BASIC ELEMENTS OF GRANT WRITING

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting evaluates hundreds of proposals each year for a variety of funding purposes. This publication is an easy guide to the basic elements of grant writing and is offered to assist applicants to CPB and to other funding sources. It offers guideposts to help you through each stage of the process.

These guideposts are transferable to a variety of grant applications. However, we encourage you to carefully read the guidelines written for each grant you select.

Successful grant writing involves the coordination of several activities, including planning, searching for data and resources, writing and packaging a proposal, submitting a proposal to a funder, and follow-up. Here are some steps that will help.

PREPARATION

You are likely to find preliminary grant writing steps to be the most time consuming, yet most vital aspect of the process. If done well, your prepartory work will simplify the writing stage.

1. Define your project.

- Clarify the purpose of your project and write a mission statement.
- Define the scope of work to focus your funding search.
- Determine the broad project goals, then identify the specific objectives that define how you will focus the work to accomplish those goals.

Example:

- Goal: To improve production quality.
- Objective 1: Recruit advanced production talent.
- Objective 2: Train mid-level producers.
- Objective 3: Upgrade production equipment.
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These goals and objectives suggest the proposal will request support for recruitment activity, production training, and equipment purchase. In contrast, a different proposal with the same goal might focus only on equipment upgrades.

Decide who will benefit. Benefits may extend beyond the direct beneficiary to include the audience, other institutions, etc.

Draft expected project outcomes in measurable terms.

Draft a timeline that includes the planning phase, the period of searching for funds, proposal writing, and the intended project start date. Periodically update the timeline as you learn more about submission deadlines, award timetables, etc.

2. Identify the right funding sources.

Foundation centers, computerized databases, station development offices, publications, and public libraries are some of the resources available to assist your funding search.
Do not limit your funding search to one source.

Look for a match between your project and the grants you seek by looking for consistency between the purpose and goals of your project and the funder. In addition, pinpoint specific funding priorities and preferences.

Make direct contact with funders to support projects like yours.

Request proposal guidelines. Also request a list of projects previously funded. Perhaps an annual report is available.

Inquire about the maximum amount available. Also, find out the average size and funding range of awards.

Determine if funding levels of the grants you select are appropriate for your project. Note whether there is a funding floor or ceiling.

Find out whether the funder has other grant sources for which your project is eligible.

3. Contact the funders.

Think of the funder as a resource.

Identify a project officer who will address your questions.

Some funders offer technical assistance, others do not. Ask for technical assistance, including a review of proposal drafts.

Inquire about how proposals are reviewed and how decisions are made.

Inquire about budgetary requirements and preferences. Are matching funds required? Is in-kind acceptable as a portion of applicants' share? What may be counted as in-kind, and how might it be applied? Learn about payment processes, including cash flow.

Remember, the contacts you make may prove invaluable, even if not for now.

4. Acquire proposal guidelines.

Guidelines usually tell you about:

- submission deadlines
- eligibility
- proposal format: award levels forms, margins, spacing, evaluation process and restrictions on the number criteria of pages, etc.
- review timetable
- budgets
- funding goals and priorities
- award levels
- evaluation process and criteria

- whom to contact
- other submission requirements

Additionally:

Read the guidelines carefully, then read them again.

Ask the funder to clarify your questions.

5. Know the submission deadline.

Plan to submit your proposal on or preferably before the deadline.
Be realistic about whether you have time to prepare a competitive proposal that meets the deadline.

Know the funder's policies on late submissions, exceptions, and mail delays.

Find out how the funder will notify you about the receipt and status of your proposal. Factor this information into your timeline.

6. Determine personnel needs.

Identify required personnel both by function and, if possible, by name. Contact project consultants, trainers, and other auxiliary personnel to seek availability, acquire permission to include them in the project, and negotiate compensation. Personnel compensation is important budget information.

7. Update your timeline.

This is a good point at which to update your timeline, now that you know about submission deadlines and review timetables. Factor into your schedule time to write multiple drafts, gather relevant and permissible materials, and prepare an impartial critique of your proposal for clarity, substance, and form.

WRITING THE PROPOSAL

Structure, attention to specifications, concise persuasive writing, and a reasonable budget are the critical elements of the writing stage.

There are many ways to organize proposals. Read the guidelines for specifications about required information and how it should be arranged.

Standard proposal components are: the narrative, budget, appendix of support material, and authorized signature. Sometimes proposal applications require abstracts or summaries, an explanation of budget items, and certifications.

1. Narratives

Statement of need - purpose, goals, measurable objectives, and a compelling, logical reason why the proposal should be supported. Background provides perspective and is often a welcome component.

Approach - method and process of accomplishing goals and objectives, description of intended scope of work with expected outcomes, outline of activities, description of personnel functions with names of key staff and consultants, if possible.

Method of evaluation - some require very technical measurements of results. Inquire about expectations.

Project timeline - paints a picture of project flow that includes start and end dates, schedule of activities, and projected outcomes. Should be detailed enough to include staff selection and start dates.

Credentials - information about the applicant that certifies ability to successfully undertake the proposed effort. Typically includes institutional or individual track record and resumes.

Tips on Writing the Narrative:

Narratives typically must satisfy the following questions:

- What do we want?
- What concern will be addressed and why?
- Who will benefit and how?
- What specific objectives can be accomplished and how?
- How will results be measured?
- How does this funding request relate to the funders purpose, objectives, and priorities?
- Who are we (organization, independent producer) and how do we qualify to meet this need?

The HOOK:

There are many ways to represent the same idea. However, the HOOK tailors the description of the idea to the interest of a particular funder. The HOOK aligns the project with the purpose, and goals of the funding source. This is a critical aspect of any proposal narrative because it determines how compelling reviewers will perceive your proposal to be.

2. Budget

Budgets are cost projections. They are also a window into how projects will be implemented and managed. Well-planned budgets reflect carefully thought out projects.

Funders use these factors to assess budgets:

- Can the job be accomplished with this budget?
- Are costs reasonable for the market - or too
- high or low?
- Is the budget consistent with proposed activities?
- Is there sufficient budget detail and explanation?

Many funders provide mandatory budget forms that must be submitted with the proposal.

Don't forget to list in-kind and matching revenue, where appropriate.

Be flexible about your budget in case the funder chooses to negotiate costs.

3. Supporting materials

Supporting materials are often arranged in an appendix. These materials may endorse the project and the applicant, provide certifications, add information about project personnel and consultants, exhibit tables and charts, etc.

Policies about the inclusion of supporting materials differ widely among funders. Whether to allow them usually depends upon how materials contribute to a proposal's evaluation. Restrictions are often based on excess volume, the element of bias, and relevance.
Find out if supporting materials are desired or even allowed.

Be prepared to invest the time to collect resources, produce a tape, document capability, update a resume, collect letters, include reference reports or whatever is needed.

4. Authorized Signatures

Authorized signatures are required. Proposals may be rejected for lack of an authorized signature. Be sure to allow the time to acquire a needed signature.

5. Specifications

Tailor proposal writing to specifications found in the guidelines. Include only the number of pages allowed. Observe the format. Is there a form to complete? Must the proposal be typed, double spaced, on 8-1/2 x 11 inch pages? Are cover pages allowed or desired? Caution! - the beautifully bound proposal is not always appreciated or allowed. Be concise. Elaborations should add depth and scope, not page fillers. Be prepared to write one or more drafts.

6. Submission checklist

- The proposal must be **NEAT, COMPLETE, and ON TIME**, with the requested number of copies and original authorized signatures.

- Address the proposal as directed in the guidelines.

- Be sure to include required documentation.

FOLLOW-UP

Contact the funding source about the status, evaluation, and outcome of your proposal. It is important to request feedback about a proposal's strengths and weaknesses, although this information is sometimes unavailable, especially with a large volume of submissions. Reference information may also be useful if you choose to approach the same or different funder again with your idea.

This information is from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's website and can be found at http://www.cpb.org/grants/grantwriting.html.