Writing a Grant Proposal

By definition, a grant proposal is a document written to a funding agency or a particular organization with the aim of convincing the reviewers to provide monetary support. The main premise is that you have a worthwhile and fully realized plan for a worthy cause and are capable of seeing it to fruition. The proposal comprises an outline of the project, budget requirements, and a request for funding. This article provides guidelines for writing a proposal as well as additional tips.

Pre-Writing

Before you begin writing your proposal, you need to make sure that:

1. You possess a clear understanding of your project which entails having a meaningful actionable plan regarding what you want to do and why you want to do it;

2. Understand the larger positive results of your project: how your study will make a broader change within society;

3. Research and locate organizations that grant funds for a project such as yours;

4. Once you've selected the organization/s, you thoroughly go through its mission statement and values to ensure that it aligns with your plan;

5. Review and adhere to the organization's proposal guidelines;

6. Lastly, reach out to peers and mentors within your specific discipline and request them for their grant proposals. This will give you a sense of how to best situate your project within your discipline.

Once you are done with all these steps, you can start drafting!

Writing

As you begin to plan your draft, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who is your audience/reviewer?

   Who are the people reviewing your proposal? What is the agency's goals and mission statement? How do they align and fit within your research idea? The answer to these questions are important as they will help you decide how to present the plan, what vocabulary to use, how much background to provide and how to frame your aim for the research. Figure out what kind of format appeals to and will be persuasive to the organization. Do they prefer numbers? If yes, present your outline with statistical data. Do they look for descriptions/testimonials? A cohesive plan with previous collaborators, perhaps? Pay close attention to how you frame your narrative with respect to the audience.

2. What are the specific requirements/criteria for this grant?

   You should have clarity about what the funding agency requires in grant proposals. Your proposal should comply strictly with these requirements. Look for samples of successful grant proposals within your field that have received the particular grant you're applying for. Learn from these samples. In short, know exactly what it is that you need to include within your proposal and how others have previously achieved that.

3. What makes you credible? Why should they fund your project?

   Here you can talk about your strengths. Make sure to present yourself as capable, adept and knowledgeable. Establish your credibility via a fully fleshed out plan: the value of your project and your current knowledge which informs it. Additionally, mention relevant past projects/accomplishments that highlight and verify your ability to succeed and demonstrate your

commitment to this project. Lastly, state any partnerships with individuals and organizations you've previously established and sustained.

4. How can you cogently present your plan?

   When writing, divide your proposal into sections and label them clearly with headings. Grant proposals should be to the point. Therefore, avoid flowery language and stick to the headings outlined in the guidelines. Your readers shouldn't have to work overtime to understand your proposal; make your writing as concise as possible. Tailor your writing to reflect the terminology best understood by the organization. One exception is when you use an anecdote or personal example to convey the motivation for the project and its larger implications.

Sections

Grant proposals have distinct sections. Depending on the organization's proposal guidelines, there may be some differences, but following is a list of some of the most common elements required in a proposal.

Short Overview (Executive Summary/Abstract)

Here you provide the key components of your proposal. For longer proposals, you can take up to a page but for shorter ones, you may only have a paragraph so be very precise and answer the following questions:

1. What is the main aim/goal of your project? What issues/needs are you addressing?
2. What are the projected results of your projects and how do you plan on achieving them, i.e. the methodology?
3. How would you evaluate the success of your project?
4. How is your project relevant, what is its value?
5. And then, briefly, introduce yourself.

Align your abstract with the mission statement of the organization. You may use terminology and vocabulary from the organization's goals to frame your overview. The summary/abstract is an overview of your project. Therefore, for greater clarity and cogence, write this after you're done writing all the other sections.

Examination of an issue (Statement of Purpose or Literature Review)

Your project is important because it addresses a gap in knowledge, resources, or opportunity. For the reader to grasp the urgency of it, you need to first elaborate upon the issue/problem and set up the context. If your project is in relation to a certain population, mention the demographic. Include relevant data (infographics or description). Specifically, for academic grants, this section will function as a short literature review demonstrating that you have read extensively, gone a step further, and located your project within the gaps that need to be bridged. However, even for academic grants it is important to state the positive impact your study will make in society as opposed to just answering an academic question.

Outline/Plan of your Project (project narrative; goals, strategies and methodology)

Once you have established the need for your project, you can outline what your project is. Here you will answer the following questions:

1. What are your research questions or goals for your project?

2. What results will your project have? (Note that grant proposal outcomes should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound).

3. What is the specific methodology(ies) you will use to achieve those outcomes?

4. How will you measure/evaluate your project's results?

5. How are you ensuring your project adequately addresses the problem?

6. What is the proposed timeline of your project?

Some of these questions pertain to the impact of your project. It is important to distill the impact because funders need to see how you've understood the realistic benefits of your project, and have a plan to achieve, verify and assess your outcomes.

Budget (Resources)

Since you are requesting funding or support, you need to clarify exactly what you need and give reasoning for particular amounts. It is advisable to format budgets within tables. Label each amount clearly with a follow up line explaining why that particular material, equipment or cost is reasonable for your project.

Additional Tips

1. Pay close attention to the organization's key interests: as mentioned before, tailor your language according to the organizations' ethos; use accessible and familiar language throughout your proposal in order to convince the reader.

2. Provide numbered lists: often reviewers won't spend a lot of time perusing each proposal; most will just skim the material. Therefore, presenting information in a way that is conducive to skimming will benefit you more. For example, writing sentences like "firstly, we will conduct interviews. Secondly…," may not be very appealing, but it will present information in a structure that is easily absorbed.

3. Customize your proposals: if you are applying to two separate organizations, don't use the same proposal. Tailor each proposal according to the specific organization.

4. Edit and revise your proposal: writing a grant proposal is hard work but the key is to have a clear understanding of your project. Spend ample time drafting a proposal that will aid in the fulfillment of your goals. This can only be done through extensive researching, writing, and re-writing!