



Expanding Educational Horizons

Caenwood Centre, Grant Hall, 37 Arnold Road, Kingston 4

Tel: (876) 967-5192 or 922-0783

Grant Writing Guidelines

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Proposal Writing

Introduction

Writing a proposal is a way to communicate to a potential donor about your organization and its needs that they may be able to assist. Raising funds is an investment in the future. Potential donors, who may also be called funders, have a few things in common – they want to solve one or more social problem and want their monies to be used wisely.

As a grant seeker, we need to uncover problems in our organization, figure out a set of possible solutions, detail the necessary actions in a project format, where a project is merely a set of activities that are grouped together and have the potential to bring about a positive conclusion and finally share this information as an opportunity with the right donor.

Once we have the problems identified and the projects detailed, then we need to search for donors who are willing to solve the same problem. The purpose of this brief booklet is to assist in identifying the problems, developing the projects and pressing to suitable donors in a way that maximizes the chances of a positive response.

As an organization, your aims should be to:

- (i) **Build a network of funders, many of which give small gifts on a fairly steady basis and a few of which give large, periodic grants.**
- (ii) **Write a Master Proposal which you can refer to when applying for many different kinds of grants.**

This process is grounded in the conviction that a partnership should develop between the school/NGO and the donor. The schools/NGOs have the ideas and the capacity to solve problems, but no dollars with which to implement them. The foundations and corporations have the financial resources but not the other resources needed to create programmes. Bring the two together effectively, and the result can be a dynamic collaboration.

This recommended process is not a formula to be rigidly followed. It is a suggested approach that can be adapted to fit the needs of any school/NGO and the peculiarities of each situation.

N.B. Fundraising is an art as well as a science. You must bring your own creativity to it and remain flexible.

Main Components of a Proposal

The Cover Letter

**Executive Summary:**

umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal 1 page

**Problem Statement/ Statement of Need:**

why this project is necessary 2 pages

**Project Description:**

nuts and bolts of how the project will be implemented and evaluated 3 pages

**Budget:**

financial description of the project plus explanatory notes 1 page

**Conclusion:**

summary of the proposal's main points 2 paragraphs

**Appendix**

history and governing structure of the institution;
its primary activities, audiences, and services
staff qualifications
letters of endorsement, partnership agreements



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1. The Cover Letter

This is the first page the funder sees and should be used to make an excellent first impression. It is an introduction and a way of getting started on the right foot – introduce yourself and the organization, and do not get into the request right away.

Key Concepts

- **brief**
- **positive and confident**
- **concise and inviting**
- **thank you**

Checklist for Cover Letter

- on letterhead
- one page
- 12 point, text font
- generous margins
- left justified
- salutations to a specific person
- first paragraph introduce organization, community and target population
- paragraph about the project, highlighting two key points
- paragraph explaining why submitting the proposal
- final paragraph expressing thanks and providing contact information
- addressed to highest possible person in donor organization
- signed by a human in blue ink
- enclosure line

2. The Executive Summary

This is the most important section of the entire document. Here you will provide the reader with a snapshot of what is to follow. Specifically, it summarizes all of the key information and is a sales document designed to convince the reader that this project should be considered for support. Be certain to include:

1. **Problem** — a brief statement of the problem or need your school/agency has recognized and is prepared to address (one or two paragraphs);
2. **Solution** — a short description of the project, including what will take place and how many people will benefit from the programme, how and where it will operate, for how long, and who will staff it (one or two paragraphs);
3. **Funding requirements**— an explanation of the amount of grant money required for the project and what your plans are for funding it in the future (one paragraph);



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4. **Organization and its expertise**— a brief statement of the name, history, purpose, and activities of your agency, emphasizing its capacity to carry out this proposal (one paragraph).

3. The Statement of Need

May also be called:

- **Problem statement**
- **Needs statement**
- **Needs assessment**
- **The problem**

This is always used, and allows for a connection to the donor being that you want to solve the same problem. This is the foundation on which the proposal is built. If your project does not clearly provide a potential solution to the project that both you and the donor want to solve then funding is not likely.

Key concepts

- **A problem is the reason for a project**
- **Well thought out and backed by statistics**
- **Logical and specific**
- **Provide comparative data**
- **Short tight sentences, do not ramble**
- **Normal margins, headings and sub headings, 12 point.**
- **Use charts and table to display large quantities of data**

As you develop a problem statement:

- (i) **Decide which facts or statistics best support the project.** Be sure the data you present are accurate. There also should be a balance between the information presented and the scale of the programme.
- (ii) **Give the reader hope.** The picture you paint should not be so grim that the solution appears hopeless. The funder will wonder whether an investment in a solution will be worthwhile. Avoid overstatement and overly emotional appeals.

Here's an example of a solid statement of need: *"Breast cancer kills. But statistics prove that regular check-ups catch most breast cancer in the early stages, reducing the likelihood of death. Hence, a programme to encourage preventive check-ups will reduce the risk of death due to breast cancer."*

- (iii) **Decide if you want to put your project forward as a model.** This could expand the base of potential funders, but serving as a model works only for certain types of projects. Don't try to make



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this argument if it doesn't really fit. If you do decide to go with pitching your project as a model, you should document how the problem you are addressing occurs in other communities. Be sure to explain how your solution could be a solution for others as well.

- (iv) **Determine whether it is reasonable to portray the need as acute.** You are asking the funder to pay more attention to your proposal because either the problem you address is worse than others or the solution you propose makes more sense than others.

Here's an example of a balanced but weighty statement: *"Drug abuse is a national problem. Each day children all over the country die from drug overdose. In the South Bronx the problem is worse. More children die here than any place else. It is an epidemic. Hence, our drug prevention programme is needed more in The South Bronx than in any other part of the city."*

- (v) **Decide whether you can demonstrate that your programme addresses the need differently or better than other projects that preceded it.** But do not be critical as that will not be well received by the funder. If possible, you should make it clear that you are on good terms with others doing work in your field. Describe how your work complements, but does not duplicate, the work of others.
- (vi) **Avoid circular reasoning.** In circular reasoning, you present the absence of your solution as the actual problem. Then your solution is offered as the way to solve the problem. For example, the circular reasoning for building a community swimming pool might go like this: "The problem is that we have no pool in our community. Building a pool will solve the problem." It would be more persuasive to say what a pool has meant to a neighboring community, permitting it to offer recreation, exercise, and physical therapy programmes.

Use this area to work on your problem statement:



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Checklist for Statement of Need

- Describe broad problem – the major symptom of the real problem
- Describe causes of a broad problem – the real problem
- A problem needs to be cited for each project component
- Statistics and references for each problem area
- Local needs assessment, results of focus groups, survey results
- Historical perspectives
- Impact of the problem

4. The Project Description

Also called

- Narrative
- Project narrative
- Project Explanation

This section of your proposal should have **5** subsections:

- (i) **Mission Goals and objectives**
- (ii) **Methods/ Activities**
- (iii) **Project Management Plan**
- (iv) **Evaluation**
- (v) **Sustainability**

Mission, Goals and Objectives

Mission is the ultimate aim. It is what you want to happen. A Mission Statement is the converse of the problem statement.

Goals – the steps to accomplish the mission. Need to be ordered logically. They need to be doable, not vague. Goals are always concrete and measurable.

Objectives are the steps for each goal. If you achieve each objective you would have accomplished your goals.

Missions, Goals and Objectives have **5** parts:

1. What you are going to do
2. Using what approach (methodology)
3. Who will do it (management and supervision)
4. For how many or by how many (measurement)
5. With what result or outcome (evaluation)



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For example:

Mission: To help children to read better through after-school programmes that are fun and engaging.

Goal 1: Develop an acceptable and appropriate a remedial reading programme

Goal 2: Implement the remedial reading programme for 50 children

Goal 3: Review the results and take to scale

N.B. - With competition for dollars so great, well-articulated objectives are increasingly critical to your proposal's success.

There are at least 4 types of objectives:

1. **Behavioral** — A human action is anticipated.

Example: *Fifty of the 70 children participating will learn to swim.*

2. **Performance** — A specific time frame within which a behavior will occur, at an expected proficiency level, is expected.

Example: *Fifty of the 70 children will learn to swim within six months and will pass a basic swimming proficiency test administered by a Red Cross-certified lifeguard.*

3. **Process** — The manner in which something occurs is an end in itself.

Example: *We will document the teaching methods utilized, identifying those with the greatest success.*

4. **Product** — A tangible item results.

Example: *A manual will be created to be used in teaching swimming to this age and proficiency group in the future.*

Use the next page to develop a Mission for a project of your choice as well as 3 Goals and 2 Objectives for each goal.

Be certain to present the objectives very clearly and be realistic. It's a good idea to use numbers, bullets, or indentations to denote the objectives in the text.



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Mission:

Goal 1:

Objectives: 1.

2.

Goal 2:

Objectives: 1.

2.

Goal 3:

Objectives: 1.

2.

N.B. - Don't promise what you can't deliver. The funder will want to be told in the final report that the project actually accomplished these objectives.



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Checklist for Mission, Goals and Objectives

- What will happen
- How will it be accomplished (approach, strategy)
- When will it happen (in project time)
- Who is responsible and who will do the work?
- For how many or how much (measurability)
- With what result, outcome, or benefit (why is the activity being done?)

5. Methods

The methods section describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve the objectives.

Methods can be broken down into 3 sections:

How: This is the detailed description of what will occur from the time the project begins until it is completed. Your methods should match the previously stated objectives.

When: The methods section should present the order and timing for the tasks. It might make sense to provide a timetable so that the reader does not have to map out the sequencing on his or her own....The timetable tells the reader "when" and provides another summary of the project that supports the rest of the methods section.

Why: You may need to defend your chosen methods, especially if they are new or unorthodox. Why will the planned work lead to the outcomes you anticipate? You can answer this question in a number of ways, including using expert testimony and examples of other projects that work. N.B. - The methods section enables the reader to visualize the implementation of the project. It should convince the reader that your agency knows what it is doing, thereby establishing its credibility.

Key Concepts

- **Clear and concise**
- **Avoid jargon and ensure technical issues can be understood by lay person**
- **Cover major project events in logical order**
- **Explain any unusual budget requests**
- **Could include a time chart (aka Gantt chart)**



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Develop a set of activities or methods for one Goal/Objective for your project:

Goal or Objective:

Activities/Methods

6. Project Management Plan

May also be called:

- **Project Administration**
- **Management issues**
- **Organizational issues**

No project will be successful without good management. The Donor needs to be assured that organization is capable of handling the project, that the personnel are qualified to supervise and manage the project and that the organizations can deliver sound financial management. Statements that address project management will be presented throughout your plan, but this is where you speak to this specifically and comprehensively.

N.B. - A strong project director can help influence a grant decision.



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Key Concepts

- **Devise an organizational chart clearly showing that the project is connected to and integral to your management structure**
- **Briefly describe past grants especially if they were successfully completed**
- **State how your project will be managed and audited**
- **Indicate level of expertise of key personnel – include biographical data in appendices**
- **Indicate full and part time as well as volunteers that will work on the project**
- **Identify recruitment needs**
- **Give an overview of the evaluation of the project (and the evaluation plan)**
- **Give overview of how the project will be documented and files stored etc.**

Use this section to draw an Organizational chart for your School or NGO:

Checklist for Project Management Plan

- To whom does the project director report
- Clear lines of responsibility for all project personnel
- Screening, training, and monitoring of volunteers
- Consent privacy and security issues
- Target population activity documentation
- Insurance and liability issues
- Transportation



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7. Evaluation

May also be called:

- **Project Analysis**
- **Outcomes**
- **Project Results**
- **Evaluation Plan**

Donors want to solve problems. You are helping them through your project. Evaluation is necessary to see if your project was successful and for the donor to know if their investment was successful.

Key Concepts

- **Linked to goals and objectives through outcomes or results of each**
- **Must be measurable**
- **Document everything**
- **Report progress – include periodic reports in the proposal**
- **Have a small internal evaluation team**
- **If level of funding significant, factor in an external evaluator**
- **Use evaluation to refine and improve project**

Checklist for Evaluation

- Internal or External Evaluators?
- What do stakeholders need (want) to know?
- What data needs to be collected?
- How will the data be collected?
- Do the collection tools exist or need to be developed?
- Who will collect the data?
- When will the data be collected?
- How will the data be analyzed?
- Quantitative and qualitative data used?
- Blend of Process or outcome evaluations?
- Who needs to receive the evaluation information?



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8. Sustainability

May also be called:

- Continuation Plan
- Sustainment
- Institutionalization

Key Concepts

- Buy infrastructure and institutional knowledge with grant funds, not staff
- Include letters of support from key partners
- Develop a clear plan to continue the project once the project funds run out
- Do not count on future grant funds to continue the project

Donors want to make good investments, so if your solution to the problem works out well then both you and the donor will want the project activities to continue. But grant funds do not continue forever so it is critical that you make the case that the activities will continue after the funding has ended and that this project will make your organization attractive to other funders in the future.

Use this space to brainstorm some sustainability factors for your project:

Checklist for Sustainability

- Commitment from organization's leadership – Board, MoEY
- Commitments from partners
- Commitments from Community stakeholders
- Structures that mean continuation costs are low
- Use of train the trainer model
- Increased institutional capacity
- Increased intellectual capacity
- Not rely on grant paid worker bees
- Expertise from consultants and contractors not employees paid by grant.



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9. The Budget

The budget for your proposal may be as simple as a one-page statement of projected expenses or it may require a more complex presentation, perhaps including a page on projected support and revenue and notes explaining various items of expense or of revenue.

Expense Budget

As you prepare to assemble the budget, go back through the proposal narrative and make a list of all personnel and non-personnel items related to the operation of the project.

Be sure that you list not only new costs that will be incurred if the project is funded but also any ongoing expenses for items that will be allocated to the project. Then get the relevant costs from the person in your agency who is responsible for keeping the books. You may need to estimate the proportions of your school/NGO's ongoing expenses that should be charged to the project and any new costs, such as salaries for project personnel not yet hired. Put the costs you have identified next to each item on your list.

Your list of budget items and the calculations you have done to arrive at a dollar figure for each item should be summarized on worksheets. You should keep these to remind yourself how the numbers were developed. These worksheets can be useful as you continue to develop the proposal and discuss it with funders; they are also a valuable tool for monitoring the project once it is under way and for reporting after completion of the grant.

Support and Revenue Statement

For the typical project, no support and revenue statement is necessary. The expense budget represents the amount of grant support required. But if grant support has already been awarded to the project, or if you expect project activities to generate income, a support and revenue statement is the place to provide this information.

Budget Narrative

A narrative portion of the budget is used to explain any unusual line items in the budget and is not always needed. If costs are straightforward and the numbers tell the story clearly, explanations are redundant. If you decide a budget narrative is needed, you can structure it in one of two ways. You can create "Notes to the Budget," with footnote-style numbers on the line items in the budget keyed to numbered explanations. If an extensive or more general explanation is required, you can structure the budget narrative as straight text. Remember though, the basic narrative about the project and your organization belongs elsewhere in the proposal, not in the budget narrative.

10. Conclusion

Two short paragraphs summarizing proposal – brief.



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11. Appendix

May also be called:

- **Supplementary material**
- **Supporting documents**

Key Concepts

- **When in doubt, leave it out**
- **Include all information that the donor requests**
- **Include only essential materials**
- **Materials that provide further illustration of important parts of the proposal**
- **Refer to appendix in body of proposal**

Checklist for Appendix

- Grant makers' requirements
- Key personnel bio and resumes
- Letter of support, partnerships
- Flow chart
- Timelines
- Details of equipment, technical specifications
- Consultant and service contracts
- Monitoring and Evaluation plan
- Advisors and board members
- Survey results and previous evaluations



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12. Letter Proposal

Sometimes the scale of the project might suggest a small-scale letter format proposal, or the type of request might not require all of the proposal components or the components in the sequence we've just discussed. The guidelines and policies of individual funders will be your ultimate guide. Many funders today state that they prefer a brief letter proposal; others require that you complete an application form.

For example, a request to purchase a \$1,000 fax machine for your school/NGO simply does not lend itself to a lengthy narrative.

What are the elements of a letter request? For the most part, they should follow the format of a full proposal, except with regard to length. **The letter should be no more than three pages.**

As to the flow of information, follow these steps while keeping in mind that you are writing a letter to someone. It should not be as formal in style as a longer proposal would be. It may be necessary to change the sequence of the text to achieve the correct tone and the right flow of information.

Here are the components of a good letter proposal:

- **Ask for the gift:** The letter should begin with a reference to your prior contact with the funder, if any. State why you are writing and how much funding is required from the particular foundation.
- **Describe the need:** In a very abbreviated manner, tell the funder why there is a need for this project, piece of equipment, etc.
- **Explain what you will do:** Just as you would in a fuller proposal, provide enough detail to pique the funder's interest. Describe precisely what will take place as a result of the grant.
- **Provide agency data:** Help the funder know a bit more about your organization by including your mission statement, brief description of programmes offered, number of people served, and staff, volunteer, and board data, if appropriate.
- **Include appropriate budget data:** Even a letter request may have a budget that is a half page long. Decide if this information should be incorporated into the letter or in a separate attachment. Whichever course you choose, be sure to indicate the total cost of the project. Discuss future funding only if the absence of this information will raise questions.
- **Close:** As with the longer proposal, a letter proposal needs a strong concluding statement.
- **Attach any additional information required:** The funder may need much of the same information to back up a small request as a large one: a board list, a copy of your IRS determination letter, financial documentation, and brief resumes of key staff.

N.B. - It may take as much thought and data gathering to write a good letter request as it does to prepare a full proposal (and sometimes even more). Don't assume that because it is only a letter, it isn't a time-consuming and challenging task. Every document you put in front of a funder says something about your school/NGO. Each step you take with a funder should build a relationship for the future.



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What Happens Next?

Submitting your proposal is nowhere near the end of your involvement in the grant-making process. Grant review procedures vary widely, and the decision-making process can take anywhere from a few weeks to six months or more.

During the review process, the funder may ask for additional information either directly from you or from outside consultants or professional references. You need to be patient but persistent. Some grant-makers outline their review procedures in annual reports or application guidelines. If you are unclear about the process, don't hesitate to ask.

If your hard work results in a grant, take a few moments to acknowledge the funder's support with a letter of thanks. You also need to find out whether the funder has specific forms, procedures, and deadlines for reporting the progress of your project. Clarifying your responsibilities as a grantee at the outset, particularly with respect to financial reporting, will prevent misunderstandings and more serious problems later.

Nor is rejection necessarily the end of the process. If you're unsure why your proposal was rejected, ask. Did the funder need additional information? Would they be interested in considering the proposal at a future date? Now might also be the time to begin cultivation of a prospective funder. Put them on your mailing list so that they can become further acquainted with your organization. Remember, there's always next year.

Reference:

http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/prop1_print*The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing*, 4th ed. (New York: The Foundation Center, 2004), by Jane C. Geevernew, Cheryl and James Quick. 2003. How to write a Grant Proposal. Wiley and Sons: New York.



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