

Preparing your proposal.

A couple of points to consider:

- Every grant competition is competitive. Your proposal may be one in 100 proposals submitted for consideration for a single grant award. Or, your proposal may be one in only four proposals submitted for consideration for a single grant award. Either way, you are competing against another proposal. So, you need to make your proposal the best possible proposal.
- Most grant competitions are based on points. That is, the granting agency has pre-determined the number of points for each section of the proposal. For example, it could designate as follows: 25% for creativity of proposal, 25% for the level of skills and experience of the requester, 25% for cost-effectiveness and 25% for the extent to which the project is sustainable. In this way, you know which aspects to concentrate on when you are working on your proposal. For example, if the point breakdown is: 25% for creativity of the proposal, 50% for the level of skills and experience by the requester, 15% for cost-effectiveness and 10% for the extent to which the project is sustainable; then, you should make sure your proposal spotlights the skills and experience you and your team have.
- Humans read the proposals, so you need to make sure your proposal is both factual and interesting to read. Telling a clear story in an effective way puts the reader in a better frame of mind when deciding on a score for your proposal.
- Your proposal needs to demonstrate how ready you are implement your project. That means you have to describe the project in as much detail as possible. You don't want the proposal reader to be left with questions about your project (because you won't be there to answer the questions), and give you fewer points for a specific aspect of your project.
- There are limits to amount of information you can provide. Many electronic applications limit the number of words (or characters) use can use to respond to a question about your proposal (and, that tool will automatically limit you). And, most other applications limit you to a specific number of pages, and if you go even one line over onto an additional page, your proposal is automatically disqualified (regardless of how good your proposal is...it probably won't even be read).

Step One

Carefully read the outline for what you need to include in your proposals. You must address each point or answer each question asked in the request for proposals. Create a checklist of the items you need to include in your proposal. Then, before you submit the proposal, go through the checklist to make sure you included all of the required items, and that you addressed all of the questions.

This sounds basic, but it is very important, because if you don't answer a question or don't include a required item, your proposal will not be competitive. For example, if a request for proposals requires you to include both an 'itemized budget' and a 'budget narrative' that explains how you expect to use the funds you are requesting, and you don't submit both pieces as part of your application, then you will lose points for your proposal.

Also, be careful to notice if there are any requirements for types of fonts or formats that need to be used. Again, if you don't follow these requirements, your application may never be read.

Step Two

Develop an outline of your proposal, making sure which sections address the questions required by the request for proposals. Consider writing a proposal like writing a paper for a class. The proposal needs to flow in a logical way. As visual information is often helpful, consider 'drawing' out your proposal, explaining how you get from the broad idea to development of goals to activities which address the goals to desired deliverables and outcomes to how these outcomes will be evaluated. In this way, you know if the information flows in a way an average person will understand it.

Step Three

Define your goals and objectives. The request for proposals will typically outline a set of goals it expects to achieve by offering the grant. You should consider how your project addresses these goals. If your project doesn't address these goals, you have two choices: adjust your project to be able to address the goals, or do not apply for the grant. However, you should never say you will do something if you really do not have skills or interest in doing something, and you should make sure the goals the request for proposal outlines do not force you to compromise on you or your organization's guiding principles and mission and vision statements.

Step Four

Write your proposal. Consider dividing the sections into 'chunks,' especially if the application is an electronic application. In this way, you can write specific paragraphs which address specific topics, and you are able to edit these to make sure they fit within the limits of the application. Make sure you have time to write the proposal, edit the proposal for *content*, review the proposal at least once, edit the proposal for grammar, and load the proposal in the electronic application.

Step Five

After you have completed the proposal, re-read it carefully to make sure it would make sense to a person who does not know anything about you or your organization. For example, are you including words or acronyms which are not common to someone outside your field (or your country)? Is the flow logical? Does it adequately explain your goals and objectives? Is your evaluation process clear? You should also make sure another person not familiar with your idea reads the proposal to see if it makes sense. And, make sure your proposal addresses all of the items the request for proposals asks you to cover.

Step Six

Go through your checklist to make sure you have included all required pieces.

Step Seven

Submit your proposal.