

**May 1999***Enhancing adult literacy in the State of Ohio*

# Program Resources

## Tips for Writing Successful Grants

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Proposal writing is a skill that can be learned. The information that follows is organized as a series of tips, first about general information and then about the specific sections often required in grant applications.

A bibliography that contains additional information concludes this section.

### General Tips

- Contact the funding source and request copies of successful efforts. (Note: Any proposal that is funded with public money is in the public domain.) Study these successful efforts. What do they have in common? What formatting ideas can you use in your own effort
- Groups often (and in the case of family literacy, should) collaborate in the development of ideas for funding. Group proposal writing, however, is
  - drafting the proposal. Others in the group can read and respond to drafts.
  - Contact the program officer (or grants contact person) early in the process. If possible, confirm eligibility requirements and deadlines. Get as much advice as the officer is permitted to give. Follow funding guidelines exactly as you develop the proposal.
  - Find ways to make your proposal timely. Find out what's "hot" and use these issues in the development of your proposal. Remember that few agencies wish to fund "business as usual," so also find ways to make the ideas in the proposal seem fresh and innovative. You may find the figure on this page helpful in matching your strengths with the funders' goals and practices.

### Matching Strengths with the Funders' Goals and Practices.

#### The Funding Source

- \* What types of projects has it funded?
- \* What is the range of dollars given to projects?
- \* What types of subjects does it avoid

#### Funding

KNOWLEDGE  
NEEDED

#### Yourself

- \* What type(s) of expertise do you have
- \* What limitations do you have
- \* What personal characteristics make you especially well-suited for this project

#### Your Institution & Community

- \* What special resources (including human resources) are available to the project
- \* What special needs does your institution/community have?

Source: Hensen, K. (1995). The art of writing for publication (p. 181). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

- relevant to the project. Make careful notes about the resources you use because you may want to use them again in the future.
- Keep the audience in mind as you write. The people who review the proposals will not know your community, the participating agencies, even the acronyms we use as short-cuts in communicating. In the case of foundation requests, the reviewers may not be educators. Ask someone who does not know your program to read the proposal to check its clarity.
- Make the proposal easy to read. The best proposals are clear, concise, and free of jargon. Use active sentences. Pay attention to formatting issues such as margins, headings, tables, outlines, etc. Proofread very carefully; a sloppy proposal sends a subtle message about the project that you probably don't want funders to receive.
- Address all questions or criteria mentioned in the application. Neglecting to do so may cost you review points. Whenever possible, use funders' language as you draft.
- Follow all instructions exactly. Do not exceed page limits. Make sure that the proposal is complete and assembled properly.
- Save all proposals, even unsuccessful ones, so that you can use parts of them for future efforts.

## Common Reasons Grant Proposals are Rejected

### *Mechanical Reasons*

- Deadline for submissions was not met.
- Guidelines for proposal content, format, and length were not followed *exactly*.
- The proposal was not *absolutely clear* in describing one or several elements of the study.
- The proposal was not *absolutely complete* in describing one or several elements of the study.
- The author(s) took highly partisan positions on issues and thus became vulnerable to the prejudices of the reviewers.
- The quality of the writing was poor—for example, sweeping and grandiose claims, convoluted reasoning, excessive repetition, or unreasonable length.
- The proposal document contained an unreasonable number of mechanical defects that reflected carelessness and the author's unwillingness to attend to detail. The risk that the same attitude might attend execution of the proposed study was not acceptable to the reviewers.

completely traditional, with nothing that could strike a reviewer as unusual, intriguing, or clever.

- The proposed method of study was unsuited to the purpose of the research.

### *Personnel Reasons*

- As revealed in the review of literature, the author(s) simply did not know the territory.
- The proposed method of study appeared to be beyond the capacity of the author(s) in terms of training, experience, and available resources

### *Cost-Benefit Reasons*

- The proposed study was not an agency priority for *this* year.
- The budget was unrealistic in terms of estimated requirements for equipment, supplies, and personnel.
- The cost of the proposed project appeared to be greater than any possible benefit to be derived from its completion.

Source: Locke, L., Spirduso, W., & Silverman, S. (1993). Proposals that work (3rd ed., p. 163). Newbury Park, CA Sage.

⇒ If you're not funded, don't give up. Instead, take advantage of opportunities to learn more about grant writing.

## Common Sections in Proposals

The format for your proposal will be specified by the funding agency. However, most proposals contain the sections mentioned below.

### *Summary or Abstract*

- This is the first thing reviewers will read, so catch the reader's attention.
- Tell what the project is about, why it is important, and how and with whom it will be implemented.

### *Introduction*

- To the extent possible, address the funder's interests.
- Describe the participating organizations. Show that, collectively, you have the capability to implement the project successfully.
- Call attention to some unique aspect of the project or approach you are proposing.

### *Statement of the Problem/Need for Services*

- Convince the reader of the importance of the project.
- State the general problem your project will address. Use facts to back up your assertions.
- Show how acute the problem is in the geographic area to be served by the project. Describe your

and number.

- Describe services already available. Tell how your project will serve unmet needs. Also tell how you will coordinate efforts with existing services.
- If necessary, conduct a needs assessment. Here are five ways to do so (adapted from Quezada Nickse, 1993, p. 82):

Active Listening: Find members of the target group or those who work with the group and discuss needs. Do not manipulate the conversation but rather record all answers and clarify responses to questions.

Questionnaires: Pose brief yes/no questions to request information, gather opinions, or assess attitudes. The questionnaire can be self-administered or administered in person to members of the target group or those who work with them. Expect, for mailed questionnaires, a return of about 30 percent.

Observation: Observe the target group at community site. Record what is seen or heard, but do not interact with patrons, staff, or others. Look for certain behaviors and make note of them.

Checklist: Draw up a list of items directly or indirectly related to needs characteristic of the target group. Ask people to identify which needs they believe to be significant.

Formal or structured interview: Ask specific questions of all respondents. Record answers.

*Goals or Objectives*

- Goals and objectives tell the funder what you will accomplish. They define the outcomes for the project. They serve as guiding statements of purpose.
- Make sure each goal or objective is tied directly to the needs established in the previous section.
- Make sure that together, the goals and objectives address all aspects of the program.
- Make sure each goal or objective lists a single construct. Reduce the amount of overlap between individual goals/objectives.

*Plan of Operation*

- The plan specifies how the goals or objectives will be met. Answer these questions about the project: who? what? when? where? and how? Show how the project will address the needs you specified earlier.
- List personnel, resources, and activities. For family literacy program, issues to address might include recruitment, induction, types of services and how they will be provided, coordination with other available services, transition services for families

- If not requested elsewhere, work a time-line into the plan. This shows the funder that you have thought carefully about how the project will proceed.
- A chart like the one in this column may help you develop the plan for the project.

*Staff*

- List staff, both paid and volunteer, both grant-supported and those supported through other sources. Briefly mention each person's role within the project.
- Show the funder that individual staff members are qualified. Also show how, collectively, the group has the expertise needed to make the project successful.
- Include brief resumes for key staff members.

*Site and Resources*

- Help the funder picture the setting(s) for the project as appropriate, adequate, and available.
- Tell about other resources that will be available to project participants (e.g., public library, computer labs).

*Evaluation*

- Outline procedures for measuring the extent to which the project has met its goals or objectives. Be certain that evaluation plans are tied directly to project objectives.
- Avoid technical terms related to educational measurement or research.
- Describe the types of data (information) that will be collected. Also tell how the data will be analyzed.
- Include plans for formative (while the project is in process) and summative (at the conclusion of the project) evaluation. Show how formative evaluation results will be used to refine the project.

**Plan of Operation (chart to help you develop the plan for the project)**  
**STRATEGIC PLAN FOR \_\_\_\_\_**

ACTIVITIES	RESOURCES NEEDED	TIMELINE	PERSON RESPONSIBLE

### Budget

- Stay within funding limits. Use funders' budget categories, even if they differ from those your agency uses.
- Be certain that the budget is reasonable compared to the proposed outcomes of the project. Make sure administrative costs are reasonable.
- Double-check the budget against the plan. Develop a budget to support all activities. Make sure the budget does not refer to costs that are unrelated to the project.
- Be certain that the budget is adequate to conduct the project. Account for all expenses related to the project, even in-kind services. (Document in-kind services with letters of support from agencies that will be providing the in-kind services.) A list of common in-kind donations includes:
  - space
  - utilities
  - volunteers
  - other staff (e.g., nurse, janitor)
  - office equipment
  - furniture
  - transportation
  - food
  - toys, books, art supplies
- Include a brief budget narrative in which you detail expenses (e.g., X hours per week @ \$\$ per hour for personnel, \$5.00/session x X sessions x Y families for food costs).

### Plans for the Future

- Detail long-range plans related to the project.
- Show how the project will be institutionalized after grant funding ceases.

### Appendices

- Include extra information if required or if the material will help the reader understand the program.
- Put each different kind of information in a different appendix. Label each appendix with a letter of the alphabet. Make reference to appendices in the proposal narrative: See Appendix A for \_\_\_\_.
- Typical documents found in appendices include:
  - letters of support
  - resumes and job descriptions
  - community map
  - relevant program information
- Remember that readers may not consult the appendices. Critical information should appear in the body of the proposal.

### Sources for Further Information

(1995, December 7). ABE director from Kansas offers 12 sure-fire grantwriting tips. *Report on Literacy*

Atwood, M.E. (1998, April). *Family literacy funding: patchwork quilt*. Presented at the National Family Literacy Conference, Louisville, KY.

Fay, J., Gilbert, J., & Wream, K. (1993). *Building villages to raise our children: Funding and resources*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

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National Center for Family Literacy. (1993). *A guide to funding sources for family literacy*. Louisville, KY: Author.

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This material first appeared in Chapter 6 on Funding in *The Family Literacy Resource Notebook*, "Section II: Tips for Writing Successful Grants." Funded by the Ohio Family Literacy Statewide Initiative, the book was published by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center (OLRC) in 1998. Hard copies have been disseminated by the Ohio Family Literacy Task Force and by OLRC.

*The Family Literacy Resource Notebook*, a large volume of nearly 1200 pages, functions as a reference for both new and experienced programs. Although it was developed to describe and promote family literacy, the contents apply to a broad range of educational programs. The twelve chapters contain information, useful book lists, contact people, sample forms on a variety of topics including collaboration, curriculum, staff development, recruitment and retention, public relations, and evaluation.

Copies are available from the OLRC, 414 White Hall, Kent State University, Kent, OH 44242. There is a cost of \$50 for paper copies. The entire text is available for browsing or for downloading at the OLRC web site <http://literacy.kent.edu/oasis/familitnotebook/>. For further information, contact Connie Sapin at (800)

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