

Preparing Proposals

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Note

To limit file size, decorative images have been deleted.

The Grant Application Process: An Overview

Seeking a Possible Match: Two Approaches

- Identifying something you wish to do and then seeking a suitable funding source
- Looking for a *request for proposals* in your field and then developing a proposal that meets the criteria
- (Note: Sometimes a request for proposals has another name, such as *call for proposals* or *program announcement*.)

Preparing to Write the Proposal

- Reading instructions carefully
- Consulting a program officer, if appropriate
- Researching the literature
- Doing preliminary studies, if applicable
- Contacting potential collaborators, if any
- Determining expected costs
- Other
- (Will be discussed in more detail shortly)

Writing and Submitting the Proposal

- If requested, submitting a letter of intent or pre-proposal
- Drafting the proposal
- Revising (and re-revising) the proposal
- Obtaining feedback on one or more drafts
- Double-checking that all instructions have been followed
- Submitting the proposal as instructed

Awaiting the Decision

- Typically, committees evaluate proposals.
- These committees generally contain experts in the field of work (peer reviewers). Sometimes they include others too.
- Often, these committees both
 - Determine which proposals are acceptable
 - Determine which proposals are best (if not enough money is available to fund all acceptable proposals)

Following Up

- If your proposal is funded, doing the work and reporting on it (for example, writing progress reports and journal articles)
- If you are invited to revise and resubmit the proposal, proceeding accordingly
- Otherwise, deciding how to proceed (Note: Even if your proposal is not funded, you may receive feedback that can help in preparing future proposals.)

Key Advice on Preparing Proposals

- Seek a funding source well matched with your goals
- Start preparing your proposal early
- Gather plenty of information
- Follow the instructions carefully
- Prepare a detailed, realistic budget
- Write readably
- Revise, revise, revise

Identifying Suitable Funding Sources

Potential Sites of Funding:

Some Sources of Ideas

- Colleagues, mentors, and administrators
- Grant offices at some institutions
- Acknowledgments etc in journal articles
- Published or posted announcements (calls for proposals)
- E-mail lists in your field or at your institution
- Published or posted guides
- Internet searching

Looking for a Good Match

Seek funding from entities

- With goals that are consistent with what you want to do
- That tend to give grants of the size you are seeking
- If possible, with programs that match your intended work

* * * Note * * *

Consulting a program officer at the potential funding source can be very helpful.

Preparing to Write a Proposal

Starting Early

- Even a short proposal can take a long time. Therefore start early.
- For large grant proposals, it can be advisable to begin at least 6 months before the deadline.

Analyzing Instructions, Examples, etc

- Carefully review materials from the potential funding source.
- Consult the program officer, if appropriate.
- If possible, look at examples of successful proposals to the funding source.
 - From colleagues
 - From the program officer
 - Published or posted

Doing the Groundwork

- Review the literature on work related to yours. Be prepared to cite it.
- Start developing a persuasive explanation of why the proposed project is valuable.
- If your proposal will be for research, formulate one or more well-defined, potentially productive hypotheses or research questions. Beware of proposing a project that is unrealistically large.

Assembling Collaborators

- If you want others to join the project team, invite them. Ask them for needed items, such as information and CVs.
- If you want outside participants, such as consultants, invite them. If appropriate, obtain CVs and letters of support.
- Consider including a writer or editor on the grant-preparation team.

Establishing Timelines

- Especially if you're preparing a large proposal, draft a schedule for doing so. Include time for institutional approvals, if needed.
- Consider preparing a timeline (such as a Gantt chart) for the proposed project. Indicate dates on which you plan to start and finish each main part of the project.

Gathering Budgetary Information

- Start identifying items that you'll ask the funding source to pay for.
- Start determining the cost of each.
- If your institution will contribute resources, identify them, and determine how much they are worth.

Doing Other Items

- If advisable, do preliminary studies.
- If appropriate, consider sustainability.
- If required, submit a letter of intent or a letter of inquiry (“pre-proposal”).
- Other?

The Short Curriculum Vitae:
A Common Component of Proposals

The Curriculum Vitae: Some Basics

- Curriculum vitae: the academic equivalent of a resume
- Commonly called a CV
- Sometimes called a biosketch
- Lists your education, experience, publications, honors, etc
- Often required in proposals to help show that you are qualified for what you are proposing

Standardized CVs

- Required by some granting agencies
- Have specific instructions to follow—for example, regarding
 - Types of information to include
 - Organization of information
 - Length
- A brief look at an example

Preparing a CV to Use in a Proposal

- Follow instructions carefully.
- In general, use reverse chronological order.
- Emphasize items that help show you're well qualified for what you're proposing.
 - What might be some examples?
 - Therefore you may have different versions of your CV for different proposals.

Preparing a CV: More Tips

- If an item may be unclear to readers, include a brief explanation.
- If a paper has been accepted but not yet published, list it under Publications as “In press” or “Forthcoming”.
- Don’t include items that aren’t very relevant to the proposal (examples: height, weight, marital status, high school attended, hobbies).

Following Good Examples

- Consider using as models some CVs from successful proposals to the funding source.
- Some potential sources of such examples:
 - Colleagues with grants from the funding source
 - The website of the funding source
 - A program officer at the funding source

The Abstract: A Key Component of a Proposal

Proposal Abstract

- Appears at the beginning of the proposal
- Summarizes the proposal
- Usually has a word limit
- May need to meet other requirements

Importance of the Abstract

- Provides a first impression
- Sometimes used in choosing peer reviewers
- Help administrators and reviewers grasp the essence and importance of the work
- Also remind reviewers about what they have read in the proposal

When to Write the Abstract

- Can be useful to draft the abstract early in the proposal-writing process (helps focus ideas)
- Abstract should be finalized after the rest of the proposal is in final form, for consistency with the body of the proposal

Content and Structure of the Abstract

- Purpose of item being proposed (and, if not obvious, rationale for the item)
- Description of item being proposed—for example:
 - Research plan
 - Project plan
- Expected outcome

Writing Style for Proposal Abstracts

- Concise (to meet word limits and for readability)
- Readable (to be understood quickly)
- Therefore
 - Organize the abstract carefully.
 - Say things simply and directly.
 - Include transitions etc to make clear the structure of the abstract and the relationships of ideas.
 - Avoid wordy language and overly long sentences.
 - Realize that you probably must do several drafts.

Give abstracts the time they
deserve!

Analysis of an Example of an Abstract

Exercise:

Drafting a Preliminary Abstract

Break into small groups, and decide on something to propose (for example, a research project, educational project, or service project). Together, rough-draft an abstract of what you propose. Be ready to share your abstract with the full group.

Writing the Proposal: Components and Advice

Grant Proposals as Persuasive Writing

Proposals must persuade potential funders that

- the goal of the proposed work is worthwhile
- the goal is relevant to the funder's mission
- the proposed approach is sound
- the staff is capable of doing the work
- adequate facilities will be available
- the requested amount of funding is reasonable
- other?

Some Items That Help Make a Proposal Persuasive

- Inclusion of reasons for choices (for example, regarding techniques, sample sizes, durations, consultants, venues)
- Inclusion of supporting evidence (for example, published findings, preliminary data, calculations, CVs, letters of agreement)
- Competent writing (helps show capability)

Some Common Sections of Proposals

- Background information
- Statement of goals or aims
- Research plan or program plan
- Budget
- Information on qualifications of staff
(for example, resumes, CVs, or biosketches)

(Note: Depending on the requirements, proposals can range from one page to many pages.)

Some Other Items Sometimes Included

- Letter of transmittal (cover letter)
- Title page
- Abstract
- Table of contents
- Lists of tables and figures
- Description of predicted impact
- Plan for disseminating results
- Information on facilities
- Reference list

Appendixes

- Optional to include
- Examples
 - Papers accepted but not yet published
 - Letters of support from potential collaborators
 - Additional details about activities planned
- Remember: Reviewers typically are not obligated to look at appendixes.

Title

- Short but important
- Should clearly and concisely indicate the focus of the proposal
- May require several drafts

Advice on Writing the Proposal

Writing the Proposal

- Start early—sometimes at least 6 months in advance.
- Consider including a writer or editor on the team.
- **Read the instructions carefully, and follow them exactly.**
- Match the technical level of the proposal to the background of the reviewers.

Writing the Proposal (cont)

- Remember to include the 5 Ws and an H: **who, what, where, when, why, and how.**
- Include reasons for your choices.
- Write the proposal readably. For example
 - Organize the writing carefully.
 - Present overviews before details.
 - Use simple, common wording where possible.
 - Avoid wordy phrases.
 - Make effective (but not excessive) use of such devices as headings, boldface, and italics.

Writing the Proposal (cont)

- **Include a carefully prepared budget.**
- If relevant, include a timeline.
- If relevant, include tables and figures.
- As previously noted:
 - Devote special care to the abstract.
 - Also write a clear, concise title.
- If the potential funder has forms to use, complete them carefully.

Writing the Proposal (cont)

- If part or all of the proposal will consist of freestanding text, format it readably
 - Standard typeface
 - Large enough type and margins
 - Unjustified (ragged) right margin unless otherwise stated
- Have others review drafts of your proposal.
- Double-check that instructions were followed.
- Proofread the proposal carefully.
- Carefully follow instructions for submitting the proposal (often done electronically).

Example:

An Extensive Proposal for a US National Institutes of Health (NIH) Grant

Notes:

- This proposal can be accessed by searching the AuthorAID website (www.authoraid.info) using the phrase *annotated grant proposal*.
- The format for NIH grant proposals (grant applications) has changed somewhat. However, the principles remain the same.

Avoiding Common Problems

Note

This list is based in part on studies of reasons that proposals were rejected.

Common Problems to Avoid

- Failure to follow the instructions
- Seeming unfamiliarity with relevant previous work
- Lack of a valid rationale
- Lack of originality
- Superficial or unfocused plan; lack of detail
- Unrealistically ambitious plans

Common Problems (cont)

- Incomplete budget
- Unrealistic budgeting
- Failure to justify budgetary items enough
- Problems with the experimental or other approach
- Lack of experience with key methods
- Lack of preliminary data, if needed
- For service projects, lack of sufficient information on evaluation plans

Common Problems (cont)

- Inconsistencies in the content
- Excessive use of acronyms/abbreviations

A Suggestion

Imagine that you receive the grant and do the work as described. Will you then have all the needed information to write the appropriate report(s) or paper(s)? If not, revise the plan in your proposal, to make sure that you would gather all the information you would need.

Some Examples of Good Grant Applications to the US National Institutes of Health (NIH)

www.niaid.nih.gov/researchfunding/grant/pages/appsamples.aspx

Thank You!