Writing a Proposal
Office of Research Services
Types of Proposals

You can apply for funding in many different areas, including:

- Program
- Research
- Technical assistance
- Planning/Coordinating
- Solicited – a request for you to use the funds for a specific program in a specific way
- Unsolicited – You request funds for a program that has not yet been specified
- External
Types of Grants

- **Block Grant** – Funds distributed by the federal government to a state or city for broad purposed (community development block grant), allocated based on populations.

- **Challenge Grant** – A grant offered by a funder to encourage other grantmakers or individuals to support a particular program or organization. Payable only if other funds are obtained in an amount specified by the donor.

- **Endowment Grant** – A transfer of money or property donated to an institution.

- **General Operating Support** – Also called “Unrestricted funds.” Refers to support for the organization as a whole, and for any purpose that furthers the organization’s mission (ex. Secretarial support, rent, building security and maintenance, development staff, a fiscal manager, insurance, etc.).

- **In-Kind Contribution** – Goods and services that are donated to a particular organization for a grant program. (Ex. Volunteer time, food, equipment, space rental, staff or management time that is paid for by other programs).

- **Matching Grant** – A grant that is made specifically to match or supplement funds provided by another donor, usually as a specified proportion of the total program cost. Often provided as a challenge grant, and paid on the condition that the other funds are obtained.

- **Restricted Grant** – Contributions and donations that arrive with strings attached. These restrictions can determine for what purpose the money can be spent, by when it can be used, or whether matching grants are required to make the funds available.

- **Seed Grant** – A grant that is made to start a program, with the intention of leveraging other support to sustain it.

- **Technology Grant** – Grant monies specified for use on technology.

- **Unrestricted Grant** – Money donated by individuals or businesses, or given to general operating grants, to further the mission of an organization. May be spent for any organizational priority or need.
General Terms Used in Grants

- **Allowable activities** – Project activities and expenses described in the program guidelines that can be included in the proposed budget

- **Authorized Signature** – The only person authorized/allowed to sign grant proposals and accept awards on behalf of the university

- **Cost-sharing** – A portion of the project or program costs not borne by the funding agency. It includes all contributions, including cash and in-kind, that a recipient makes to an award.

- **Guidelines** – The directions explaining what activities an agency wants to fund, what applications must contain, how applications must be prepared, and how proposals will be reviewed

- **Indirect cost** – A percentage established by a Federal department or agency for a grantee organization, which the grantee uses in computing the dollar amount it charges to the grant to reimburse itself for indirect costs incurred in doing the work of the grant project (e.g., the amount of time a bookkeeper funded by local funds spends providing payroll support to grant-paid staff)

- **Letter of intent** – A letter from applicants requested by some programs prior to the application deadline to assist in the review process

- **Letter of support** – A letter that expresses the endorsement and encouragement of a community partner for a proposed grant program

- **Prospectus** - A prospectus is a proposal to undertake a research project. A prospectus is a statement that briefly describes the questions, materials, and methods a researcher will use in his or her research. A prospectus indicates that the research project fits the required parameters.

- **RFP** – Request for Proposal (RFP) is a formal solicitation by a grantor seeking applications from potential grantees. RFPs describe what groups are eligible to apply (e.g., nonprofits and states), the background of the program, recent research, what each applicant is required to include in its application, how much money the grantor plans to award and to how many groups, the range of the awards, etc.

- **Summary** – An overview of a document such as a report or proposal. Often longer than an abstract, it may be distributed in place of the primary document to the public or to specific interested parties
What Funding Sources Look For

- Severity of Need
- Shared Mission
- Consistency
- Understanding the Problem & Solution
- Competence
- Cost Effectiveness
- Accountability
- Realistic Goals & Budget
- Project Readiness
- Eligible Matches
Guides to Grant Writing

- From the ORS Website On-Line Resources: [http://www.coastal.edu/grants](http://www.coastal.edu/grants)

- Many federal agencies also include guidance on writing successful grant proposals on their Web sites. For example, the [National Science Foundation](https://www.nsf.gov) has many documents which are useful to researchers in all disciplines. [The National Institutes of Health](https://www.nih.gov) has a section called "Grant Writing Tips Sheets". [The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance(CFDA)](https://www.cfda.gov) Web site has a section on developing and writing grants proposals.
Grant Writing Online Courses

- The Foundation Center's Learning Lab has a proposal writing short course providing basic information for all fundraisers, academic and non-profit. *A Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal*, by S. Joseph Levine, Ph.D., Michigan State University, provides writing hints and examples for each major section of a proposal, and a wide array of links to other proposal writing resources. Finally, the Grantsmanship Tutorial is designed to assist investigators as they prepare the grant proposal.

- GrantProposal.com
  A very well organized site on proposal writing. Includes an overview, inquiry and cover letters, standard components of a proposal, a sample proposal, advice from funders, and more. An excellent section on researching funding opportunities is included also. [http://www.grantproposal.com/](http://www.grantproposal.com/)
Sample Request for Proposals:

- National Science Foundation Recent Funding Opportunities: http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_list.jsp?org=NSF&ord=rcnt
- Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina: http://www.ccfgives.org

Sample Request for Proposals, Letters of Inquiry, Cover Letters and Successful Proposals:

- Proposalwriter.com http://www.proposalwriter.com/grantsamples.html#samples
Gathering Data

Statistical Data are needed to:

- Help prove your need for the project, particularly in your locale;
- Help refine the approach to the need;
- Document the degree to which your organization has previously been successful;
- Illustrate that you know what is going on locally and nationally

***Funders will want sufficient data included to answer questions which any sensible reviewer will ask, but they don’t want to be bombarded with pages of charts and graphs***
Gathering Data

- General Information from the OGSR Website: www.coastal.edu/grants
- Information about Coastal Carolina University: www.coastal.edu/about
- Information About Horry County: http://www.horrycounty.org
- Information about Georgetown County: www.georgetowncountysc.org
- Information About South Carolina: http://www.sciway.net/statistics/
- Federal Census Information http://www.census.gov
- Statistics from over 100 Federal Agencies http://www.fedstats.gov
- National Center for Charitable Statistics http://www.nccs.urban.org
Sources of Data

- **Federated Funds (such as United Way):** see what research they have done locally, whom they have funded and who else they know of in your field.

- **Phone directories:** look in the government section and Yellow Pages.

- **Elected Officials:** Representatives and their staff keep up with who is doing what in their jurisdictions, and may have done research or collected data themselves.

- **Local Government Agencies:** Department heads and their staff may have collaborated or communicated with groups doing similar work or their own studies.

- **Area Colleges and Universities:** faculty or students may have conducted research or worked with particular populations.

- **Professional or trade associations:** they will know who is addressing similar issues in your area.

- **Use the Library:** indexes of newspapers, magazines and journals; specialized encyclopedias; sources of data for domestic and international finances, economics and trade; reference materials on medicine, technology, mathematics and health; and data on economics, geography, ethnic populations and transportation.
Sources of Data

Some useful Websites include:

- Local, State and Federal Information - [http://www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov)
- Federal Census Information - [http://www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
- Statistics from over 100 Federal Agencies - [http://www.fedstats.gov](http://www.fedstats.gov)
- National Center for Charitable Statistics - [http://nccs.urban.org](http://nccs.urban.org)
Using a Timeline for Development

Step 1  Identify Need

Step 2  Identify those to be involved planning/writing the grant proposal, including other agencies; Conduct needs assessment; develop your case for funding; identify potential funding sources.

Step 3  Complete work on potential funding sources; send letter of inquiry to the best prospects (even if you intend to call or meet in person).

Step 4  Reach agreement on the final version of project idea, need and approach, and develop first draft of proposal. Seek feedback from colleagues, partners and collaborators.

Step 5  Modify the proposal using input received, preparing final version. Submit proposal for internal and external reviews and approval. Submit the proposal to the funding source.

Step 6  Verify receipt of the proposal by the funding source and find out when a decision is likely to be made. Funding agency may request additional information or schedule a site visit.

Step 7  Approval or declination is received. In any case, obtain comments of reviewers.

Step 8  Check or authorization to begin spending is received; if proposal has been declined, resubmit with revisions.
Grant Writing Basics (short version)

Preparation

1. Goals
2. Identify the right funding sources
3. Contact the funders
4. Acquire the proposal guidelines
5. Know the submission deadline
6. Determine personnel needs
7. Update your timeline
Grant Writing Basics (short version)

- Writing the Proposal
  1. Narratives
     a. Tips on Writing the narrative
     b. The HOOK
  2. Budget
  3. Supporting Materials
  4. Authorized Signatures
  5. Specifications
  6. Submission Checklist

- Follow Up
Basic Parts of a Proposal

- **Cover Sheet** - a case statement and proposal summary;

- **Needs Assessment** - a concise demonstration of the specific situation, opportunity, problem, issue, need, and the community your proposal addresses;

- **Program Goals and Objectives** - a succinct description of the proposed project/program's outcome and accomplishments in measurable terms, and how it matches the funder’s interests;

- **Methodology** - a rational, direct, chronological description of the proposed project and the process used to achieve the outcome and accomplishments;

- **Evaluation** - the plan for meeting performance and producing the program/project;

- **Budget/Funding Requirements** - a realistic budget with a detailed explanation of the funding request, committed matching funds, evidence of sound fiscal management, and long term funding plan;

- **Qualifications** - your organization's background, its funding history, board involvement and staff qualifications, and its capacity to carry out your proposal;

- **Conclusion** - a brief, concise summary of your proposal;

- **Appendices** - additional attachments required by the funder, such as proof of tax-exempt status, organizational and financial documents, staff/board lists, support/commitment letters.
Parts of the Proposal

1) **Cover Letter** (one page)

   Provide a clear, concise overview of the organization, purpose and reason for
   and amount of the funding request. Be sure to show how your proposal furthers
   the grantmaker's mission, goals and matches the funder’s grant application
   guidelines. Cover Letters should be typed on letterhead.

2) **Cover Sheet** (1/2 page)

   Also called an executive summary, this case statement and proposal summary is
   the most important component of your proposal. Summarize all of the key
   information and convince the grantmaker to consider your proposal for
   funding. Introduce your proposal, present a clear, concise summary of, and the
   visual framework for, the proposed project/program, and include: Applicant
   contact information, purpose of the funding request, need/problem, objectives,
   methods, total project cost, amount requested.
3) Narrative (10-15 Pages)
   a) Needs Assessment (Problem Statement) (3-4 Pages)

   Objectively address specific situation, opportunity, problem, issue, need, and the community your proposal addresses. Support your statement with qualified third-party research/evidence to justify the need or problem. Clearly, concisely demonstrate that a relevant, compelling problem or need exists, and include the following:
   - Description of target population.
   - Definition of community problem to be addressed and service area need.

b) Program Goals and Objectives (1 - 2 pages)

   Describe the outcome of the grant in measurable terms, in a succinct description of the proposed project outcome and accomplishments, including your overall goal(s); specific objectives or ways in which you will meet the goal(s). Program Goals and Objectives should include:
   - Minimum of one goal for each problem or need in the problem or statement.
   - Description of the benefiting population.
   - Performance - the action which occurs within a specific time frame at an expected proficiency.
   - Process - the method by which the action will occur.
   - Product - the tangible results from the action's performance and process.
c) **Methodology** (4 + Pages)

Describe the process to be used to achieve the outcome and accomplishments, in a rational, direct, chronological description of the proposed project; actions that will accomplish your objectives; impact of your proposed activities, how they will benefit the community and who will carry out the activities; time frame for your project/program; long-term strategies for maintaining the on-going project/program. Methodology should include:

- Restatement of problems and objectives.
- Clear description and explanation of program/project scope and activities.
- Sequence of activities, staffing, clients and client selection.
- Time line of activities.

d) **Evaluation** (1 - 2 Pages)

Determine the plan for meeting performance and producing the program/project and justify how you will measure the effectiveness of your activities, who will be involved in evaluating and how they will be used; your measured criteria to produce a successful project/program; the expected outcome/achievement at the end of funding period. Evaluations should include:

- Plan for evaluating accomplishment of objectives.
- Plan for modifying process and methodology.
- Provide methods - criteria, data, instruments, analysis.
4) Budget

- Clearly delineate costs to be met by the funder and all other funding sources; outline both administrative and program costs. For specific projects, include separate budgets for the general operating and the special project. Show income and expenses in columnar form (according to general accounting/bookkeeping principles).

- Delineate personnel costs for salary and fringe benefit information, and other-than-personal-services (OTPS) expenses for facility operating (rent/mortgage, utilities, maintenance, taxes), and travel, postage, equipment costs, supplies, and insurance, etc.

- List actual committed and pending sources of income only. Include fees for service, government funds, corporate/private grants, individual donations, etc.

- Prepare a detailed budget consistent with the proposal narrative

- Include project costs to be incurred at the time of the program's implementation.

- Include no miscellaneous or contingency categories, include all items requested for funding, and all items to be paid by other sources, consultants.

- Detail fringe benefits separately from salaries, detail all OTPS costs.

- List separately all donated services, including volunteers, indirect costs where appropriate.

- Sufficiently justify performance of the tasks described in the narrative.
5) Qualifications (1-2 pages)

Describe applicant, qualifications for funding and establish credibility.

Demonstrate the means and methodology to solve the problem, or meet the need, within 12-15 months, and include the following:

- Organization identity and purpose, constituents and service area. Brief summary of organization history, mission and goals.
- Brief description of organization current programs, activities, service statistics, and strengths/accomplishments. Long-range goals and current programs/projects and activities.
- Evidence and support (including qualified third-party statistics) of accomplishments.
- Number of board members, full time paid staff, part-time paid staff, and volunteers. Evidence of Board involvement, activity and key staff members qualifications and administrative competence.

6) Conclusion (1/2 page)

Present a brief, concise summary of your proposal that states your case, problem, solution and sources/uses of project/program funds.
7) Appendices

Additional attachments are usually required at the funder's discretion. Typical appendices generally include:

- Verification of tax-exempt status (IRS determination letter)
- Certificate of Incorporation and By-Laws
- Listing of officers and Board of Directors
- Financial statements for last completed fiscal year (audited, preferred)
- Current general operating budget and special project budget (if applicable)
- List of clients served (if appropriate)
- List of other current funding sources and uses
- Biographies of key personnel or resumes (only if requested)
- Support letters or endorsements (limited number)
- Commitment letters from project/program consultants or subcontractors (if applicable)
- Diagrams for equipment or schematics for building requests (if applicable)
A Note on Style of Writing

- Write on a 9th or 10th grade level.
- Avoid technical jargon, slang, trendy phrases, use of multi-syllabic words and contractions.
- Avoid abbreviations of proper nouns and use of undefined acronyms.
- Use positive action terms to set the image for your proposal.
- Eliminate gender-specific language.
- Use white space, bullets and paragraph breaks for visual appeal.
- Refer to the APA Publication Manual for style and writing guides, documentation and references.
Hints and Tips for Proposal Writing

- Start with outcomes. Be specific in what you wish to achieve and design your project back from these outcomes.
- Carefully match your goals and outcomes with those required by the grant guidelines.
- Talk to the grant contact person to receive specific information about the purpose and goals of the grant. Find research to support your project idea. Programs that have been previously validated have more merit because they have shown success in the past.
- Find a district sponsor. Get them to help with any red tape or information you might need to complete your grant proposal.
- Make your grant proposal interesting to read through good formatting. Remember that people are going to judge your ideas against others and a pleasing and well-organized presentation will get you further. Include pie charts. Set off your information with appropriate indentations.
- Use language to your advantage. Quote from notable sources.
- As you write your strategies for the grant proposal, keep assessment methods in mind. Think about how you are going to measurably show what you will accomplish.
- Look closely at any funding rules to make sure you do not ask for items that the grant will not fund. For example, Florida state grants do not allow food items to be bought with grant money.
- Check out the grant to see if matching funds are required. Check with your Grants Office to find out the rules concerning salaries for any individuals working on the project. Find out whether the grant requires outside evaluators that you may have to pay for out of the grant.
- Make sure your budget narrative and your budget summary match exactly.
- Grants are stamped when they are received. Try to send in your grants a few days early so that it appears you are on the ball.
- Because of the time constraints on many grants, you must plan ahead. Also, make sure you are not competing with others at your own school or district for the same money.
- Make a database if one is not currently available in your district of important demographic numbers and statistics. Place this information in your grant proposals as requested highlighting special needs.
- If you plan to write numerous grants, create templates for commonly needed forms. This is especially useful for state and federal grant that repeat a lot of the same information.
- Be honest both in the grant proposal itself and with yourself concerning what you can actually accomplish. Remember, you have to follow through with whatever plans you make.
Top Ten Reasons Proposals are Declined

1. "The organization does not meet our priorities."
   Research thoroughly before applying.
2. "The organization is not located in our geographic area of funding."
   Get the guidelines before applying, and read the guidelines cover to cover.
3. "The proposal does not follow our prescribed format."
   Read the application information very carefully and follow it exactly.
4. "The proposal is poorly written and difficult to understand."
   Have friends and experienced people critique the grant before you submit it.
5. "The proposed budget/grant request is not within our funding range."
   Look at average size of grants of the funder.
6. "We don't know these people. Are they credible?"
   Have board members and other funded organizations help you establish a relationship and give you credibility.
7. "The proposal doesn't seem urgent. I'm not sure it'll have an impact."
   Study the priorities and have a skilled writer do this section to make it "grab" the funder. Your aim is to sound urgent, but not in crisis.
8. "The objectives and plan of action of the project greatly exceed the budget and timelines for implementation."
   Be realistic about the programs and budgets. Only promise what can realistically be delivered for the amount requested.
9. "We've allocated all the money for this grant cycle."
   Don't take this personally. It is a fact of life. Try the next grant cycle. Next time, submit at least a month before the deadline to give ample opportunity for questions and a site visit.
10. "There is not enough evidence that the program will become self-sufficient and sustain itself after the grant is completed."
   Add a section to the proposal on your plans for self-sufficiency and develop a long-term strategy.
A Reviewer’s Perspective

Two quotes from people who review grant proposals:

- “If I can’t understand the title, then I don’t fund it.” W. Tilt, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- “If you haven’t told us what you want by the end of the third paragraph, chances are you’re not going to get it.” J. West, Phillips Petroleum Foundation

The following quotes are taken from The Foundation's Center's "Guide to Proposal Writing: What the Funders Have to Say."

- "Statistics are important, but can be confusing. Use them when they set the stage and give a context for the project."
- "Ideas need to stand out. If the format of the proposal helps accomplish that, then it is O.K. But fancy fonts and layout don't carry much weight in and of themselves."
- "If it is clear, concise, to the point, everything should be there without having to look for it. There should be meat on the bones but no fat."
- Start with clarity and no fluff. I remember one proposal that was just bullet format. It was clear, succinct and to the point. For a literary point of view, it was dull, but programmatically, it was clear and precise."
- "We like to see more, rather than less, information is the budget. We want to see how our money will be used, how it will fit into the whole picture."
- "I don't like to see in-kind services in the budget often, it's just a million volunteers licking stamps. It can be a bogus attempt to make a $300,000 budget look like a million dollars."
- "What makes me crazy is an organization ignoring our guidelines."
- "Don't try to pull the wool over our eyes. Be honest and straightforward."
- "I hate proposals in plastic or loose leaf binders with lots of tabs and indices. It's also ecologically unsound."