifications of people who may be hired or who have been designated to work with this project. Resumes and job descriptions (usually one or two pages) may be attached in an appendix for most proposals.

F. Evaluation: This section should explain how the success of each objective will be evaluated. You can list each objective (in a shortened form) and explain how each objective will be evaluated

to assess its effectiveness. Consider your evaluation in terms of both *quantitative* and *qualitative* analysis. Also consider it in terms of both *formative* evaluation (designed to determine the extent to which progress is being made toward the stated objective) and *summative* evaluation (designed to determine the extent to which the objective was accomplished). This section explains how you will know whether or not the outcomes of the project are of value. The section generally includes a table of the objectives, evaluation tools, benchmarks, and outcomes.

G. Sustainability or Institutionalization Plan: Explains how the project will continue past the funding period. For needs-based grants, it might explain how the institution will adopt the changes introduced and begin funding those aspects that require continued funding. For innovation grants, it might explain how you plan to continue to grow or expand the innovation. For research grants, it should explain what you plan next and how you will fund it.

H. Dissemination: How will you tell others in the professional/academic community about what you have learned through this project. For some needs-based grants, this could include papers and presentations about how best practices were implemented at your institution. For innovation and research grants, this section is critical; it should tell how you will get the word out to interested others. A discussion of broader impacts of the proposed innovation or research may also be appropriate here.

REFERENCES CITED – Sometimes allowable; usually references must be included in the narrative.

BUDGET – Usually requires spreadsheet tables. (See other handouts.)

BUDGET NARRATIVE

This section accompanies a formal spreadsheet budget. It may be part of the body of the proposal, or it could be a supplemental document. The budget narrative should specifically describe each item identified in the budget in narrative form. You can use this section to explain items from the budget tables in more detail, especially items that may not be clear to the reader or may need further discussion to establish their necessity. (For instance, if the budget includes funds for travel, you could explain how many people will be traveling to attend what conference and for what purpose. Or you might explain why purchasing a one piece of equipment is preferable to another.) Each item must correlate to specific activities described in the program plan and to the budget forms required by the grant.

APPENDICES – allowable appendices may include:

- Resumes (one or two pages – see handout of instructions and examples)
- Job Descriptions (for positions to be hired)
- Timetables or Research Plan Tables (see handout of examples)
- Letters of Support and/or Commitment from your institution, administrators, partners, and collaborators (see handout for examples). Letters should:
 - Express the organization’s knowledge of and support for your project.
 - Explain why the project is important to them – how it would make a difference. Perhaps tie into their mission statement or expressed goals.
 - Specify and commit to any support the organization will.

- Point to the strengths of the organization that could be of value in implementing or sustaining the project.

REMEMBER that while every proposal is unique and that the actual sections of a proposal may vary from one to another, still, there are some elements of proposals that are expected and required for a successful proposal. Present the proposal in the most organized, logical way possible with formatting that makes your organization easily apparent to the reader.

Persuasive Elements Borrowed from Various Federal Programs

National Science Foundation – Intellectual Merit / Broader Impact

What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?

How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields? How well qualified is the proposer (individual or team) to conduct the project? (If appropriate, the reviewer will comment on the quality of the prior work.) To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts? How well conceived and organized is the proposed activity? Is there sufficient access to resources?

What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?

How well does the activity advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training, and learning? How well does the proposed activity broaden the participation of under-represented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.)? To what extent will it enhance the infrastructure for research and education, such as facilities, instrumentation, networks, and partnerships? Will the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding? What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society?

NSF requires that statements of the Intellectual Merit and Broader Impact be included in the proposal and worked into the proposal narrative as well. Proposers would do well to consider including this information in innovation and research proposals to other agencies and organizations.

Department of Education, TRIO Programs – Ambitions and Attainable

The Department of Education's TRIO programs require that applicants explain why their objectives are both ambitious and attainable. They encourage applicants to use comparative data to show why the proposed objectives are ambitious based on information provided in the Need section of the project narrative and attainable based on the information provided in the Plan of Operation and the resources available to the project. They want to know that objectives are attainable within the project period given the project budget and other financial resources. Including this information in proposals to other organizations, even though not required, increases the competitiveness of a proposal.