Basic Principles of Grant Writing

Margaret O. Casey RN MPH
January 31, 2008
Salina KS
Good Proposal = Good Idea + Good Plan

Do you know....
- What you want to do and why you want to do it?
- If it will work?
- If you can do?
- If it matters to anybody else?

Can you communicate...
- Why this project is needed and what you want to accomplish?
- Who will carry out the project?
- How much will it cost?
Request for Proposal

- Read carefully and follow directions to the letter
- Don’t miss deadlines for letter of intent and proposal submission
- Always attend bidders conferences if offered
- Begin first by creating an outline based on the RFP
Agency Protocols

- Who can commit to conduct project?
- Who is authorized to approve budget?
- Who else gets involved?
- What happens if you get funded?
- Can you REALLY do what you are proposing?
Essential Components of a Good Proposal

- Cover sheet and Table of Contents
- Summary
- Introduction
- Program Narrative, including:
  - Problem Statement/Needs Assessment
  - Objectives
  - Methods / Workplan
  - Evaluation
- Future/Other Funding
- Budget and Budget Justification
- Letters of Support and/or Commitment
Grant Proposal – Components

- **Cover Sheet**
  - Federal 424 Form
  - State
  - Make your own if appropriate

- **Table of Contents**
  - This is the last thing you will do before you sign the document

**This RFP has a required cover sheet you must use!**
(Executive) Summary

Clearly and concisely summarizes the request.

- Appears at beginning of proposal; written last.
- Identifies the applicant; sentence about credibility
- Includes at least one sentence on problem, objectives, methods.
- Includes total cost, funds already obtained, and amount requested in this proposal
- Is brief (2-3 paragraphs is best!), clear and interesting.
Program Narrative: Lead Agency Description

Describes applicant’s qualifications or credibility or background

- Who are you: the agency and the individuals
- Applicant agency purpose, programs, constituents
- Evidence of past work and accomplishments
- Evidence of ability: knowledge of the field
- Leads logically to the problem statement
- Brief, interesting and free of jargon
What about your organization?

- What do people think about the organization/institution where you work?
- What do funders think about the organization/institution where you work?
- Boilerplate – file and save
More Lead Agency Description

- What is organization’s mission?
- How is organization positioned in community and what is its heritage?
- How does it benefit the community?
- How and who does it serve?
- Is the organization fiscally sound?
- Does the organization have strong leadership?
- What community partners are involved?
Program Narrative: Community To Be Served

- Community description, including geography, demographics
- Community readiness
- Description of problem and need – why the funding is necessary
Program Narrative: Community Need

Need: Gap between what a situation is and what it should be.

Collect information about:
- The problem to be addressed
- Current programs addressing the issue, its successes and challenges
- Current policies and needed policies
Community Need

- Do you have local or county statistics to add to the Background provided?
- Can the reviewer get a picture of your community and its needs from your proposal?
- What statistics can you provide to show community readiness?
Problem Statement or Needs Assessment

Documentation of needs to be met or problems to be solved

- Relates to purpose of applicant agency
- Reasonable dimensions – not save the world
- Supported by data, authorities, clients
- Client’s needs vs. applicant’s needs
- Not “lack of program”
- Factual, specific, brief, compelling case
- Jargon-free and interesting to read
Numbers that Get Noticed

- Seek the strongest statistics
- Showcase the statistics
- Make the numbers noticeable
Problem Statement

- Define the problem in terms of conditions and behaviors, rather than solutions
- Define the problem in terms of environmental conditions and behaviors that affect it; avoid assigning blame
- Write preliminary statement that everyone can agree on, such as “Male tobacco users in our community are not using the Quitline.”
Program Objectives

Establish measurable benefits of funding

- At least one objective per problem or need
- Outcomes, not methods
- States how those served will benefit
- States time by which change will occur
- Should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).
What about Process Objectives?

- Process objectives = tasks to be completed over course of project
- Relates to methods, but NOT the same as methods – focus on results
Linking Outcome, Impact and Process Objectives

- **Outcome**: By 2010, CVH mortality among men will be reduced by 5%, as measured by annual vital statistics.
- **Impact**: By 2010, tobacco use among men will be reduced by 30%, as measured by annual BRFSS.
- **Process**: By 2010, use of Quitline among men will be increased by 75%, as measured by Quitline statistics.
Project Action Plan

- Goal
- Objective
- Projects
  - By dates
  - Key Activities
  - Milestones
  - Who will do what – Responsible staff – volunteer, organization
Methods

Activities to be employed to achieve results

- Flow from problems and objectives
- Clearly describes program activities
- States reasons for selection of activities
- Describes sequencing, staffing and level of effort.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Months</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hire staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize TF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train TF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linking Objectives & Methods

- **Outcome:** Reduce CVH mortality
- **Impact:** Reduce tobacco use
- **Process:** Increase use of Quitline
- **Methods:**
  - Conduct professional education programs
  - Conduct media campaign
  - Provide marketing materials to appropriate venues
Evaluation

Plan for determining degree to which objectives are met and methods are followed:

- Plan to measure progress toward objectives
- Plan for evaluating & modifying methods
- Criteria for success & how data collected
- Test instruments, data analysis explained
- Evaluation reports to be produced
### Checking Proposal Continuity: Each component of proposal should be related logically to other components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem(s)</th>
<th>Objective(s)</th>
<th>Method(s)</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Proliferation of weeds resulting from a recent irrigation project has reduced sugar beet yield in the affected area by 50 percent; farmers’ control costs are $75 per acre. An experimental weed seed screen is available, but its cost effectiveness has not been tested. | 1. To increase sugar beet yield in one-half of the acreage by 25 percent per acre.  
2. To reduce weed control costs in one-half of the acreage by 50 percent or $37.50 per acre.  
3. To determine the cost effectiveness of the weed seed screens. | 1. Introduce weed seed screens into one-half of the irrigated acreage in the affected area.  
2. Same as above.  
3. Take weed counts and assess weeding costs in screened and non-screened acreage. | 1. Compare harvested sugar beets in screened acreage vs. previous yield vs. unscreened acreage.  
2. Compare weed control costs in screened acreage vs. previous costs vs. unscreened acreage costs.  
3. Combine 1 & 2 above and compare costs of purchasing, installing and maintaining screens with costs of conventional weeding practices on a per acre basis. |
Sustainability Plan

- Plan for continuation beyond grant period.
- Realistic plan for future funding if program is to be continued
Other Funding

- Availability of other resources needed.
- How other funds will be obtained if needed to implement the grant
- Accompanied by letters of commitment
Letters of Support

- Endorsement - not same as commitment
- Limit the number (5)
- Knowledgeable of your work, appreciative of this project
- Address to agency head, not to whom it may concern
- Don’t say: in response to your request for letter
- Purpose: broad community support
Effective Letters of Commitment

- **WHO**: Person or agency promising tangible service or asset
- **WHAT**: One-page letter typed on letterhead, specifying what will be contributed or provided
- **WHY**: Demonstrate local financial support for project
- **WHEN**: As soon as methods are outlined
- **WHERE**: Appendix
Project Budget

- Personnel
- Fringe Benefits
- Travel
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Contractual
- Other
- Total
Budget

Costs to be met by the funding source and those to be provided by applicant or others

- Use required form if directed (Yes in this case)
- Same story as program narrative: no surprises
- Specific & detailed: includes all items asked of the funding source
- Include other income or in-kind services, and budget narrative/justification
Based on the plan described in application
Undergoes thorough review by all parties
Details the cost of each item
Gives reviewers adequate information
Easy to follow
Takes care of all funding needs (or explains why not)
Budget Narrative

- Vitally important so the reviewer can really understand how you and the community will support your grant.
- All sections must have an explanation that anyone who is totally unfamiliar with you and your organization can understand.
Budget: Matching Funds

- Monetary contribution to assist with conduct of project:
  - Required amount of non-grant resources that will be spent on this project
  - Required at a specific level (e.g., 10%, 3:1 – for this RFP, it’s **25%**)
  - Sometimes must be cash, but not always (Yours may be from a variety of other sources)
  - Must be documented in financial reports
How to find funds for matching?

- Probably no “pot” of money for matching
- Talk to your partner organizations
- Talk to funding source to determine flexibility
- Talk to your budget person
  - Can’t use federal funds
  - Can’t match the same money twice
  - Can’t pretend to have matching funds
Additional Components
For a Better Proposal

- **Cover Letter**
  - Letterhead stationery
  - Signature by high authority

- **Table of Contents**
  - Outline organization of proposal
  - Number the pages!
Additional Components
For a Better Proposal, cont.

Appendices
- Letters of support/commitment
- Publications by/about your agency
- Detailed info/data not in text
- Resumes/qualifications of project staff
- Admin/organizational location of project

** Remember definition of an appendix!
Ways to Improve Your Chances

Avoid unsupported assumptions:
Don’t ...
- assume funding source knows all about you and your agency.
- say “we believe” or “it is thought” – give supporting evidence/documentation
- describe national scope of problem without documenting it in community served
Ways to Improve Your Chances

❖ Pay attention to details: Do …
  – Be sure your topic is appropriate for support
  – Be specific about purpose, products, past work
  – Be reasonable: budget ~ work proposed
  – Include letters of commitment for promises made by others
Ways to Improve Your Chances

Make your proposal meet the funder’s needs

- Project benefit to many people
- Display novel approach, cutting-edge
- Collaborate!
- Include target population
- Make your own investment
- Demonstrate replicability
- Promise to disseminate information
- Demonstrate life after the grant
Ways to Improve Your Chances

- Be sure proposal is neat, clean, easy to read:
  - No typographical errors
  - Original, plus number of copies requested (2 additional for this RFP)
  - Don’t use extravagant packaging
  - Avoid footnotes; give separate reference list
  - Use 12-point, Times New Roman
  - Make important parts stand out
  - Organize document so it flows (appendix)
Ways to Improve Your Chances

- Improve your writing skills: Do’s and Don'ts
  - Don’t use a committee for writing
  - Don’t be afraid to personalize
  - Don’t use contractions or sexist language
  - Do aim your pitch at one individual
  - Do avoid technical language, acronyms, abbreviations
  - Do select title of 10 or less words; don’t be cute
  - Do be consistent in style and format
  - Do keep it short and simple; less than page limit
Ways to Improve Your Chances

- Don’t junk the English language
  - Avoid problem words and phrases
  - Avoid bad connections
  - Avoid obese prepositions
  - Avoid useless cabooses
  - Don’t take the roundabout way
Ways to Improve Your Chances

- Develop a grants-writing dream team
  - Team leader
  - Skilled writer
  - Budget developer
  - Literature researcher
  - Program experts
  - Needs assessment coordinator
  - Word processor
  - Community key informants/consumers
  - Gopher
Where’s the Money

- Federal Government: Major Players
  - NIH
  - HRSA
  - CDC
  - EPA
  - NSF
Where’s the Money, cont.

- Private Foundations
  - State Library
    - Foundation Center
    - Foundation Directory
  - County Libraries
  - Internet
Internet

- Foundation websites
- Grants writing websites
- Internet Search Engines
Ten Commandments of Foundation Grant Proposals

- Be realistic
- Follow instructions
- Avoid familiarity
- Engage key officials
- Ensure solid proposal

- Keep trying
- Don’t be overambitious
- Form collaborations
- Fulfill all obligations
- Do your homework
Wrap Up

- Read instructions and follow them exactly – If they want one inch margins, use one inch margins
- Be specific
- Get it in on time or they won’t look at it
- Once funded, complete all requirements on time if you want to be re-funded!
Conclusion

There’s money out there....
...there’s no reason you can’t get some of it.

Remember:
Good idea + good plan = good proposal