Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal [1]

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This Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal was created to help empower people to be successful in gaining funds for projects that provide worthwhile social service. A major theme that runs throughout the Guide is a concern for the development of meaningful cooperative relationships - with funding agencies, with community organizations, and with the people you are serving - as a basis for the development of strong fundable initiatives. The Guide is built on the assumption that it is through collaboration and participation at all levels that long term change can be affected.

Each of the headings used in this Guide are suggested as meaningful ways to organize your own funding proposal and were identified through an examination of a number of different proposal writing formats. The comments and suggestions that follow each heading are presented to help you prepare a strong and fundable proposal.

The complete Guide is available on the worldwide web and consists of not only the ideas and suggestions in this paper, but also includes examples of actual funding proposals, suggested published materials, and links to numerous other proposal writing websites. This paper includes only the Hints section from the web-based Guide. (To view the complete Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal please go to: **http://learnerassociates.net/proposal/**)

Good luck in the preparation of your funding proposal!

Joe Levine

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Key Sections of a Funding Proposal

1. **Project Title/Cover Page**
2. **Project Overview**
3. **Background Information/Statement of the Problem**
4. **Project Detail**
    - **a. Goals and Objectives**
    - **b. Clientele**
    - **c. Methods**
    - **d. Staff/Administration**
5. **Available Resources**
6. **Needed Resources**
    - **a. Personnel**
    - **b. Facilities**
    - **c. Equipment/Supplies/Communication**
    - **d. Budget**
7. **Evaluation Plan**
8. **Appendices**

Proposal Writing Hints

1. Project Title/Cover Page

✔ Check to see if the agency you have in mind has any specifications for the Title/Cover Page (often they have a required format).

✔ Usually the Title/Cover Page includes signatures of key people in your organization (Department Head, Supervisor, Contracts Officer, etc.).

✔ If your proposal is built on collaborating with other groups/organizations it is usually a good idea to include their names on the Title/Cover Page.

✔ Your cover should look professional and neat. However, do not waste time using fancy report covers, expensive binding, or other procedures that may send the wrong message to the potential funding agency. You are trying to impress the potential funding agency with how you really need funding, not the message that you do things rather expensively!

✔ The title should be clear and unambiguous (do not make it "cute").

✔ Think of your title as a mini-abstract. A good title should paint a quick picture for the reader of the key idea(s) of your project.

✔ The words you use in your title should clearly reflect the focus of your proposal. The most important words should come first, then the less important words. Notice that both of the following titles use basically the same words, except in a different order. The project with Title #1 appears to be focused on Red Haired Musicians. The project with Title #2 appears to be focused on Musical Style Preference. However, both projects are the same! Make sure your words are in the correct order.

Title #1 - **Red Haired Musicians and their Preference for Musical Style**

Title #2 - **Music Style Preference of Red Haired Musicians**

✔ Try to remove words from your title that really are not necessary for understanding. Title #1 has too many words. Title #2 is just as clear but with fewer words.

Title #1 - **The Systematic Development of a Local Initiative to Create a Learning Center for Community Education**

Title #2 - **A Local Learning Center for Community Education**

✔ Try and use only a single sentence for your title. If the sentence is getting too long try removing some words. When all else fails try using a two part title with the parts separated by a colon (use only as a last resort!). Do not attempt to use the title as an abstract of your entire proposal.

2. Project Overview

✔ Think of the Project Overview as an Executive Summary (the busy executive probably only has enough time to read your Overview - not the entire proposal). Be specific and concise. Do not go into detail on aspects of your proposal that are further clarified at a later point in your proposal.

✔ The Project Overview should "paint a picture" of your proposal in the mind of the reader. It should establish the framework so that the rest of the proposal has a frame of reference.

✔ Use the Project Overview to begin to show your knowledge of the organization from which you are requesting funds. Key concerns of the funding organization can be briefly identified in relation to your proposed project.

✔ If you will be collaborating with other organizations make sure some of their interests are also highlighted in the Project Overview. This can assist in strengthening the

collaboration by recognizing them at the very beginning of your proposal.

✔ The best time to prepare the Project Overview is after you have completed the entire proposal (and you understand all aspects of your proposal very well). Let the Overview be your last piece of writing and then insert it at the beginning of your proposal.

✔ Try to keep in mind that someone will be reviewing your proposal and you would like to have this person be very positive about what you have written. The Project Overview will probably form a strong impression in the mind of the reviewer. Work on your Project Overview so that you can avoid giving this person the opportunity to say things like:

Not an original idea
Rationale is weak
Writing is vague
Uncertain outcomes
Does not have relevant experience
Problem is not important
Proposal is unfocused
Project is too large

3. Background Information/Statement of the Problem

✔ It may be easier to think of this section as a review of Relevant Literature. Cite previous projects and studies that are similar to what you are proposing. Show the funding agency that you know what you are proposing because you are familiar with what has preceded you.

✔ Try to be careful in your use of language. It can be very helpful to have a friend, outside of your area of focus/expertise, read your proposal to make sure that the language is readable and minimizes the use of:

jargon
trendy or "in" words
abbreviations
colloquial expressions
redundant phrases
confusing language

✔ Position your project in relation to other efforts and show how your project:
a) will extend the work that has been previously done,
b) will avoid the mistakes and/or errors that have been previously made,
c) will serve to develop stronger collaboration between existing initiatives, or
c) is unique since it does not follow the same path as previously followed.

✔ Use the statement of the problem to show that your proposed project is definitely

needed and should be funded.

✔ It is essential to include a well documented statement of the need/problem that is the basis for your project. What are the pressing problems that you want to address? How do you know these problems are important? What other sources/programs similarly support these needs as major needs?

✔ Check to see that the potential funding agency is committed to the same needs/problems that your proposal addresses. Clearly indicate how the problems that will be addressed in your project will help the potential funding agency in fulfilling their own goals and objectives. As you write, keep the funding agency in your mind as a "cooperating partner" committed to the same concerns that you are.

✔ Is there a special reason why you and/or your organization are uniquely suited to conduct the project? (Geographic location, language expertise, prior involvements in this area, close relationship to the project clientele, etc.)

✔ When you get to the Methods Section of your proposal it will be important to refer back to the needs you have identified in this section (and show how your methods will respond to these needs).

✔ It can really help gain funding support for your project if you have already taken some small steps to begin your project. An excellent small step that can occur prior to requesting funding is a need assessment that you conduct (survey, interviews, focus groups, etc.). Write up your need assessment as a short Report, cite the Report in your proposal, and include a copy with the proposal.

✔ This is an excellent section to have the reader begin to understand that an ongoing approach to the problem is essential (assuming that you are proposing a project that is ongoing in nature) and that short term responses may have negligible effect. This can begin to establish a rationale for why your project needs external funding - it seeks to provide a *long term response*.

4. Project Detail

a. Goals and Objectives

✔ Try and differentiate between your goals and your objectives - and include both.

> ✔ Goals are the large statements of what you hope to accomplish but usually are not very measurable. They create the setting for what you are proposing.
>
> ✔ Objectives are operational, tell specific things you will be accomplishing in your project, and are very measurable.

✔ Your objectives will form the basis for the activities of your project and will also serve as the basis for the evaluation of your project.

✔ Try to insure that there is considerable overlap between the goals and objectives for your proposal and the goals and objectives of the funding organization. If there is not a strong overlap of goals and objectives then it might be best to identify a different funding organization.

✔ Present measurable objectives for your project. If you are dealing with "things" it is easier for them to be measured than if you are dealing with abstract ideas. Your proposal is easier for a prospective funding organization to understand (and the outcomes are much more clear) if you describe your objectives in measurable ways.

b. Clientele

✔ Include specific information about the population or clientele on which your project is focused.

> ✔ Exactly who are the clientele? Who is included in the clientele group?
>
> ✔ In what ways have you already had contact with the clientele group?
>
> ✔ Can you show that you have the support of the clientele group to move ahead with the project?
>
> ✔ In what ways have members of the clientele group been involved in the preparation of the proposal?
>
> ✔ What other agencies are involved with this clientele group (and have these other agencies been included in your proposed project)?

✔ It is important for the funding agency to see how much the clientele group has been involved with the project and the preparation of the proposal. (Sometimes a project is funded and then the director finds that the clientele group does not want to be involved!! Do not let that happen to you.)

✔ Be sure to clarify why it is important for the funding organization to be concerned about your clientele. Your proposal should clearly indicate how assisting your clientele is in the best interests of the funding organization.

c. Methods

✔ There should be a very clear link between the methods you describe in this section and the objectives you have previously defined. Be explicit in your writing and state exactly how the methods you have chosen will fulfill your project's objectives and help deal with the needs/problems on which your proposal is focused.

✔ The prospective funding agency will be looking at your methods to see what new, unique or innovative actions you are proposing. Make sure you clearly present the innovative aspects of your idea.

✔ Are the specific methods you are proposing for your project very important to your unique clientele? Make sure you clarify this for the funding organization.

✔ Do not forget to include the collaborative relationships your project will be developing with other cooperating groups. A good way to show collaboration is in the methods that you will be using. How will the methods for your project encourage groups to join together in dealing with the issues/concerns your project addresses?

✔ Your Methods section should clearly indicate how the methods that will be used will allow the outcomes of your project to have value for others beyond your project. (This can also tie into your Dissemination Plan - see the Appendices section for more hints on dissemination.)

d. Staff/Administration

✔ Use this section to describe the roles of the different people associated with your project and the importance of each.

✔ Make sure to clarify how each of the roles are essential to the success of the project and how each role clearly relates to operationalizing the methods you have described.

✔ So what do you say about your key people? To start, make sure you include name, title, experience, and qualifications. Include other information if you feel it is important to the success of your project.

✔ The descriptions of your personnel should let the funding agency know that you have excellent people who are committed to the project. You are not asking the funding agency to "trust" you. The validity of what you are proposing is directly related to the people that will work with the project.

✔ Working together as a part of a team is something that funding agencies often like to see. Try making your project a team effort.

✔ If you will be using a Steering Committee (Advisory Committee, Governing Board, etc.) to assist in your project, this is a good place to describe how it will be organized and

who will be included.

✔ A Steering Committee can be politically very helpful to you and your project. You can enlist the support of a variety of other agencies/organizations by placing a representative of these agencies/organizations on your Steering Committee.

✔ Make sure you define the length of service for the members of the Steering Committee (so that membership can rotate and you can minimize the length of service of someone who may not be helpful!).

✔ Members of a Steering Committee can greatly help in identifying and linking to other resources.

✔ A viable Steering Committee can suggest to a funding agency that the project has strong links to the local situation and the project has a good chance of continuing after the funding period is over.

5. Available Resources

✔ Collaborative efforts (an important project resource) are usually considered very favorably! Many funding agencies like to see cooperative ventures as the basis for local action. In other words, the funding agency's dollars are being brought together with other existing organizations that are already committed and involved in dealing with the needs that the project is responding to.

✔ Sometimes local resources go unnoticed and are difficult to see. Look carefully around you because there are certain to be resources that you have available that you may not be noticing (time that volunteers donate to your project, materials that local merchants may provide, local experts who can provide help/advise when needed, a friend who is willing to do some word processing, etc.). Such in-kind resources can show a potential funding agency that you are strongly rooted in your community.

✔ It is very impressive to a prospective funding agency if local resources have already been contacted and plans to include them in the project have already been made. Letters from local resources supporting the project (included in the Appendix) are an excellent addition to the proposal.

6. Needed Resources

a. Personnel

✔ Refer back to your Staff/Administration section and identify those people by name who will actually be paid from the grant - these are the ones to be identified in this section

✔ Include short descriptions of each of the people who will be involved in your project and supported by the funding. The descriptions should clarify in the mind of the potential funding agency that these people are ideally suited to conduct the project.

✔ Instead of having all full-time staff on the project, consider having a number of part-time staff - especially if the part-time staff currently work with other cooperating organizations. This is a good way to show inter-agency collaboration.

✔ Make sure you notify people who you identify in your Personnel section and receive their approval *before* you send in your proposal.

b. Facilities

✔ Though you may not be requesting funds for the purchase or rental of facilities, it can be helpful to provide a brief description of the facilities that will be used for the project.

✔ Consider describing existing facilities that will be used for the project as *in-kind contributions* to the project. Even if you have free access to classrooms at a local school, meeting space at a shopping mall or a project room in a local office building, it can be helpful to indicate how much additional money the prospective funding agency would have to provide if these facilities were not donated.

c. Equipment/Supplies/Communication

✔ Be careful in listing the equipment that will be needed for your project. Funding sources are usually much more willing to provide funds for the support of personnel than they are to support the purchase of equipment (that may or may not directly benefit the funded project).

✔ The following are the types of equipment that may be needed for a funded project:

- ✳ tape recorder (for recording interviews, dictating reports, etc.)
- ✳ video cassette recorder and television monitor (for recording project activities, documenting change, etc.)
- ✳ computer/monitor/printer (for general project support)
- ✳ desks/chairs/tables
- ✳ lamps
- ✳ intercom/office telephone system
- ✳ telephone conferencing equipment
- ✳ photocopy machine
- ✳ specialized equipment for fulfilling project objectives

✔ It will help if you've really done some research on the actual cost of the equipment you

specify. This is much better than "guessing" at the cost and then to be challenged on your estimates by the potential funding agency.

✔ It is easy to overlook many of the office supplies that will be needed for your project. Will you be needing printed letterhead stationery? And, if you will be mailing many letters, have you considered the current cost of postage (and possible increases in cost)? Do you have a good idea how much paper is needed to support the use of a computer word processor? Have you recently checked the price on such things as sticky notes, paper clips, or pencils/pens? A trip to a local office supply store could be most appropriate.

✔ Coffee, cups, donuts or other “supplies” for morning and afternoon breaks are usually not included in the proposal. These are personal (not project) expenses.

✔ How will you be sharing information about your project with others? Will your project include a Newsletter? How about a website? The more open you are and willing to help others learn from your experiences the more likely a funding agency will be interested in assisting.

✔ Consider including in your proposal additional funds for hosting some form of workshop or institute where you can bring together other professionals who are interested in conducting a similar type of project in their area. This would be a good way to publicly recognize your funding organization. Invite someone from the funding organization to attend the workshop so they can hear what others think about the investment they have made.

d. Budget

✔ Make your budget realistic. Carefully think through exactly what you will need from the funding agency to carry out the project and establish your budget around this amount. (Do not forget, funding agencies receive lots of requests for funding. They can easily tell when someone has inflated a budget in order to procure funds for other purposes. Do not get caught in this situation.)

✔ Have someone else in your organization review your budget to see how realistic you are.

✔ Do you really need a large amount of funding at the beginning of the project or will your project be "phased up" over a period of time? Sometimes it is not very realistic to expect a new project to be able to be up and operating (and spending large amounts of money) during the first 6 months or year of operation.

✔ A good strategy to use with a potential funding agency is to ask for a small amount of funding for the first phase of the project. Specify in your proposal what you expect to

achieve during this "minimal funding phase" and when you will be returning to the funding agency to ask for funds for the next phase. This can suggest to the funding agency that they can terminate the relationship easily if your project is not successful (and then it is essential for you to make sure the first phase IS successful).

✔ Check with the agency to see if they have suggested/required budget categories that they want you to use.

✔ If the potential funding agency does not have any suggested/required budget categories, organize your budget around a set of meaningful categories that work for the project you are proposing. Categories that you may want to consider for itemizing your budget are:

- Personnel (salary and benefits)
- Consultants (salary)
- Instruction
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Communication (telephone/postage)
- Materials preparation
- Travel
- Rental of facilities
- Evaluation
- Other expenses
- Indirect costs (costs that your organization requires that you include)

✔ A suggested budget format for a three year funding proposal:

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**
PERSONNEL			
Person #1			
Person #2			
Person #3			
Sub-Total			
FACILITIES (list)			
Sub-Total			
EQUIPMENT (list)			
Sub-Total			
SUPPLIES (list)			
Sub-Total			

COMMUNICATION (list)			
Telephone			
Postage			
Sub-Total			
TRAVEL (list)			
Fuel			
Vehicle Rental			
Rail Tickets			
Sub-Total			
	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**
TOTAL			
SUM TOTAL			

7. Evaluation Plan

✔ It is important to describe in your proposal exactly how you will decide whether or not your project has been successful, achieved its objectives, etc. The Evaluation Plan will tell the prospective funding agency how you will be going about showing them at the end of the project that their investment in you was a good one.

✔ If you plan to use a survey or questionnaire to help in evaluating the success of your project you may want to include in the Appendices a draft of what you are considering for the questionnaire/survey.

✔ Your evaluation plan does not have to be elaborate but it is important to indicate to the prospective funding agency that you have not forgotten this important step.

✔ Try to include both a concern for **formative evaluation/process evaluation** (ways to gain feedback on the project while it is being conducted) and **summative evaluation/product evaluation** (ways to show that the project fulfilled that which was originally proposed). Another way of conceptualizing this is that formative evaluation/process evaluation is concerned with the activities of the project. On the other hand, summative evaluation/product evaluation is concerned with the stated objectives of the project.

✔ It is easy to create a summative evaluation/product evaluation plan if you have done a good job of clearly stating your project objectives or expected outcomes.

✔ Make direct reference to your objectives in your evaluation plan. This creates a strong sense of integration/consistency within your proposal. The reader of your proposal will now be hearing the same message repeated in different sections of your proposal.

✔ Try creating two separate evaluation plans - one for formative evaluation and the other for summative evaluation.

✔ A good evaluation plan should include some sense of concern for what goes on following the conclusion of the funding period. How will the initiatives that have been started under the project be sustained? Have new things occurred that will be continued in the future? How will other cooperating agencies assist in continuing the project after the conclusion of the funding period? These and other areas should be included in a viable evaluation plan.

8. Appendices

✔ Appendices should be devoted to those aspects of your project that are of secondary interest to the reader. Begin by assuming that the reader will only have a short time to read your proposal and it will only be the main body of your proposal (not the Appendices). Then, assume that you have gotten the attention of the reader who would now like some additional information. This is the purpose of the Appendices.

Here are some possible sections to include in the Appendices:

✔ **Dissemination Plan** - An important aspect of your proposal will be the plan for disseminating information of/from the project to other audiences. Most funding agencies are interested in seeing how their financial support of your project will extend to other audiences. This may include newsletters, workshops, radio broadcasts, presentations, printed handouts, slide shows, training programs, etc. If you have an advisory group involved with your project they can be very helpful in disseminating project information to other audiences.

✔ **Time Line** - A clear indication of the time frame for the project and the times when each aspect of the project will be implemented. Try creating the time line as a graphic representation (not too many words). If done well, it will help demonstrate the feasibility of the project in a very visible way.

✔ **Letters of Support** - Funding agencies would like to know that others feel strongly enough about your project that they are willing to write a letter in support of the project. Talk through with the potential letter writers the sort of focus that you think will be important for their letter. (Try and draw on the reputation of the letter writing group.) Do not get pushed into writing the letters for the agencies - they will all sound alike and will probably defeat your purpose of using them. The letters must be substantive. If not, do not use them! Have the letters addressed

directly to the funding agency. (Do not use a general "To Whom It May Concern" letter - it makes it appear that you are applying to many different potential funding agencies and are using the same letter for each. This may really be the case, so make sure you personalize each letter to the specific potential funding agency.)

✔ **Cooperating Agency Descriptions -** If you have referenced in your proposal different cooperating agencies that you will be working with, it is a good idea to provide a more detailed description of each of these agencies in the appendices. Rather than include large descriptions of each cooperating agency, a single page that gives the name/address of the agency, names of key personnel, and brief descriptions of the major services provided is sufficient. Try and prepare each of these single page descriptions so they follow a similar outline/presentation of information.

✔ **Evaluation Instrument -** Include a draft copy of the actual evaluation instrument you plan to use (survey, questionnaire, interview guide, etc.). This will let your prospective funding agency know that you are serious about making evaluation an integral part of your project - and funding agencies like to hear this! Indicate DRAFT at the top of the instrument and then make it look as real as possible. Never say things like, "I think I may have a question that deals with...", or "Four or five questions will be included that examine the concern of...". If you will be using an interview procedure or a focus group discussion, include a draft copy of the specific questions that will actually be used for the interview/ discussion.