

# Grant Proposal Writing

*This brief is one in a series of tips for civil society organizations written from a funder's perspective. It is intended to stimulate inquiry, rather than to provide rigid instructions.*

## Tips for Strengthening Organizational Capacity

### Grant Proposal Writing

Tips for developing and writing a proposal, including critical elements to facilitate project success.

These tips include sections on the purpose of a grant proposal, concept and project plan, organizational capacity, and criteria for reviewing the proposal.

### Project Development

Tips for developing and implementing a project and key questions to ask in the process.

### Budgeting

Tips for preparing a budget with an emphasis on its purpose, steps, and components.

### Financial Systems

Tips for establishing an accountable and transparent financial system to build financial sustainability.

### Monitoring & Evaluation

Tips for reviewing and assessing progress towards objectives, identifying problems and strategies, and making adjustments to plans.

### Resource Mobilization

Tips for mobilizing resources closer to home to strengthen organizational capacity and deliver benefits to the community.

### Reporting to Funders

Tips for maintaining and strengthening your relationship with funders following a grant award.

## PURPOSE OF A GRANT PROPOSAL

Consider the grant proposal as a presentation of your work and efforts to work with and meet the needs of the community. It is a written document which you submit to a funder to be considered for a grant. The four basic areas it should address are:

1. **Concept:** Funders want to know that a project fits with the overall direction or mission of your organization and that it is addressing a compelling issue.
2. **Project/activity:** Funders review the scope of the intervention, whether it be a project or activity, and how it will be implemented, including anticipated outcomes, staffing, timeline, monitoring and evaluation.
3. **Organizational Capacity:** Funders are interested in evidence that your organization has adequate capacity to implement the proposed activity and that their grant will be used efficiently.
4. **Budget:** Funders check to see if the budget corresponds with your anticipated outcomes.

Proposal writing is part of the process of planning your work, which includes consultation and outreach to your community, assessing needs and strengths, and developing solutions. These tips are intended to help your organization think through elements of a proposal. It can be used with the tips on "Project Development" and "Budgeting." In this brief, the word "project" is used to refer to a specific intervention or activity.

## CONCEPT AND PROJECT PLAN

Before beginning to write the proposal, you should have a plan for the project including discussions on these questions:

- How does your proposed project reflect the mission of your organization?
- What is the context in which you work? What are the issues that the project will address? Why are these critical to situation in which you work?
- What are your goals, objectives, and activities?
- What are the intended results? What changes will occur as a result of the project?
- Who are the stakeholders you will work with, how have they been consulted, and how will they be involved?
- What is the timeline and required resources (financial and staffing)?
- How will you monitor and evaluate the project?
- How will the project continue after the grant?

## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

The proposal is also an opportunity to articulate your organization's capabilities and demonstrate accountability to your stakeholders. Some of the ways to demonstrate this are to explore the questions:

- What is your organizational structure? What are the relevant skills of your staff and volunteers?
- What is your governance structure and what roles and responsibilities does this structure have? Does it include community members and leaders? Does it include women?
- What are the organization's most recent accomplishments?
- What monetary or in-kind contributions have the community provided to the project?
- Who else has donated to your organization?
- What networks do you belong to?
- What is your relationship with local authorities?

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## GRANT PROPOSAL COMPONENTS

Funders have their own guidelines, requirements, and application procedures. The grant proposal is a written description of your project plan based on the key questions described on the first page. The proposal could also include documentation about your organization in visual form, such as video or photographic documentation. Funders may also request a cover letter or executive summary. Before composing the proposal, think through and outline the key components below:

### COMPONENTS OF A GRANT PROPOSAL

Contact Information	Responsible person's name, organization, address, email, telephone.
Overview	Summary of proposal, including a statement on the purpose of the project and why funds are being requested.
Context	Description of critical issues affecting your community and why project is necessary. Funders may ask for a needs statement which provides a scope of the problem, including statistics. Focus this section on what your intended project is addressing.
Project Description	How project will be implemented, including: measurable goals and objectives, activities, beneficiaries' involvement, anticipated results, timeframe, collaborating organizations or agencies
Monitoring and Evaluation	How project will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that the project is on track and that the results are being achieved.
Budget	Costs for project, amount requested, in-kind contributions, and other sources of funding. State currency and exchange rate on which your budget is based.
Organization Information	Background, governance structure and composition, mission, past accomplishments, staff qualifications, internal controls, legal status.

## CRITERIA FOR REVIEWING THE PROPOSAL

Funders base their reviews and decisions on specific criteria. Knowing how funders review your proposal could help you to better articulate and improve your proposal and chances for success. The questions below are provided to have a discussion within your own organization when writing a proposal to request a grant. They are not to be taken as definitive procedures and processes of funders. Always check with and follow the funder's guidelines prior to

submitting a grant proposal. Below are some of the criteria and questions some funders may use to review, rate, and evaluate your proposal:

### RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS

- Do the objectives and goals match the problems or needs that are being addressed?
- How will the intervention achieve its objectives?
- Does the proposal involve the community or those who are supposed to benefit from the project?
- How are other stakeholders involved?
- Does the proposal address the strengths and needs of the community?
- Is there balance—gender, youth/adult, marginalized, ethnic groups—in project preparation and implementation?
- How will the changes be measured, monitored, and evaluated?

### FEASIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY

- Has the approach been attempted elsewhere?
- Is the proposed approach practical?
- Is the budget appropriate for the scope of the project?
- What is the timeframe for the project? Is it realistic?

### IMPACT

- What will happen as a result of the project?
- How will it make a difference in the community?
- Does the proposed activity have influence beyond its aims?

### SUSTAINABILITY

- Are there lasting benefits after the intervention?
- Are there key partnerships with other civil society organizations, development agencies, or government that will help sustain the project?
- Have funds from other sources been identified?
- How will the project continue after funding?
- What is the plan for the project's future?

### CAPACITY

- Has the organization succeeded in similar endeavors of equal size, scale, and focus?
- What relevant skills do the organization's staff and board bring to the project?
- How is the organization governed?
- Is the organization legally registered?

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## CREDIBILITY

- What is the evidence that the organization is achieving its goals?
- What is the organization's relationship with the community? What kind of reputation does the organization have beyond its community?
- Is the organization a member of a network(s)?
- Who are the partners of the organization?
- Has the organization had any other contributions from external sources?

## FINANCIALS

- Does the budget include income, expenses, and contributions (in-kind, financial)? Note: some funders require a specific percentage of in-kind contributions.
- Are the budget items reasonable and justifiable?
- What percentage of budget request is for salaries? Is this sustainable?
- What percentage of budget request will go directly to beneficiaries?
- What are the internal controls? How are funds expensed, what kind of tracking system is in place, how are decisions made?

- ☑ **Is your budget complete?** Include all funding sources, both in cash and in-kind which could include office space, land, or professional services valued at market rates) A complete budget further creates a positive image about the organization's capabilities.
- ☑ **Have you demonstrated knowledge of good practices in your field?** An understanding of the issues show to funders that you have knowledge of what works and what has been tried in the past.
- ☑ **Did you include concise and specific information that provides evidence of your organization's capacity as it relates to the proposed activities?**

Remember that the relationship with the funder does not end with the grant proposal and award. To maintain a good reputation and relationship, respond promptly to funder's inquiries for reports and provide updates on activities and changes. Keep in mind that your reputation and your actions will impact not only your own organization, but also could have influence on the funder's priorities and perspectives.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more tips on proposal writing, see "Proposal Writing Short Course" (available in Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish) on the Foundation Center website:  
<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/>

Also see tips on "Resource Mobilization."

Note: This brief was developed based on the World Bank's experience in piloting the Grants Facility for Indigenous Peoples and information from the Council on Foundations book, *Grantmaking Basics A Field Guide for Funders* by Barbara D. Kibbe, Fred Setterberg and Colburn S. Wilbur, 2005.



The World Bank Small Grants Program is one of the few global programs of the World Bank that provides direct grants to civil society organizations through the World Bank's Country Offices. The Small Grants Program seeds and supports activities related to civic engagement that empower and enable citizens to take initiatives to influence development outcomes.

[www.worldbank.org/smallgrantsprogram](http://www.worldbank.org/smallgrantsprogram)

**Social Development Department - The World Bank**

*Tips by Yumi Sera and Susan Beaudry, 2007*

## ADDITIONAL TIPS

- ☑ **Did you read, understand, and follow the guidelines of the funder?** Each funder has different eligibility criteria and requirements for proposals. To save time and effort on your part, become familiar with the potential funder's specific requirements, questions, and guidelines. Funder's review hundreds of proposals a year and will quickly dismiss a proposal that has been submitted without regard for their priorities or requirements.
- ☑ **Did you follow the instructions for proposal submission?** Some funders do not accept unsolicited proposals. Others may require a brief letter of inquiry before submission of a full proposal. Check to see how the proposal could be submitted.
- ☑ **Did you answer all the questions clearly?** Have someone unfamiliar with your situation read your proposal to see if they understand the scope of the project.
- ☑ **Is your proposal format clean and easy to read?** Avoid using jargon and acronyms.
- ☑ **Have you articulated the understanding of your unique situation?** A discussion of the external trends and internal organizational challenges demonstrate to funders that you have a good understanding of the factors that may affect the chances of success.