Grants and Proposal Writing

About this guidance

This document presents a basic overview of the writing process for grants and proposals. It is divided into 4 sections. Content includes readings, knowledge checks, and links to more information.

1. **Envisioning your project:** Writing measurable objectives, documenting the need for your project, Identifying a target population
2. **Choosing a funding source:** considerations and sources when looking for funding
3. **Preparing to write your proposal:** developing a budget and planning your project
4. **Writing the proposal:** the common components of a proposal, including the introduction, narrative, budget, and supplementary materials

The intended audience for this class is libraries and organizations applying for NNLM funding. Everyone is welcome to learn.

This work was adapted from NNLM's class *Grants and Proposal Writing*.

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For more information on NNLM funding, contact your NNLM Regional Medical Library.

Contents

Terms to know

Here are some common terms and acronyms you will encounter when writing grants and proposals. All links included here refer to NIH definitions; definitions may vary depending on your funding source.

- RFP: Request for Proposals: a public notice that funding is available
- RFA: Request for Applications: a public notice that funding is available
- CFA: Call for Applications: a public notice that funding is available
- Letter of intent: a letter sent to a funder by an applicant prior to applying for a grant
- Letter of application: accompanies your award proposal for funding

Section 1: Envisioning Your Grant Project

Before you begin writing a grant proposal or even researching what grants are out there, it is important to have an idea of what you want to achieve and what your institution would like to do to achieve it. If this aspect of the grant project receives enough thought and attention early on, the rest of the proposal-writing process becomes easier.

1. Goals and Objectives

The first step of defining the project is to clarify what the purpose of the project is. At this point in the project, you are thinking broadly about the broad goals of the project and what you are hoping it accomplishes.

Identifying the goals of the project can help give shape to your ideas, even if you don't know what activities you want to perform yet. It can help to plan your project in this sequence, because while you likely know what

Project goals typically relate to the ideal outcome of your project and reflect long-term changes. Generally a proposal includes one to three goals for the project; having more than three goals might indicate that the project is not sufficiently focused.

In turn, each goal will have one or more objectives that help determine if the goal has been met. A common approach to writing objectives is to make them SMART:

- Specific – the objective is defined as clearly as possible
- Measurable – data related to the objective can be collected
- Achievable – the objective is ambitious but realistic for your organization.
- Relevant – the mission of both your organization and the funder of the grant is clearly related to the objective
- Timed – you have a schedule for when the objective will be achieved. Typically this is imposed by the terms of your grant.

Having SMART objectives makes it easier to determine whether the goal has been met. Organizations that offer grants like to know that there are clear criteria that define whether the project is meeting its goals.

Knowledge Check 1

Read the following objective statement for a fictional grant proposal submitted by a public library:

"Within the next year, the library will increase patron engagement by 10%."

Which criterion for a SMART objective does this statement fall short of meeting?

1. Timed
2. Relevant
3. Specific
4. Achievable

Answers provided on the next page!

Answer 1

Read the following objective statement for a fictional grant proposal submitted by a public library:

"Within the next year, the library will increase patron engagement by 10%."

Which criterion for a SMART objective does this statement fall short of meeting?

1. Timed
   o Sorry, the best answer is "Specific," because the objective does not explain what "patron engagement" means. Depending on what specific type of engagement is measured, one year could be a reasonable amount of time to achieve the objective.
2. Relevant
   o Sorry, the best answer is "Specific," because "patron engagement" is not defined. Patron engagement would be relevant to the goals of a public library, they would just have to be clearer about what they mean, such as attendance at library events or the circulation of materials.
3. **Specific**
   o **Correct!**
   o For this objective to be more specific, it would need to define some type of patron engagement--such as attendance at library events or increased circulation of library materials.
4. Achievable
   o Sorry, the best answer is "Specific," because "patron engagement" is not defined. Depending how "patron engagement" is defined and where it's starting from, a 10% increase in patron engagement in a year could be achievable.

2. Fitting Your Grant Project to Its Audience

One of the most important parts of your project is to identify the primary people your project is intended for. Whatever your target population, your grant proposal will require data to demonstrate the need you want to address, as well as information about the number of people with that need who could benefit from your project. Your target population does not necessarily need to be a certain percentage of your community's overall population for the project to be worthy of funding, but you will need to show that there are enough people from that population in your area that your project would be effective at meeting the need you identified.

If your project is intended for an audience of people from underrepresented or otherwise vulnerable populations, there are steps you can take to make your project activities sensitive and effective for them. Such projects might include people for the following target audiences:

- People with disabilities
- LGBTQ people
- Racial or ethnic minority groups
- Religious minority groups
- Senior citizens
- Immigrants or refugees

When designing your grant project, include people from your intended audience populations in the project planning phase. Consider what other organizations in your community already work with your target audience. Ideally, your partner organization should be one that you already have a relationship with and have worked with in the past. These connections are incredibly valuable to your institution, even if you aren't exploring new projects or grant opportunities.

3. Continuation Planning

One often overlooked part of a project is what happens after it ends. For grant-funded projects, the funder will want to know how your institution will continue addressing the need you identified after the grant has ended. Funders are concerned about their money having the biggest possible impact, so they consider whether this grant will help your institution perform this work in some form on an ongoing basis.

One form this can take is using the grant to fund the start-up of a project that you will then sustain through other funding mechanisms. For example, perhaps the grant project will serve as a proof of concept, which you will then use to request a budget increase for your institution to continue the project. In this case, detail where the additional funding would come from, and the data you will be collecting during the project to make the case for the budget increase.

The continuation of your project does not have to mean performing the same activities in the same way. Your project will lead to a set of skills and resources that will continue to exist after the project is completed and can help meet the need you identified in other ways.

Reflection: Imagine your project

Think about a project that you might like to start at your institution, and suppose you receive a grant to fund the project for one year. Briefly write down some thoughts about what might happen after that project ends.

Here are some questions that you can use as a guide to your reflections. Depending on the project you have in mind, some of these questions might not apply to your situation:

- Will your institution's staff develop knowledge of a public health issue that can be applied to regular activities or policies at your institution?
- Will you design information materials that can be kept in use?
- Will there be opportunities to share what you learned with other institutions?
- Will you form relationships with other organizations in your community that can lead to other projects?

4. Logic Models

Logic models are quite effective at helping you think through what your program involves and what you hope to accomplish. This in turn makes it easier to make your case to a potential funder in a grant proposal, because you have already explained your project to yourself.

In a logic model, inputs are anything that you are investing into the program. This includes funding, materials, and the staff's workload. (In other words, if staff members are working on this project, they might not have the time to take on another new project.) The outputs are anything that your institution will create to make the project successful. This can include anything from information resources to services, activities and events.

The logic model can also help you focus on whether this is the right time to seek a grant for implementing the project. Writing a grant proposal is a large project that requires significant time, energy, and coordination. Before you make that kind of investment, the logic model provides a good opportunity to check the following:

- You want to start a new project or expand an existing project, and the costs can't be covered by your current budget.
- You are able to commit the needed time and energy to the grant-writing process and to the project you want to fund.
- You or someone at your institution is able to coordinate the various parts of preparing the grant proposal.
- The community you are a part of is receptive to the work that you want to do.

For further information, consult this guide for developing logic models from CompassSBC.

Examples and Template

Examples of logic models for a library program and a library community-based project are available in the Appendix, along with a template.

Section 2: Choosing a Funding Source

Once you have a well-defined project, you can decide where you are going to apply for funding.

1. How Selective Should I Be?

Although there might be many grants that your project could be eligible for, it is worth your time to be selective. You will be more likely to win a grant if you research your options and find the grant that is the best fit for your project and your organization's mission. There are many factors to consider when selecting a grant, and many places where you can look. The material covered here is not exhaustive, but it will give you a good start.

When you find a grant that could be a good match for your project, keep the request for proposals (RFP) and study it closely. It will have important information such as requirements for the grant and deadlines for submitting the proposal, and it will help you make sure the funding term of the grant is an appropriate match to the expected timeline of your project. You will refer to the RFP throughout the process of deciding which grant to apply for and while writing the proposal.

2. Common Funding Sources

Depending on the scope of your project and its expected budget, there might be many appropriate funding sources. These can include government sources, foundations, businesses, or associations.

One place to start looking is federal government grants. There are federal institutions that fund projects related to health librarianship and health literacy:

- Network of the National Library of Medicine
- National Library of Medicine
- Institute of Museum and Library Services

Be sure to look for funding opportunities from your state/territorial government and local government too.

Many foundations and private organizations also provide grants. Even if the available grants are not specifically aimed at libraries, many of these funders are interested in projects that support community health. Just be sure that your project aligns well with the goals of the specific grant you're applying for and the organization in general.

If there is a specific health need in your community that your project will try to address, look for organizations that focus on that health need. A simple trick that sometimes works is to perform an internet search for _____ *Association*, filling in the health need you're interested in.

You can also look for state/territorial and local organizations that address this health need. They might offer grant opportunities, or they might direct you to other organizations that do.

Knowledge Check 2

Is it a good idea for a library to apply for a grant offered by a private business? Choose the best answer.

1. No, private businesses have no interest in partnering with libraries.
2. It might be, depending on the purpose and requirements of the grant, and what the business hopes to accomplish by offering it.
3. Yes, any grant you're eligible for is a good grant.
4. No, libraries should never partner with a for-profit business in any way.

Answers provided on the next page!

Answer 2

Is it a good idea for a library to apply for a grant offered by a private business? Choose the best answer.

1. No, private businesses have no interest in partnering with libraries.
   - o Sorry, that's not necessarily correct. Some businesses do provide valuable opportunities for libraries and other information organizations to partner with them. As with other types of funders, be mindful of what the business requires from grant recipients, and whether these requirements are consistent with your organization's values, policies and capabilities.
2. **It might be, depending on the purpose and requirements of the grant, and what the business hopes to accomplish by offering it.**
   - o **Correct!**
   - o As with any grant, you need to be mindful of what the funder will require from you before, during and after the project. For example, does the business expect that grant recipients would advertise or promote the business's products or services? If so, this could conflict with many public libraries' policies of maintaining a non-commercial space, so the grant might not be a good fit.
3. Yes, any grant you're eligible for is a good grant.
   - o Sorry, that's not always true. It can be good to investigate a wide range of grants early on, but ultimately it depends on whether the goals of the grant and the mission of the business align with those of your institution. For example, does the business expect that grant recipients would advertise or promote the business's products or services? If so, this could conflict with many public libraries' policies of maintaining a non-commercial space, so the grant might not be a good fit.
4. No, libraries should never partner with a for-profit business in any way.
   - o Sorry, that's not always the case. Some businesses do provide valuable opportunities for libraries and other information organizations to fund projects. As with other types of funders, be mindful of what the business requires from grant recipients, and whether these requirements are consistent with your organization's values, policies and capabilities.

3. Finding More Funding Sources

The list of funding sources in the previous section is not at all exhaustive. Sometimes you can find local-level organizations that are working to address the same health need as your project. They might offer grant opportunities or know of other organizations that do.

Local funding sources can also be important to investigate, but it might require more effort to identify them. One advantage of applying for funds from a local organization is that there is often less competition than for a grant that seeks applicants nationwide. Some of these grants require that your project specifically benefit people living in the town, city, or county where the funder is located, so ensure that your project has the same geographic scope as the grant before applying.

There are a few databases you can start searching for local-level organizations:

- The Community Foundation Locator
- Tax-Exempt Organization Search
- GuideStar

Sometimes, the best way to find local funding sources is to ask people in your community who are already working on the need your project will address. If there are people or groups who have worked on similar projects or with similar populations, ask if they know of any local funding opportunities. A community business network, such as a chamber of commerce, might also have leads on local businesses or foundations that offer grants.

Knowledge Check 3

Why might you choose to apply to locally-offered grant instead of one offered by a national organization or the federal government? Select all that apply.

1. Local funders won't require reports about your project activities or success.
2. Local grants offer more money.
3. There is often less competition for local grants.
4. Local funders are more likely to prioritize the specific health and information needs of your community.

Answers provided on the next page!

Answer 3

Why might you choose to apply to locally-offered grant instead of one offered by a national organization or the federal government? Select all that apply.

1. Local funders won't require reports about your project activities or success.
   - Sorry, that's not quite correct. While some local funders might not require as much documentation about your activities as national organizations or federal agencies, they will still need proof that the funding is used appropriately and has an impact.
2. Local grants offer more money.
   - Sorry. Local grants aren't likely to offer more money than ones that invite applications from nationwide.
3. **There is often less competition for local grants.**
   - **Correct!**
   - Local grants will generally see less competition, though it depends on your community and the grant in question.
4. **Local funders are more likely to prioritize the specific health and information needs of your community.**
   - **Correct!**
   - Some funders specifically look for projects in the communities in which they are located, so they might be more willing to fund projects targeted at specific local needs

4. Investigating Possible Funding Sources

Once you identify a possible funding organization, there are several different sources you can use to investigate them to ensure they are the best possible fit for your grant. In particular, you want to find out as much as you can about why the grant is being offered and what the funder hopes to achieve with it. You also want to research the funding organization itself and how well its mission or activities align with your project idea. If the funder has a history of funding similar types of projects and working to address similar health needs, there is a better chance that they will be interested in your proposal.

You can start to collect this information from the following sources:

- **The request for proposals (RFP).** This will be your first stop, since it will tell you important information about the purpose of the grant, the goals that the organization wants to achieve by awarding it, and requirements for awardees of the grant. It will also have logistical information about the grant proposal itself, such as deadlines and required materials.
- **The funder's mission statement and values.** When you get to the stage of writing your grant, it will be important to highlight how your project connects to the funding organization's own sense of purpose. The funder's website and newsletters can be good places to research this information.
- **Previously funded projects.** In addition to their websites and newsletters, funding organizations often discuss their awardees' work in annual reports. Annual reports from the last couple of years can give you a good sense of what sorts of projects the organization likes to fund. If the grant is specific to projects in your local community, you might also find information about previous projects in local news publications or websites.
- **Contacting the funder directly**. The above sources might not contain all information you need to make an informed decision about applying for the grant, or all the requirements that the proposal itself must adhere to. Expect to run into some questions that you can answer only by reaching out to the funder. The contact person for the grant should be listed in the RFP.

5. Contacting a Funder

Aside from seeking necessary information, contacting a funder is a way to show that you are serious about your project, the grant and the organization's mission. It is also a way to make a good first impression with the organization. Depending on the funder and the grant, you might have to submit a letter of interest (LOI) prior to submitting the full proposal. The LOI is your chance to make a first impression with your funder and let them know what sort of project you are interested in doing.

Typically, the RFP includes contact information for the person who can answer questions about the grant. If at all possible, you want to direct any communication to a specific person.

Before you contact the funder, have a list of questions that you're seeking answers to. Be able to succinctly explain what your project is and why you believe this funder is a good fit for it. You also need to show that you have done your research, understand everything in the RFP, and are familiar with the organization's mission and basic activities. Contacting the funder to ask basic questions about these topics can make you seem unprepared.

Some common topics to ask the funder about directly include:

- The funder's process for evaluating grant proposals.
- Reporting requirements, such as how frequently you would be required to update the funder about your progress with the project, or what information they require in these reports.
- Restrictions on how funding can be used, such as expenses that aren't allowed or maximum amounts for certain allowed expenses.
- Formatting details for the proposal, including limits on the word count or page count.

Whether contacting the funder by phone, email, or a written letter, follow all standards for professional etiquette. Additionally, respect the person's time, particularly if you have several questions. Give them a reasonable amount of time to reply, or request an appointment to discuss your questions at greater length.

If you decide that the grant is not right for your project after having contacted the funder, follow up with them again and explain why you decided not to apply for this grant. This professional courtesy can help keep future doors open with this funder.

Knowledge Check 4

Which of the following questions is LEAST likely to be appropriate to directly contact a funder about?

1. If we receive this grant, how would we report our project activities to you?
2. Are you able to share the rubric that your reviewers will use when evaluating proposals for this grant?
3. How much money is available through this grant?
4. Do you require written quotes to support any of the expenses in my budget?

Answers provided on the next page!

Answer 4

Which of the following questions is LEAST likely to be appropriate to directly contact a funder about?

1. **How much money is available through this grant?**
   - **Correct!**
   - The amount of money available through the grant will be given in the RFP, so you should not ask the funder about this. Only ask questions that you can't answer with the information already available to you.
2. If we receive this grant, how would we report our project activities to you?
   - Sorry, the best answer is "How much money is available through this grant?" Depending on how much detail the RFP goes into, reporting requirements might or might not be discussed. If not, it would be appropriate to ask the funder about this. The idea is, only ask questions that you can't answer with the information already available to you.
3. Do you require written quotes to support any of the expenses in my budget?
   - Sorry, the best answer is "How much money is available through this grant?". Depending on how much detail the RFP goes into, it might or might not specify whether written quotes are required as a supplement to the budget. If it doesn't mention this either way, it would be appropriate to ask the funder about this. The idea is, only ask questions that you can't answer with the information already available to you.
4. Are you able to share the rubric that your reviewers will use when evaluating proposals for this grant?
   - Sorry, the best answer is "How much money is available through this grant?". The amount of money available from the grant would be described in the RFP. Evaluation criteria are a common issue to contact funders about, so it would be appropriate to ask the funder for a copy of the rubric, if they haven't already made it available to grant applicants. The idea is, only ask questions that you can't answer with the information already available to you.

6. Institutional Restrictions

We have talked about the requirements that funders might place on a grant, but these are not the only things to think about as you are selecting a grant to apply for. Your institution may also have requirements or restrictions around the application process for grants.

For example, if your institution is affiliated with a college or university, you might have to get approval from the university's development office. They might place limits on the type of grants you can apply for or how much money you can request through them. Your institution might also have an office specifically in charge of overseeing grants and proposals.

In situations like this, ensure that you have adequate time for all stakeholders to weigh in on the project and review the grant application. In particular, make sure everyone who would need to sign the final grant contract is involved in the grant-writing process early on. Communicating with these stakeholders from the start will help you shape your project and grant proposal in a way that satisfies everyone, and it reduces the chance that major revisions to your proposal will be needed after it is drafted.

In addition, be sure to discuss the grant with your supervisor. Writing a grant proposal requires a lot of time and effort from multiple people in your organization, so it is helpful to discuss with your supervisor how to prioritize work on the grant proposal among your department's other work duties.

Section 3: Preparing to Write Your Proposal

So far, we've defined our project and found a grant that aligns with both the project and our institution. But we're not ready to start writing yet. Research and other preparation needs to happen first. In this section, we will look at the groundwork that must be laid to complete specific parts of a typical grant proposal.

1. Managing the Research for Your Proposal

Part of the challenge in this phase of the proposal-writing process is organization. Before beginning, have a system for preserving the information you find, where you found it, and when. You might need to keep track of everything from research on wages for personnel to notes from phone conversations with the funding source.

Before you get started on all the research that will need to be completed for your proposal, discuss with your colleagues how information you find or create will be organized. Consider questions like these:

- Is there a specific location where information related to the proposal will be kept? And how will it be organized?

- How will we record where information came from, and when we received it? Do we need a system for this?

- Do we need to make copies or otherwise protect any of this information against loss?

Knowing beforehand how you will keep all this information organized will help you and your staff be more efficient as you prepare the proposal. Having this paper trail will also make it easier to double-check details in your application when you need to.

2. Letters of Support

Many grant proposals will need letters of support, which are written by any organizations that you will partner with. These letters serve as evidence that you understand the need your project hopes to address, and that other organizations working to fill that need have confidence in your institution's ability to execute the project.

If you require a letter of support from an organization, request one well in advance and agree on a reasonable deadline for submitting one. Sending a copy of the RFP to the partner organization can help them write a letter tailored to the grant in question, and give them some direction on what needs to be included. It might also be helpful to schedule a check-in a couple days before your agreed deadline for finishing the letter, to ensure that the letter is on schedule and answer any questions your partner organization might have.

An effective letter of support is brief and specific. They should not exceed one page in length. They describe the existing or intended partnership between the organizations, and it should describe what the partner organization will do to support your project. A letter of support should also explain your partner organization's typical activities and why they are a good partner for this project.

Letters of support are especially important if you have a partnership with an organization that works with underrepresented or otherwise vulnerable people. In this case, the letter of support should detail what you and your partner organization will do to make sure your project is effective and culturally sensitive.

Knowledge Check 5

Which of the following details are likely to be relevant for your partner organization to include in a letter of support? Select all that apply.

1. A summary of the project's expenses
2. Any past partnerships with your institution
3. The process by which you and the partner organization will collaborate on management of the project, including defining your roles
4. Awards or recognition that the partner organization has received for similar projects
5. Description of the partner organization's mission and regular activities

Answers provided on the next page!

Answer 5

Which of the following details are likely to be relevant for your partner organization to include in a letter of support? Select all that apply.

1. A summary of the project's expenses
   - Sorry, that's not quite correct. This information would be covered in your project budget. However, a letter might describe specific expenses that the partner organization would cover, particularly if the expenses are not allowed in the grant you're applying for.
2. Any past partnerships with your institution
   - **Correct!**
   - Funders will like to hear that you have a record of working successfully with this partner organization
3. The process by which you and the partner organization will collaborate on management of the project, including defining your roles
   - **Correct!**
   - This portion does not have to be extremely detailed, but showing that you've reached an agreement on shared leadership for the project can be helpful for a funder to know.
4. Awards or recognition that the partner organization has received for similar projects
   - **Correct!**
   - If the partner organization has received recognition for similar projects, this helps show a funder that they are able to contribute to your project's success. It also gives more weight to your partner organization's endorsement of your proposal.
5. Description of the partner organization's mission and regular activities
   - **Correct!**
   - This information tells the funder that your partner organization has done work relevant to the project you are proposing.

3. Project Planning

You may have already done some project planning, if you used a logic model to envision your grant project. Now, you'll want to create a detailed plan describing your schedule for the events that will be involved with the project, and the tasks that need to be completed to make them happen. Many funders require a tentative schedule of events or milestones to be included with your proposal.

As you probably have noticed, preparing a grant proposal is a significant project in and of itself. In addition to planning the project you hope to fund with the grant, you'll need to plan and manage the grant-writing process too.

Check the Appendix for:

- A proposal preparation checklist provides an at-a-glance view of all of the different pieces that need to come together for your grant-writing.
- A Program Planning Exercise to help plan your project.

In addition, you might choose to use a project planning tool such as a Gantt chart, which you can think of as a group of overlapping timelines showing when all the different processes involved in a project need to occur.

Reflection: How do you plan projects?

Think about your previous experience with planning projects and write down a few thoughts about it. What processes or tools did you use? What worked well, and what didn't? If you were going to create a grant proposal, is there anything you would do differently in the planning phase for it?

4. Researching the Budget

A key part of your budget research will be documenting the cost of all expenses. The funder might require you to submit quotes or other documentation for the costs of certain items in your budget. Even if you don't need this information in the proposal itself, having a solid idea of the expenses involved with your project will still help you with planning and ensure you will have adequate funding.

If you are asked to justify any of the expenses in your budget, it will be easier to do so if you have researched these details and can easily share your supporting information.

Be sure to consider all possible expenses that are related to your project. For example, if your project will involve activities or meetings at your institution after-hours, your utility bills might increase due to additional time that the lighting and climate control must be on.

5. Other Supplementary Materials

Different grants and funding organizations will require different materials to support your grant application. Of course you want to provide all information that the funder requires, but you also should avoid providing materials they didn't ask for. Grant proposals take a lot of time to fully review, and reviewers will not want to read more than they asked to. If you have questions about whether a specific supplementary item not mentioned in the RFP would give the review committee useful information, discuss this with your contact person for the grant.

These are some common supplementary materials to include in a grant proposal:

- **CVs of key staff members who will work on the project.** These will help the funder verify that you have the appropriate staff to execute your project successfully, and that they are qualified to do so. Early on in the project, ask any key staff members review their CVs for currency and update them as needed.

- **Evaluation instruments.** If there are surveys or other tools that you will use to evaluate success toward meeting your project goals, you might need to include a copy of them.

- **A promotion or dissemination plan.** How will you inform your target audience about activities connected to your project? In general, it helps to use a variety of promotional strategies and media. It can also help to put together a calendar of when different pieces of your promotion plan are implemented. Generally, you will want to begin promoting project activities well in advance of when they happen.

- **Authorized signatures from other stakeholders at your institution.** For example, the director of the grants office at a university would need to sign off on a proposal submitted by one of that university's libraries. As you plan your timeline for completing the proposal, make sure you leave adequate time for them to review a completed draft and give final approval.

- **Estimates or quotes.** A grant might require multiple quotes for certain items above a specified price. These would be included as a supplement to your budget.

6. Proposal Preparation Documents

- A Program Planning Exercise and Proposal Preparation Checklist are available in the appendix to plan and build your proposal.

Section 4: Writing the Proposal

Now that you've clearly defined a project, researched a suitable grant, and laid the groundwork for your proposal, it's time to start writing. This final section focus on writing, compiling, and revising your final proposal.

Keep in mind that different funding organizations might have different requirements for what specific information to cover and what sections to include in a proposal. The information here is only a guide; always follow the requirements and instructions that you receive from the funder

1. The Introduction

Many grants require an introductory section to open your proposal, and it might be called the Abstract, the Summary, or the Introduction. It can be one of the hardest parts of the entire project to write, because you must convey a lot of information in a very limited space.

Because funders can expect different things to be emphasized in the abstract, it's especially helpful to review abstracts from successful applications for the grant you're interested in, for an idea of what the funder is looking for. In general, though, expect that the abstract should cover the same topics that the funder asks you to cover in the main narrative.

If the funder requires an abstract with a very restrictive word limit, you might have to cover some or all of your points very briefly, and this requires you to be very selective about what supporting information you include. For instance, when describing the data demonstrating the need your project intends to address, you might cite one piece of evidence that requires little explanation, and frame this as an example of your more extensive supporting data.

Keep in mind that this introductory section might be read by more people than just the reviewers, so it is especially important that it is understandable to a wide audience without background knowledge about your institution or community. For example, the funding organization might have managers or executives who do not directly take part in evaluating grant proposals, but who must sign off on the proposals that the reviewers want to approve. These stakeholders will certainly read the abstract, but they might not read your entire proposal.

2. The Narrative

The core of your grant proposal will be a narrative describing the project you want to complete and the need it will address. The narrative will include background information about the target audience for your population and the surrounding community that supports the need for your project.

The narrative will also need to justify the resources you would spend the grant money on. It is important that the narrative discuss everything that you include in the budget; a mismatch between the narrative and the budget might confuse the reviewers or make them less likely to approve your proposal. Compare your draft budget and narrative side-by-side during the revision process.

Some questions that narratives typically address include:

- What concern or need will be addressed by this project?

- Why are we addressing this concern, and why at this time?

- Why is our institution qualified to tackle this concern?

- Who will benefit, and how?

- What specific objectives can this project achieve, and how will they be achieved?

- How will we measure the project's results?

- How does this project relate to the funder's mission, priorities, and reasons for offering a grant?

When writing the narrative, remember that your readers are likely to have little if any prior knowledge about your institution or the work that you do. For example, some of your readers might hold the all-too-common belief that the only service libraries provide is loaning books and other materials. If you are applying for a grant on behalf of a library, and the funder does not appear to have funded projects for libraries before, you might have to provide background on your institution's other services. For example, your narrative could describe other types of health information outreach you've done in the past, as proof that your institution is able to complete the project for which you are seeking the grant.

Similarly, the reviewers reading your proposal might not have prior knowledge of your community context or the target population you plan to serve. Even if both your project and the grant itself is intended for the needs of your local community, your proposal should still explain these needs with evidence to support your claims. Besides getting all of your readers on the same page, it shows that you have a good understanding of the need you plan to address.

3. The Budget

A well-planned budget shows that a project that has been thought through carefully. Be as comprehensive as you possibly can when forecasting the costs for different aspects of your project.

As you work on your budget, compare it with your narrative to make sure every expense described in the narrative is accounted for. Consider having a draft of your narrative out as you draft and revise your budget, so you can cross-check your budget and confirm that it matches the narrative.

Many funders require a standard template or form for a grant proposal's budget. Before you begin drafting the budget, determine if something like this exists for the grant you're applying for. You might have to ask the contact person for the grant about this If there is no standard budget template, it's still a good idea to look at proposals from previous projects that the funder has approved, so you have an idea of what the budgets from successful proposals look like.

This is also a good time to review the allowed and excluded expenses for the grant again, to ensure that everything you request in your proposal is permitted.

It's possible that the funder will approve your project, but only for a portion of the funds you requested. If this happens, be flexible and work with the funder to form an agreement on how to change the project budget. The funder might have thoughts about more cost-effective ways to cover one or more items listed in your budget.

Knowledge Check 6

For each detail that might be included in a grant proposal, select the section of the proposal where it would be MOST appropriate. The sections to choose from:

Abstract

Budget

Narrative

Supplementary Materials

1. Model number of a specific piece of equipment you need, with its price
2. Discussion of all relevant evidence showing the need for your project and its potential impact
3. A Gantt chart with a detailed timeline for all aspects of your project
4. One sentence describing a similar project your institution successfully completed two years ago

Answers provided on the next page!

Answer 6

For each detail that might be included in a grant proposal, select the section of the proposal where it would be MOST appropriate. The sections to choose from:

o   Abstract
o   Budget
o   Narrative
o   Supplementary Materials

1.   Model number of a specific piece of equipment you need, with its price
     o   **Budget**
     o   The model number and price for needed equipment would go in the budget. The narrative would mention the equipment but not describe it in such fine detail.
2.   Discussion of all relevant evidence showing the need for your project and its potential impact
     o   **Narrative**
     o   The narrative is the best place for a full discussion of supporting data, though you should still keep it concise and limited to truly relevant information.
3.   A Gantt chart with a detailed timeline for all aspects of your project
     o   **Supplementary Materials**
     o   A full schedule of the project, whether in a Gantt chart or some other format, would most likely be grouped with supplementary materials.
4.   One sentence describing a similar project your institution successfully completed two years ago
     o   **Abstract**
     o   A one-sentence description of a past project would be most appropriate for the abstract--you would say more about that project's relevance to your proposal in the narrative.

4. General Writing Tips

The writing process can be intimidating. Luckily, you do not need to produce beautiful literature for your grant application; instead, aim for writing that succinctly and clearly spells out the purpose and details of your project.

Here are some writing tips for drafting your proposal.

- Make it clear where your readers are in your proposal at any given time. Use headings and subheadings to break up sections, as long as they are allowed in the funder's format. As much as possible, start each paragraph with a sentence that summarizes that paragraph's main point.

- Use language from the RFP to make it clear how your project relates to the purpose of the grant. If the funder's stated reason for offering the grant is improving information literacy in the general public, then describe your project's impact in those terms. Otherwise, the connection between your project and the grant's mission might not be clear to the reviewers.

- Be concise. Funding organizations often put word limits or page limits on grant proposals, so every word needs to count. The reviewers will likely be reading a lot of grant proposals in a limited amount of time. Write your proposal so that reading and understanding it is as easy as possible.

- Avoid using jargon, even if it is commonly understood in your field. There's a good chance that some of your reviewers will not have worked in an institution like yours. If there's no way to avoid using a certain specialized term, define it clearly on its first use.

- Leave time for proofreading, preferably by someone who has not worked on the proposal. Including someone who is reading your proposal for the first time might notice places where your thoughts could be explained more clearly. In addition, if you are not fluent in the language the grant is written in, it's a good idea to include someone who can read and write the language fluently for the last round of proofreading.

- As part of the final proofreading, review all of the requirements for the grant proposal again to make sure that all required materials are included, and that they're in the right place in the proposal.

10 Common Mistakes in Proposal Writing

1. Poor writing
2. No project planning
3. Inaccurate costs
4. Typos
5. Buzzwords
6. Budget doesn't match narrative
7. Last-minute writing
8. Assuming reviewers are experts
9. Ignoring instructions
10. Idea ≠ purpose of award

5. After You've Submitted Your Proposal

You and your team just completed a major project that required a lot of time and effort. Take some time to commemorate your success!

The funding organization should give you a timeframe for their review process and when you will receive their decision. Avoid pestering them in the meantime, but if that deadline passes and you haven't heard from them, it's reasonable to check in.

If your project is approved, that's great! Follow up with the funder about what to do next. This is a good time to review requirements for the grant, such as reporting your activities to the funder. You can also use this time to learn specifics about how the funding will work, such as the procedures for getting reimbursed for project expenses.

If your proposal is not accepted, it doesn't mean your project was a bad idea or poorly planned. There are many possible reasons a proposal might not be accepted. The funder might have perceived a mismatch between their mission and the project. It might also be simple competition: many grants are very competitive, and funders can't approve every proposal that they might want to.

You can request feedback from the funding organization, including suggestions for improving the proposal. Keep lines of communication open, because this organization might be an option for funding a different project in the future, or they might be able to direct you to other funding opportunities. Be sure to communicate with all stakeholders at your institution and share feedback that the funder provided. A debriefing meeting among the staff who worked on the proposal can be beneficial.

If you seek funding for your project through other grants, avoid simply submitting your current proposal to the new funder after minor changes. Part of what funders evaluate is how well your project connects to their specific mission and goals, and effectively communicating that connection requires studying the funder in question. In particular, the abstract and narrative should be substantially revised or rewritten to reflect your project's relevance to the new funder.

6. Additional Writing Resources

If you want more information about writing proposals for grants, you can start with these resources:

- [Applying for a Grant](#), from Community Toolbox

- [Grant Writing Basics](#), from the Grants.gov Community Blog

- [Grant Writing Tip Sheets](#), from the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

- [Introduction to Project Budgets](#), from Candid.org

Acknowledgments

Content in this guidance developed by Jarrod Irwin, former Coordinator, NNLM Region 1 - Southeast Atlantic Region.

Appendix: Example Logic Models and Template

This appendix provides examples of logic models for an outreach program and a collaborative community project, along with a blank template.

Program Logic Model Example: Health Information Outreach

Title

Health Information Outreach

Goal

Improve community members' abilities to find, evaluate, and use health information

Inputs: What we invest

- Staff
- Volunteers
- Time
- Money
- Research findings
- Materials
- Equipment
- Technology
- Partners

Activities: What we do and who we reach

What we do

- Conduct workshops and meetings
- Train
- Deliver services
- Develop products, curricula, resources
- Facilitate access to information
- Work with media

Who we reach

- Participants
- Clients

- Agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Decision-makers
- Customers
- Clinical professionals
- Members of Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

Outcomes: Why this project?

Short-term results

Learning

- Awareness
- Knowledge
- Attitudes
- Skills
- Opinions
- Aspirations
- Motivations

Intermediate results

Action

- Behavior
- Practice
- Decision-making
- Policies
- Social Action

Long-term results

Conditions

- Health
- Social
- Economic
- Civic
- Environmental

Assumptions

- Beliefs about the environment and community
- Should be confirmed before beginning the program

External Factors

- Positive and negative influences
- Culture, economics, politics, demographics
- Should be confirmed before beginning the program

Project Logic Model Example: Community Partnership

Title

Connecting Parents to Quality Online Health Information Related to Children's Health and Wellness

- Partnership of Health Science Library, Public Library, and three nonprofit community-based organization providing support to families.

Goal

Improve parents' ability to find children's health information

Inputs: What we invest

- Consumer health information training session modules
- Trainers (public and health science librarians to conduct training sessions)
- Computer-training facilities
- Funding
- Promotional materials for online health information

Activities: What we do and who we reach

What we do

- Promote online health information to community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Promote use of reference services at local libraries among CBO clients
- Conduct 10 or more online search classes with parents who use the CBOs

Who we reach

- 70 or more parents trained
- 150 or more public library users receive MedlinePlus brochures
- CBO clients

Outcomes: Why this project?

Short-term results

Learning

- Parents will increase their ability to find online health information
- Parents will identify ways to contact local reference librarians

Intermediate results

Action

- Parents will use online health information resources to research their future health concerns
- Parents will contact reference librarians for assistance with health information
- CBOs will request more training sessions for parents

Long-term results

Conditions
- Improved health literacy
- Improved child health
- Improved community support for public library

Assumptions
- Convenient computer training facilities can be identified
- Parents in the CBO programs can be motivated to attend online computer training sessions
- Reference librarians are available to teach at times convenient to parents

External Factors
- Positive: The main branch of the public library has a computer training facility with 10 computers and Internet access
- Negative: Anticipated cuts in the public library budget may lead to staff lay-offs and decreased hours of operation

Logic Model Template

Title:

Goal:

Inputs: What you invest

Activities

What we do

Who we reach

Outcomes: Why this project?

Short term results

Intermediate results

Long term results

Assumptions

External factors

Positive

Negative

Appendix: Proposal Preparation Checklist

Use this checklist to track and plan your proposal.

1. RFP/Documents

____ Obtain complete copy of RFP

____ Distribute RFP to appropriate staff

____ Prepare questions for submission to the contacting officer

____ Receive and review responses to questions

____ Collect, distribute and review pertinent background documents

____ Submit letter of intent, if necessary

____ Make special note of deadlines for submission

2. Preparing for the Proposal

____ Hold strategy meetings, if necessary

____ Determine number and type of staffing needs

____ Identify equipment and/or supply needs

____ Obtain specs and costs of any equipment

____ Gather background data/statistics

____ Sketch rough draft of budget

____ Identify proposal writer

____ Make sure organization meets mandatory criteria

3. Proposal

____ Prepare draft outline of proposal

____ Determine document format (font, major/minor headings, etc.)

____ Determine page numbers for each section

____ Determine review, feedback and editing process

4. Gathering Appendices

_____ Collect CVs of all individuals participating in the project

_____ Obtain any additional information from participants, if necessary

_____ Obtain letters of support

_____ Gather any special pages, charts, etc.

5. Finishing Touches

_____ Spell check all sections

_____ Prepare table of contents

_____ Prepare cover letter

_____ Have "outsider" read proposal

_____ Select cover design

6. Packaging

_____ Make required numbers of copies of proposal

_____ Check pages in each copy for legibility

_____ Make sure no pages are missing

_____ Determine how proposal will be packaged

_____ Ensure sufficient quantities of all packaging items are available

Appendix: Program Planning Exercise

Only 20% of your time will be spent writing and packaging the proposal. The other 80% of your time will be spent developing and planning your program. The more work you put into planning the program, the easier it will be to write the proposal

Project Name:

Need Statement

- What is the need?
- Who?
- Where?
- Why?
- What evidence do you have of the problem?

Goals and Objectives

Goal:

Objective 1:

- What is the direction of change?
- What will be the degree of change?
- What is the time frame?

Objective 2:

- What is the direction of change?
- What will be the degree of change?
- What is the time frame?

Methods

How? (each task)	Personnel/Resources?	Timeframe?
Add your tasks.	Add your personnel and resources.	Add how long you think it will take.

Evaluation

- What will you measure and when?
- How will you determine the baseline?
- How will you measure the goals/objectives?

Budget

- List personnel needed
- List equipment needed
- List supplies
- Other resources