

Essential Components of a Grant Proposal

Grant proposals build a persuasive case to an interested funder. Each component informs the evaluator by providing increasing detail while naturally answering questions about the project idea and organization. While grants may be formatted in various ways based on the funding agency, the following components are considered standard.

Executive Summary

This serves as an introduction to the project idea and the organization. It should be brief (between 2 and 5 sentences) and helps the reader understand the nature of the proposal at a high level.

Organizational Capacity

This section tells the reader why you are the right organization to undertake this project. It establishes the organization's credibility and capability to implement the proposed activities and administer the funding. It is usually one page or less in length and it should summarize the organization's history, mission, targeted area of focus, supporters, and highlight relevant achievements.

Needs Assessment

This section identifies the problems being addressed in the grant and conveys the importance of the issue presented. In presenting the needs you should include both factual and human interest terms and to the extent possible, include relevant statistical data. Make sure that your needs can be addressed by your project plan. Never describe the problem as the absence of your proposed project.

Project Work Plan

This section responds to the need by detailing what activities are going to take place. In describing the activities, be sure your project plan is realistic for the funding level, timeframe of the grant and organizational capacity. If this is an ongoing project, talk about what has already taken place and what will be enhanced or changed as a result of this additional funding. Remember that people are programs so the focus should be on the work to be accomplished first, supported by qualified staff or volunteers who will implement the project. Also include a timeline of activities so the reader understands how the proposal will be carried out.

Project Goals, Objectives and Outcomes

This section answers the reader's "so what?" question. When writing this section, terminology is important. *Goals* provide a broad description of the overall impact of your project. *Objectives* describe specific and measurable results based on the activities in your program plan. They can change behaviors, increase proficiency or performance, define a process, or produce a product. *Outcomes* describe what will change as a result of the project and should be stated in a way that can be measured or evaluated. Outcomes change behavior, target specific achievements, or modify benchmarks currently in place.

EXAMPLES:

Goal: This project will increase bird conservation practices in urban areas.

Objectives: (Behavior) Fifty percent of program participants will learn about Audubon At Home
(Performance) Within the first year, X participants will conduct 3 bird counts
(Process) Project staff will document training methods for citizen scientists then follow up on how effective the trainings were in engaging participants
(Product) A booklet on Audubon at Home activities tailored to the local area will be produced

Outcomes: (Change) Increase citizen science program in urban wilderness areas
(Target) Engage 50% of program participants in citizen science activities annually
(Benchmark) Increase current citizen science program by 75%

Project Evaluation

This section describes how success will be measured. Evaluation is an objective analysis of quantifiable (number served, acres conserved) and qualitative (perceptions, observations) factors. Make sure your evaluation techniques are realistic and scaled to the effort outlined in the program plan. In some cases it is a good strategy to enlist an outside organization to perform the evaluation component of the project.

Project Budget

This is where you place a dollar value on the project plan. It is vital that the budget reflects anticipated costs and expenses accurately since the project will have to be executed as proposed with the approved budget. Make sure you *read the guidelines* for allowable costs. The budget should include all expenses related to the project including other potential funding sources and any contributing funds by the organization. Most grants require a budget narrative to provide additional details on budget categories. This narrative should be succinct and easy for the reader to link to a budget table or template.

Sustainability

Where applicable, this section demonstrates the viability and long term commitment of the proposed work. In writing this section, describe the future of project including potential funding sources or partnerships. If it is important that the project is sustainable, make sure a viable plan is in place.