



General Proposal Guidelines

Many foundation and corporate sponsors do not provide detailed guidelines with respect to proposal preparation. In these cases, the following provides a guide to the basic organization and elements of a proposal.

Title (Cover) Page

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This section is optional depending on the length and complexity of the proposal. As well as providing an outline, it should assist a reviewer in finding her/his way through the proposal.

Abstract

A clear and concise summary of the project. The abstract or summary is a 100 to 300 word condensation of the essential information in a proposal. It should be clearly and concisely written section emphasizing the following:

- the timeliness, significance and need
- the specific objectives
- the general procedures and evaluation methods
- the anticipated impact, indicating who will benefit and how

The abstract is very important because many funding decision-makers may read only the review comments and the abstract.

Project Description

This is the main body of the proposal, the section on which the decision will turn. The basic idea is expressed here, the philosophy or premise underlying it explained, the methods for developing it are described, and its ultimate purpose is stated and defended. The project description can be subdivided into the following components:

Introduction

This should be a brief summary of the problem (or need), proposed method of solution, and anticipated outcomes. It may contain information showing that the proposer is well-acquainted with the past and current work and literature in the field and that the proposed project will advance or add to the present state of knowledge in this field.

Problem statement (or statement of need) and significance

This section defines the project rationale including the overall purpose, need and justification for the project. It explains the significance of the proposed idea in relationship to the sponsor's goals and objectives in a way that will logically justify the expenditure of funds

Goals and Objectives

Goals and general statements specifying the project's desired outcomes. They are value statements indicating the general direction of the project. Objectives are specific statements of the expected accomplishments of the proposed activities and usually include the following:

- description of the outcome in measurable terms
- the criteria for measuring the acceptability of the outcome.

Procedures and Methods

Describe in as much detail as practical the approach to be used in the proposed activity. Describe in a step-by-step sequence (including time estimates) techniques or methods to be used. Do not hesitate to use figures or tables wherever they will help clarify a point. If the proposed activity will require an unusual amount of funds for any particular category of expense, explain in detail. (Most declined proposals fail because of poorly-defined methodology.)

Evaluation

This section presents the overall evaluation process, both for assisting the on going progress toward achieving the objectives and the actual outcome of the proposed activities. The evaluation component will perform the following functions:

- It will monitor progress to determine whether the project is being implemented as planned
- It will assess actual outcomes to determine the extent to which the objectives are being achieved

- It will provide the feedback necessary to assess whether modifications in the project are necessary

Dissemination

Many sponsors, especially private foundations, require a dissemination plan to be included in a proposal. The dissemination section should emphasize any reasonably anticipated outcomes or activities for making them available to others. Dissemination provides results of individual or local research to a regional or national audience. In doing so, it stimulates ideas, suggestions and constructive criticism from desired or concerned groups.

Two important rules:

Let the language of the proposal reflect your knowledge of the field; however, make it understandable to the least knowledgeable of anticipated reviewers.
let the language convey your enthusiasm for the project.

Budget

This section includes all the financial items needed to perform research. <More information>

References

This section should be included only if literature has been cited in the proposal narrative. The number of references should be kept to an essential minimum. A numbered list, or any acceptable bibliographic method, may be used.