Writing Resources

The final proposal format will depend on the guidelines provided by the sponsor. For example, most federal agencies give very specific instructions and forms on all of the sections to be included in your proposal. A private foundation, however, may provide very little direction on the arrangement and inclusion of various components of the proposal other than a page limitation. There are some basic elements you will find in all proposals, however:

- **Narrative** – This is the WHAT and WHY section of your proposal. Generally, you begin with a statement of need or problem you will address. Next, state the overall goals and specific objectives of your project. Finally, describe your plan of action, providing enough detail for the reviewer to judge whether your project can be run both efficiently and effectively. The narrative should demonstrate that you have carefully thought through all aspects of the project. It must convince the reviewer of the significance of the problem, the appropriateness of your proposed response, and your ability to conduct the planned activities.

- **Evaluation** – Evaluation is important because it demonstrates accountability and concern for program outcomes. You may want to consider adding an evaluation specialist to your proposal development team. Use this section to explain the methodology you will use to determine whether or not your program was a success.

- **Timeline** – Include a well-developed project timeline to help the reviewer understand what you plan to do. It can show that you have thought through your project’s long-term needs and goals.

- **Budget** – While many view the budget as a tedious technicality, it is a key element to your proposal. The budget is often used by reviewers to get a quick sense of the project’s organization. Typical budget categories include personnel, travel, equipment, materials, and indirect costs. These are discussed in more detail on pages 12-13.

- **Abstract** – The abstract may be the only section read in detail by some reviewers. It should be a concise, one page summary of your project that provides a good overview of the proposed activities and it should capture the reader’s interest.

- **Supporting Materials** – Often included in an appendix, these are the graphs, pictures, tables, letters of support, biographical sketches of the project team, and other documents that support the credibility of your project but may interfere with the smooth reading of the proposal.

Here are some general tips for writing good proposals:
Help the reviewer find the information he or she needs by carefully organizing your proposal. For example, use explicit titles, headings and subheadings throughout your proposal. Be consistent in the use of fonts and formatting. Use tables and graphics to summarize information.

- Ask a colleague who is familiar with your topic to read your proposal for content.
- Check for logical, spelling, and grammatical errors.
- Compare your final proposal to the program guidelines. Did you include all of the requested information? Have you addressed the review considerations?
- Obey the rules given in the program guidelines.
- Start early, revise often, and submit before the deadline!

There are many good grant writing guides available. Visit the Director of Grants for copies of articles and books on writing successful proposals, or try these web sites:

“Hints for Writing Successful NIH Grants” by Ellen Barrett
[http://chroma.med.miami.edu/research/Ellens_how_to.html](http://chroma.med.miami.edu/research/Ellens_how_to.html)

“A Proposal Writing Short Course” from the Foundation Center
[http://fdncenter.org/onlib/shortcourse/prop1.html](http://fdncenter.org/onlib/shortcourse/prop1.html)

“The Grantseeking Process” from the Foundation Center
[http://fdncenter.org/onlib/orient/intro1.html](http://fdncenter.org/onlib/orient/intro1.html)

“A Guide to Proposal Writing” from the National Science Foundation