

Proposal Basics

Your proposal serves five main functions:

1. [The Proposal is a sales piece.](#) In approaching a funder, you need to build a link between the funder's orientation and yours – a classic sales process. Your proposal allows you to demonstrate how your organization can help fulfill the funder's mission. You do this by relating your concept or project to the issues the funder is interested in supporting.
2. [The Proposal is a concept paper.](#) This is the broadest function the proposal serves – a plain statement of what you have in mind, why it is important or interesting to the funder, who will benefit from it, and why it is the best approach to making the changes you want to bring about.
3. [The Proposal is a plan.](#) A proposal is a step-by-step working plan, showing in as much detail as necessary what objectives you want to accomplish, the specific tasks associated with each objective, how long it will take, how much it will cost, and what kind of organization and staff are needed.
4. [The Proposal is an agreement.](#) It is a legal agreement, almost a contract, that details what the funder can expect to receive in return for writing out a check.
5. [The proposal is an evaluation design.](#) It constitutes the basis for measuring success. Since it gives a clear and detailed picture of your intentions, it is the logical yardstick for the funder to use when judging how well your project measures up to expectations.

Proposal Writing Tips

Research is the first step.

- About your organization -- Your grants file should contain as much detail as possible about your mission, and why your organization is the best candidate to accomplish it.
- About potential funders – The bulk of your grantseeking effort should be spent identifying the funders who fund what your organization does. It's far more effective to submit ten solid targeted proposals than to submit 50 to some general list. Similarly, when you see an RFP or Call for Proposals, study it to determine if it's really a good fit for your organization.

Good proposals require good writing.

- Clear, simple language. Avoid jargon, keep sentences and paragraphs brief. If no format is provided, use section titles (i.e., Need Statement, Target Audience, Evaluation Plan) to guide the reader through the proposal
- Check your format – Proofread your work; better yet, have someone else proofread it. Don't rely on spellcheck.
- Check your content – Be sure that statements and facts are consistent throughout; for example, if you write in the narrative that your project will engage 250 people, that number should be the same in the Objectives section
- Check your effectiveness – Ask colleagues and at least one non-professional to review the proposal for clarity and interest.

Follow the rules.

- Before you begin, review the funder's guidelines regarding form, additional documents, length, and deadlines
- Create a workplan that reflects all of the funder's requirements
- Compare the completed proposal to the guidelines to make sure that they are in agreement

Major Components of a Proposal

<u>Executive Summary</u>	Statement of your case and summation of your entire proposal
<u>Statement of Need</u>	Why is this project/program/organization necessary?
<u>Project Description</u>	Nuts and bolts of how the project will be implemented, and how the funder will know that it's successful
<u>Budget</u>	Financial description of the project, with supporting documentation and explanation
<u>Organizational Info</u>	History and governing structure of your organization, primary activities, audiences and services that support your organization as the best candidate to implement the project
<u>Conclusion</u>	Summary of the main points
<u>Appendix</u>	Additional information – may include audited financials, Board lists, staff resumes, letters of support, etc.