
STEPS TO EFFECTIVE GRANT WRITING

1. **READ THE RFP FOR OVERVIEW.** This sounds simple enough, but is often not done. Spend a few minutes reading the RFP to determine the following:

- A. The scope of the requested services.
- B. The time frames of the RFP process.
- C. The length the grant or contract will run.
- D. Any special needs or unique aspects of the RFP.
- E. Does the RFP require cash or in-kind match?

2. **DECIDE IF THE RFP IS A GOOD MATCH FOR YOUR AGENCY.**

- A. Are the services requested within your agency's ability or capability to provide?
- B. Are the services within the mission of your agency?
- C. Do you have the expertise to provide these services, or can you hire the expertise?
- D. Is this a substantial deviation from your routine or normal services?

The answers to these questions should play a role in deciding if it is appropriate to submit a proposal. Don't just follow money. If the programs sought are reasonable for your agency to perform, apply. If they will strain your existing agency, you are better off spending your time searching for funding sources which more closely align with your agency's mission.

3. **STUDY THE RFP.** I mean **STUDY**. This is a careful and thorough reading of the RFP. You should take notes and make an outline of the things they are asking for. Often grantors are unclear or even contradictory in their statements of what they are seeking. Frequently, part of the requirements are found in one section (Budget, for instance) and other parts in other sections (Program, Staffing Patterns, etc). By taking notes and organizing the information into a format which lists the requirements in a manner that is meaningful to you, you simplify your task of writing the proposal. Look for keywords in the RFP. Keywords usually are repeated frequently in the RFP and indicate a philosophy or strategy which the grantor wants followed.

4. **DO YOUR HOMEWORK.** You can't write a successful proposal without knowing the following:

- A. Who is your audience? Who will read the proposal and evaluate it? What have they funded before? Do they have a philosophical orientation and does it agree with yours?
- B. What literature/research is available on the topic?
- C. Are there other programs in the country which provide similar services? While you don't want to "copy" their programs, you don't want to have to re-create the wheel from scratch either. You also want to learn from other programs' mistakes if possible.

5. **CONCEPTUALIZE THE PROGRAM.** This is a critical step. It is 2/3 of the process. Before you try to write anything, spend some time thinking about how you would do the program. Get "the big picture" clear in your mind. You may want to draw a plan or flow chart. It is important to know:

- A. What program components will be needed.
- B. How these program components will be implemented.
- C. How each program component relates to other program elements.
- D. How each program component relates to the goals of the project.
- E. How each program component relates to the requirements of the RFP.
- F. How the program components relate to your existing agency and its services.
- G. When you have the project conceptualized, outline it in a way which is clear to you.

6. **DRAFT THE RFP.** This is the easy part. Using your conceptual outline and your notes from the RFP, clearly explain the program you have conceptualized. In your draft you should:

- A. Write to get the ideas down. Don't worry about editing at this point.
- B. Make it easy for the reader to identify what they are reading. Clearly label each section.
- C. Lead the reader by the hand. Tell them what they are reading and why.
- D. Relate each section to the others (your flow chart and outline will help here).
- E. Relate each program element to a goal of the grantor.
- F. Relate each program element to the others and the "big picture".
- G. Clearly spell out facets important to the review process.
- H. Utilize "buzz words" where appropriate (don't parrot).
- I. Include research or literature reviews where appropriate.
- J. Write to explicitly convey ideas, don't try to "write smart".
- K. Assume the reader doesn't understand; clarify, clarify, clarify.
- L. Follow the RFP instructions and suggested outline.

Your goal is to make it easy for the reviewer. Remember, grants are not awarded to projects, but to projects **AS REVIEWERS UNDERSTAND THEM**. Never lose your reader. Your proposal should flow from point to point and should lead the reader through. This means:

- M. You must understand your project. (Don't laugh; many don't, and it shows.)
- N. Your proposal must be clear, organized, easy to follow, and easy to read.
- O. The reviewers should not have to "work" to understand or evaluate your proposal.

7. **SET THE PROPOSAL ASIDE FOR A DAY OR TWO.** After writing the first draft, set it aside and do something else for a day or two. You want to get some separation from the 1st draft.

8. **READ YOUR PROPOSAL AS A REVIEWER.** After 24-48 hours, read your proposal. Imagine you are a reviewer. Look at your proposal as if you knew nothing about it. Score your own proposal using the evaluation criteria you outlined from the RFP. Mark areas in the proposal which confuse you or are not clear enough. Don't try to edit them at this time, just mark them and read on. Take notes about what you found unclear, weak, or missing in the proposal. Compare your draft against any checklist provided by the grantor. Is the proposal clear and complete?

9. **USING THE NOTES FROM YOUR REVIEW, WRITE THE 2ND DRAFT.** Now is the time to edit. Correct areas you found weak or unclear. Strengthen the linkages between the sections of the proposal. Your goal (as it was in the 1st draft) is to make it easy for the reviewer.

10. GIVE THE SECOND DRAFT TO SOMEONE WHO KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT YOUR PROJECT. Always have an outside party review and critique your proposal. You are too close to the draft now to be objective. Give a colleague or friend a copy of the grant requirements, evaluation criteria, and your draft. Ask them to mark up your draft, making notes where you confuse them or where they don't understand the connection between a part of the project and the overall project. It is important you select someone who is literate and who will be BRUTAL. You want honest feedback. Better to have your colleague say "this stinks" than a reviewer!

11. USING YOUR COLLEAGUE'S INPUT, WRITE THE FINAL PROPOSAL. Consider your colleague's input. For each point you must decide if their criticism is "valid". In the end, you must be comfortable with the proposal. You may want to make a point a certain way and your colleague may not like it. If the way you made the point is important to the overall scheme, leave it in. Do pay attention to the your colleague's comments however. If you confused them you will probably confuse the reviewer.

12. COMPARE YOUR PROPOSAL WITH YOUR CHECKLIST OF REQUIRED ITEMS. Before delivering or mailing the final proposal, use the checklist you prepared when you studied the proposal. Ensure each required item is attached, including all mandatory appendices and supporting documents. Make sure you did not violate any instructions regarding proposal length, typeface, style, page numbering, etc. If the grantor required special labels or packaging of the proposal, follow them exactly.