Proposal Writing for Private Foundations

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What Makes a Grant Proposal Successful?

- A good idea or compelling project
- Fit with funding agency's priorities
Factors We Can’t Control

- Internal politics within the funding agency
- Stiff competition from other applicants
- Limited availability of funds for certain program areas within funding agency

Factors We Can Control

Quality of our own proposal requires

- Careful research and planning
- Meticulous execution
Getting Started

Things to address before you begin to write

Do Your Homework

- Conduct careful research to identify prospects
- Be sure that your project fits the funding organization's priorities by reading guidelines and searching recent grants
- Make sure you understand how the funding organization operates
  - Do they accept unsolicited proposals or issue RFPs?
  - What is their timetable for accepting and reviewing proposals?
  - Is a letter of inquiry required before submitting a full proposal?
  - Do they encourage or discourage emails, telephone contacts, etc. regarding proposal submissions?
- If possible, try to have some kind of contact with foundation staff before submitting a proposal. This could be a phone conversation with the program officer, a visit to foundation headquarters.
- Review lists of recent grants and read successful proposals if possible
Do Your Homework

Carefully review all application guidelines
- Is it an online submission? Hard copy only?
- Is there a page limit or specific font size allowed?
- What kinds of attachments are allowed/required?
- What is the deadline for submission?
  - Receipt?
  - Postmark?
- How will the proposal be reviewed?
  - Outside experts? Staff only?

Consult with Others

- Engage those who will be involved in implementing the project
- Secure departmental/college approval or funding commitments if needed
- Enlist help of peers to read and comment on proposal
Proposal Basics

Proposal Format:
Appearance DOES Matter

- Follow directions carefully
- Respect page limit, font size limits, etc.
- Use page numbers
- Include name of organization in header
- Write for your audience
  - Do not assume deep knowledge of subject
  - Provide enough detail so reader can understand project but don't go overboard
- Avoid discipline-specific jargon
- Use headings and subheadings for easier reading/references
- Explain any acronyms used
- Use charts and tables to display data
- Proofread carefully to eliminate typographical errors and grammatical mistakes
- Have others read your proposal

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Be Persuasive

- **Use compelling language but avoid exaggeration**
  - "As a result of this project, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds will be better prepared in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines."
  - "By engaging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in meaningful, hands-on STEM programs in an after-school setting, the proposed project not only provides them with enriching out-of-school learning opportunities, but also opens doors to careers in science and engineering, which, may, in turn help diversify these fields."
  - "The proposed project will solve all the problems facing disadvantaged youth in our community and will revolutionize science and engineering fields."

- **Use facts and data to support your case**
  Cite statistics that demonstrate demand for the program or service you propose to offer on a scale that is appropriate for your project. If you are administering a local project, use local statistics. If national or regional, use that basis of comparison.

  Describe impact in terms of measurable outcomes (number of new programs, number of participants served, etc.)

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Emphasize your strengths

- Answer the "why us?" question
- Cite strengths and accomplishments that are relevant to the project
  - Significant accomplishments of project staff or units
  - Relevant past funding and projects
- Cite rankings, awards, etc. to demonstrate excellence and effectiveness
- Show how funding will help strengthen an already excellent program or service
Proposal Components

Letter of Inquiry/Pre-proposal

A condensed version of the full proposal, generally 2-5 pages long that:
- Is clear and concise
- Describes objective
- Describes method
- Addresses budget needs & timeframe
- Describes organizational capability
- Demonstrates fit between proposed project and agency needs
Components of Full Proposal

- Cover letter
- Cover sheet/title page
- Executive Summary
- Statement of Need
- Project Objectives
- Project Description and Management Plan
- Timeline
- Outcomes
- Evaluation
- Sustainability
- Organizational Capability
- Budget and Cost Effectiveness
- Appendices

Cover Letter

Use only when requested

- Address to appropriate individual
- Provide contact name and information for your organization
- State organizational support, if requested
Cover Sheet / Title Page

- Use sponsor agency form if applicable
- Title page usually includes
  - Project title
  - Organization name
  - Name of Institutional Contact
  - Request amount
  - Submission date
- Note: the applicant is always the institution, not the individual project director
  - Applicant name is The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois

Executive Summary

- First thing usually read but generally the last thing you write
- One page in length
- State problem / core issue to be addressed
- Propose solution
- State project objectives and projected outcomes
- State budget request and timeframe
Statement of Need

- What specific need or problem does your project address?

- How was the need identified?
  - Surveys or needs assessment
  - Research
  - Empirical observation
  - Cite any data you have to document the need (level appropriate)

- Who will benefit from the proposed project?

- Why is it important to address this problem now?

Project Objectives

- What will you try to accomplish to address the needs you identified?

- List objectives as bulleted points, where appropriate

- Try to make objective action-oriented
  - Instead of saying "The project will offer opportunities for youth to learn about STEM disciplines," say "The project will engage youth in hands-on STEM activities, including laboratory experiments, design projects, . . . ."

- Relate objectives to identified needs
  - Ex: Need: To improve the performance of area youth in science and math
  - Objective: "The objective of the proposed project is to engage area youth in high quality STEM programs that provide hands-on learning opportunities in order to increase their familiarity with and ability in STEM disciplines."

- Relate objectives to funder's goals and priorities
  - "By developing after-school programs that increase students' ability in STEM disciplines, this project will help the XYZ Foundation achieve its goal of improving the pipeline for careers in STEM fields."
Project Description and Management Plan

- Describe activities to be undertaken to achieve project objectives
- Identify person/unit responsible for each activity
- Describe oversight and management of project
  - Role of project director, other project staff, advisory board, etc.
  - Qualifications of project director and key personnel

Timeline

- Indicate what activities are taking place and when
- Use chart or table
- Illustrate each phase of implementation
- Show when results will be achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Year I</th>
<th>Year II</th>
<th>Year III</th>
<th>Responsible person/unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop STEM curricula</td>
<td>Offer small grants to faculty to design initial modules, fall 2009</td>
<td>Revise modules and develop course materials</td>
<td>Continue revising material based on pilot program</td>
<td>Project director, faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer after school STEM program</td>
<td>Pilot program for 20 students, summer 2010</td>
<td>Implement all modules for 100 students</td>
<td></td>
<td>Project director, program coordinator, instructors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outcomes

- Describe expected outcomes: what concrete things will be accomplished?
- Outcomes are not what your unit will provide, create, establish or promote – these are activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of:</th>
<th>Use:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We will offer 10 workshops for STEM teachers.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The project will result in 200 trained professionals who can increase the quality and quantity of STEM offerings in local schools.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We will offer 10 after-school STEM programs for youth.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The project will produce a critical mass of highly qualified high school graduates capable of succeeding in STEM majors at the college level.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation

- How will you evaluate success of project?
  - **Qualitative measures**: satisfaction surveys, evaluations and comments
  - **Quantitative measures**: numbers of programs and services developed, number of clients served, etc.
  - Formal review from outside evaluator

- How will evaluations be used to improve program?
- Evaluation should shed light on
  - Whether objectives have been achieved (outcomes)
  - Whether methods employed were effective (process)
  - What problems arose and how they were dealt with
Sustainability

- How will you keep the program going when funding period ends?
  - Seek funds through additional grants
  - Make program self-funding (fee-for-service)
  - Absorb program into organization's regular budget activities

Organizational Capability

- Describe your organization, its history, and its mission
- Describe organization's overall strengths in terms of staff, facilities, resources as well as strengths related to the project
- Describe relevant prior experience
- Don't emphasize lack of resources/staff -- sponsors like to give to "winners" to ensure the success of a project
Budget & Cost-Effectiveness

- Demonstrate that project is cost-effective: it will have a significant impact for a reasonable cost
- Describe organizational resources (staff support, facilities, equipment) that the sponsor will NOT have to pay for

Appendices

Common items include:
- IRS letter indicating tax-exempt status
- Applicant’s audited financial report (OBFS)
- List of Board members
- Resumes of key personnel
- Letters of support
- Organization’s brochure
Summary
A Good Proposal . . .

- Starts with a good idea
- Is carefully researched
- Matches a particular sponsor’s priorities
- Is neat and well written
- Follows guidelines carefully
- Describes need for the project
- Outlines clear objectives
- Shows how project will be managed
- Identifies expected outcomes and a timeline for accomplishment
- Develops an evaluation plan
- Shows how the project will be sustained
- Demonstrates cost-effectiveness
- Demonstrates organizational capability

Resources for proposal writing

- Foundation Center Proposal Writing Short Course: http://dncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html
- Grantproposal.com; Aesthetics and Technicalities for Grantwriters: http://www.grantproposal.com/
- Proposal Writing Internet Resources from the University of Wisconsin Madison web site: http://grants.library.wisc.edu/organizations/proposalwebsites.html
- Proposal Writing Tips from the EPA: http://www.epa.gov/ogd/recipients/tips.htm
- Nonprofit Guides Grantwriting Tools: http://www.np guid es.org/
- CFDA Developing and Writing Grant Proposals: http://12.46.246.173/pls/portal30/CATALOG.GRANT_PROPOSAL_DYN.show

All these links and more can be found at http://vcia.illinois.edu/foundationrelations/resources/proposals.html
Grand Victoria Foundation
Types of Support

- Specific projects
- Technical assistance
- Capacity building
- **Scholarship funds**
- Challenge grants for capital
- projects
- Qualified loan funds
- Land acquisition—for preservation
Grand Victoria Foundation Programs

Education
- Strengthen the profession of teaching, including pre-service training, new teacher induction.
- On-the-job training and continuing professional development.
- Improve the quality, content, and process of teaching and learning from early childhood through adult education.
- Enhance and expand youth development programs.
- Pursue educational parity for all-aged students.
- Expand access to quality affordable child care and early childhood education.

Economic Development
- Link workforce development efforts to jobs, job creation, transportation, and housing.
- Provide greater access to capital and other resources.
- Expand housing options and improve homeownership opportunities.
- Implement regional growth management and land use strategies that promote economic vitality and environmental health.

Environment
- Prevent pollution.
- Preserve and restore natural lands and wetlands.
- Implement best land use practices.
- Expand and connect preserved natural lands.
- Develop and implement use of clean, renewable energy and other natural resources.
- Educate the public to increase participation in the above issues.

Grand Victoria LOI Guidelines

Briefly describe your organization and the project in two pages.
In your letter, you must restate and respond to the following points:
- The amount you will request from Grand Victoria Foundation.
- What you plan to accomplish with the project.
- Who will benefit from your efforts.
- Why is the project important to the target population, community or region.
- How will you achieve the project goals and objectives.
- Who will implement the project and what experience do they have.
- How the project matches the programs and priorities of Grand Victoria Foundation.
- Attach an itemized income and expense budget for the project.

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Grand Victoria Funding Priorities

Highest priority is placed on projects that are regional in scope, employ best practices, pursue long-term positive results, and leverage additional investment.

- We seek efforts that transcend lines of race and class and promote civic engagement.
- Preference is given to programs that are multidisciplinary and collaborative.
- Because of our emphasis on regional solutions, the Foundation generally directs more resources to support regional projects than to programs that are locally focussed.

Questions
Annual
Foundation Philanthropy Seminar
April 7, 2009 • 11:00a.m.-12:30p.m.

Four University of Illinois faculty members will share their experiences working with private philanthropic foundations.

The seminar is free and open to faculty, staff, and graduate students.

Because seating is limited, registration is required.

Where to Reach Us

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