

# A Guide to Proposal Planning and Writing

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by Jeremy T. Miner and Lynn E. Miner

## OVERVIEW

### Grants Marketplace

Grant seeking is a multibillion-dollar-a-year business. If it were a single company, it would rank at the top of the *Fortune 500* list. The GRANTS database identifies approximately 10,000 public and private programs that disperse grant dollars. The prefatory comments in this *Guide* offer time-tested suggestions on how you can plan and write successful grant proposals so that you can get your share of those dollars. These grantseeking tips represent a condensed version of information presented in another Greenwood Press publication, *Proposal Planning and Writing*, by Lynn E. Miner and Jeremy T. Miner (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2003). And for a more in-depth presentation of grants processes and products, including paragraph-by-paragraph analyses of proposals funded by private and public sponsors, refer to *Models of Proposal Planning and Writing* (Greenwood Press, 2005) by Jeremy T. Miner and Lynn E. Miner.

Grant seekers usually enter the grants arena with many questions. "How do I find grant money?" "What are my chances of getting a grant?" "Is it easier to get public or private grants?" "Do I have to know the 'right people' in order to get a grant?" "How big a grant can I get?" "What can I do with my grant money?" "How hard is it to get my first grant?" "Should I talk to grantmakers before submitting a proposal?" "What do grantmakers look for in a proposal?" Questions like these--and many others--often translate into one fundamental question, "Is it all really worth it?" For those organizations that received part of the over **250 billion dollars** given last year in public and private philanthropy, the answer is clearly "Yes, it really is worth it."

### Motivations of Grant Makers

Why do grant makers "give away" money? Grant makers (sponsors) are vitally concerned about social problems, injustices, or inequities. They are so concerned, in fact, that they are willing to invest their money to address these problems. In essence, they see a gap between *what is* and *what ought to be*. Another name for the "gap" in grant parlance is the "need." The gap represents their view of the world. Grant makers exist because gaps exist; their goal is to close these gaps.

Successful grant writers understand the sponsor's view of the world and express that view in the grant proposal. Successful grant writers are able to reflect the "priorities" of the sponsor. Too often, grant applicants focus on their own need for funds instead of matching their projects with the sponsor's priorities. You should select sponsors that share your values and tailor your proposals to them. Sponsors view grants as investments in an improved future. Proposals are funded when they express the same priorities shared by the sponsor. Projects are rejected when they do not precisely reflect the priorities of the sponsor.

## Getting Started

There are three main steps to follow in successful grant seeking. First, you must identify potential grant makers who would be interested in supporting your project. You should use the entries in this *Directory* as a starting point to select those prospects with a high probability of financing your needs. You can use one of the four indexes--Subject, Sponsoring Organizations, Grants by Program Type, or Geographic--to locate the appropriate grant opportunities for you. If you need additional reference materials, you may wish to consult other publications in the Greenwood Grants Collection or contact the nearest Foundation Center Library, which will contain reference books on private foundations in your region as well as basic information on government and corporate grants. Call the Foundation Center at 1-800-424-9836 for the location of the collection closest to you.

Second, after you have identified your list of potential prospects, you should contact key people who can help you plan your proposal before you start writing. In essence, you must do your homework if you are going to be successful. A sure way to fail in grantseeking is to write a proposal without talking to key people who can maximize your possibility of success. The Systems and Procedures section below offers a few of the basic proposal-planning strategies.

Third, after you have qualified your prospects and planned an effective approach, you must produce a carefully written, well-reasoned proposal. Some grant proposals are rejected because they contain bad ideas; most grant proposals are rejected because they contain good ideas poorly written. There are basically two types of grant proposals: (1) long proposals to government agencies, and (2) shorter letter proposals to private sponsors. The final section of this *Guide* offers proposal planning and writing tips for both types.

## PROPOSAL PLANNING

### Overview

There are thousands of grant programs identified in the main body of this *Directory*. This section of the *Guide* identifies a few of the other basic reference sources for finding public and private grants. While identifying possible funding sources is not particularly difficult, the greater challenge lies in knowing what to do with that information once you have it. As a result, it is important to understand the preproposal contact process: what to do after you identify a potential sponsor but before you mail your proposal. Following these steps will significantly improve your chances of getting funded.

### Finding Out About Public Grants

*Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.* The federal government remains a major provider of grant dollars, despite its decline in funding for social services and health and welfare programs during the last two decades. Most federal agencies have some type of grantmaking program. While there is no single source of information about all government grants, the most complete

federal grant reference source is the *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA), available from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, DC 20402. It is also available online at <http://www.cfda.gov>. Many of the federal grant programs listed in the Directory of Research Grants originate from the most current CFDA. The CFDA is published every spring and updated each fall. The program number entry for the government grants in this *Directory* refers to the grant program number in the CFDA.

*Federal Register*. In order to keep current with the continually changing federal grant scene, you may wish to periodically check the *Federal Register*, the government's "daily newspaper." It is also available from the Superintendent of Documents and lists notices of legal rules and regulations, and application deadlines for new grant programs from federal agencies. It can be accessed electronically at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr>.

*Grants.Gov*. Grants.gov allows organizations to electronically find, apply for, and manage competitive federal grants. Visit <http://www.grants.gov> to search more than 900 grant opportunities offered by 26 federal agencies. The goal of this Web site is to simplify the grant application process and reduce paperwork by standardizing the information collected online.

*FedBizOpps*. Besides awarding grants, the federal government also awards contracts. A grant is a mechanism to support a project whereas a contract is an instrument to procure a project. FedBizOpps is the single source for federal government procurement opportunities that exceed \$25,000. All federal agencies must use FedBizOpps to tell the public about contract opportunities over \$25,000. It is available online at <http://www.fedbizopps.gov>.

## Finding Out About Private Grants

Private grants come from both foundations and corporations. Brief overviews are presented for both sponsor categories.

**Overview of Private Foundations.** There are more than 65,000 private foundations in the United States. Annually, they award more than \$20 billion. While the figures vary slightly from year to year, the 10,000 largest foundations have 90 percent of the assets and make 80 percent of the awards. By federal law, foundations must give away 5 percent of their market value assets or interest income each year, whichever is greater. This means, for example, that the W. K. Kellogg Foundation with \$6 billion in market assets must award at least \$300 million annually. Foundations must follow the 5 percent rule or they risk losing their tax-exempt status.

At present, roughly 15 percent of the private foundations maintain Web sites that disseminate grant-related information, and that number is slowly growing. There are two major Web sites that maintain links to foundations. One is maintained by the Foundation Center: <http://fdncenter.org>. The other is maintained by the Council on Foundations: <http://www.cof.org>. Beyond these electronic lists of foundation links, a comprehensive print list of Web sites is found in the front of this *Directory*.

**Appealing to Foundations.** Foundations award grants to those organizations presenting a convincing case that they will help the foundation reach its long-term goals. The grant appeals

can assume several different forms. Some foundations make their money available for *specific purposes*, e.g., building funds, operating support, equipment, or seed capital. Some foundations make their money available to serve *specific populations*, e.g., frail elderly, minorities, homeless. Some foundations make their money available to *specific types of organizations*, e.g., hospitals, universities, boys' and girls' clubs. Some foundations make their money available to *specific geographic areas*, e.g., a city, a county, a state, a region. Some foundations have their own *specific priorities and interests*, which determine the types of programs they support. The program descriptions in this *Directory* often list sponsor preferences and any program restrictions or requirements for applying. With these considerations in mind, cast your project in a way that appeals to the foundation's self-defined mission.

**Analyzing Foundation Tax Returns.** To gain additional information about all foundations, large or small, review their tax records. By law, foundations must submit IRS 990-AR (Annual Reports) or 990-PF (Private Foundation) returns. The 990s are the private foundation's equivalent to your individual 1040 income tax records. While you would not want anybody looking at your personal tax returns, you can examine the tax returns of private foundations online free at the GuideStar Web site--<http://www.guidestar.org>. Generally, the information is quite useful in identifying foundation personnel, grant recipients, and award amounts. In some instances you may even notice a mismatch between what sponsors say they fund and how they actually invest their dollars. Use the preproposal contact process described in the Systems and Procedures section below to investigate further these apparent inconsistencies.

**Overview of Corporate Philanthropy.** Most corporations follow a concept of "profitable philanthropy." They often fund projects that will bring them better products, happier or healthier employees, lower costs, or an improved public image--all things from which they benefit. Your challenge is to describe your project in terms that will benefit them. If your organization doesn't have a history of attracting corporate donations, start small and request larger grants as you establish credibility. You may wish to request nonmonetary support as a first grant. Corporations are very cost conscious; challenge grants, dollars awarded to match other grants, have special appeal because corporations feel they are getting the most for their money. While there are nearly 2.5 million corporations, only about one-third of them make contributions to nonprofit organizations.

**Appealing to Corporations.** Corporations exist to make a profit. When you are seeking a corporate grant, you are asking for the stockholders' income. When profits increase, corporate giving increases--slightly. When profits decrease, corporate giving decreases--dramatically. When corporations make grants, they look for something in return. What can you offer them?

1. An improved corporate image? Will they have a better community reputation by funding you? Will funding your project make the local residents more productive or satisfied?
2. An improved environment around the corporation? Will your project offer improved transportation, communication, or ecology?
3. An improved benefits package? Will your project offer new or better health programs, cultural activities, or recreational facilities?
4. An improved pathway to attaining corporate goals? Will your project offer new personnel, personnel training, or availability of resources?

Your corporate proposal must emphasize what they are "buying" with their grant--prestige, employee satisfaction, or increased profits. As a result, your request should involve a project that is related in some way to their business. For instance, corporations often feel they are unfairly taxed to provide the public services required to deal with many social problems, such as illiteracy and high dropout rates. You can argue that their support will reduce long-term tax liabilities for such problems. Corporations typically support those organizations with which they already have a relationship. Don't give up if you don't make it on the first try. Use any business contacts your board, staff members, or volunteers have to help advocate for your project.

Most corporations have an informal application process. Personal contact, crucial to success in any grant solicitation, is especially important here. Again, show in concrete terms how their grant to you will benefit them. Try your answers out on your own corporate board members before you present them to the corporate funding officials you are soliciting.

### "One-Stop Shopping" for Public and Private Grants

There are many times when grant seekers want one comprehensive source that provides current information on both public and private grant makers. The GRANTS database is one such tool. It offers descriptive information on approximately 10,000 grant opportunities covering the range from curriculum development and teacher training grants to fellowship and conference opportunities. Multiple indexes provide handy cross references. The data for this *Directory* come from the GRANTS Database, available electronically on the Web through GrantSelect (<http://www.grantselect.com>), as well as online through The Dialog Corporation and Knowledge Express Data Systems (KEDS), and on CD-ROM with bimonthly updates (through The Dialog Corporation). The database also is published in specialized, subject-specific directories.

### Systems and Procedures

After reviewing the large body of proposal funding information, the beginning proposal writer is often left with two reactions: "I had no idea so much information is available," and "How do I possibly organize and manage so much information?"

The following well-established systems and procedures will help you organize and process your grant information in order to increase your chances of getting funded. With a systematic approach, you can significantly reduce your proposal development time, an important advantage, especially when you have a pressing grant deadline.

As you begin the process of prospect research with the entries in this *Directory*, look for those sponsors who share your view of the world. As you review your initial prospect list, sort them into two categories: (1) **Maybe**: on the basis of the program description, it appears that this sponsor **might** be interested in my project; and (2) **No**: it seems unlikely, based on the program description, that this sponsor would be interested in my project. Said differently, initial prospecting will not identify the final list of sponsors to whom you will submit proposals. Rather, it will identify the point from which you must gather additional prospect information before you can say "Yes, I definitely should submit a proposal." The gathering of additional information may be the most critical phase of proposal development. Successful grantseekers

follow a four-step process in conducting preproposal contacts so they can fine-tune their proposal planning and gain a competitive funding edge.

**Step One: Write to the Program Officer.** Write the program officer who was identified from your initial prospect research and request a copy of the sponsor's application forms and guidelines. In addition, request a list of past grantees and reviewers, if appropriate. Some sponsor Web sites list reviewer names. If you are unable to get specific names of past reviewers, ask the program officer for general information on the types of reviewers they use--their age, background, and training; how they are selected; how they are used in the review process; and how points are allocated to a proposal. This information will allow you to match your proposal writing style to the level of sophistication of your reviewers.

**Step Two: Call a Past Grantee.** From the information you gathered in step one, contact a past grant winner from this sponsor. Ask to speak with the project directors or the individuals who wrote the proposal. Indicate where you got their names and raise questions that will assist you in learning about the funding source.

Questioning is the foundation of preproposal contacts, getting essential background information to decide (1) if you should submit a proposal, and (2) if you submit, how best to frame the proposal so it matches the "values glasses" of the sponsor. The list of questions that you could pose is theoretically endless. Nevertheless, if you want to write a successful grant, you must PREP first, where PREP is an acronym to distinguish between four basic types of questions.

1. Position: what are the baseline situations, present circumstances, and basic facts?
2. Rationale: what are the problems, needs, and injustices that exist today?
3. Expectation: what are the implications for addressing these problems?
4. Priority: what approaches are most likely to lead to an improved situation now?

Collectively, PREP questions span a continuum of time from past actions to future intentions. Beginning grantseekers often ask too many Position questions and too few Rationale-Expectation-Priority questions. Here are some "starter questions" in each category, to which you will undoubtedly add your own.

- **Position Questions:** *Did you call or visit the sponsor before writing the proposal?* (This will give you a clue about the extent to which the grantee engaged in preproposal contact.) *Who did you find most helpful on the funding source staff?* (This query will help identify an "in-house hero," an agency staff person who may be the best source of inside information for you.) *How close was your initial budget to the awarded amount?* (The interest here is to identify the extent to which budget negotiations took place.)
- **Rationale Questions:** *You got funded because the sponsor was convinced you could solve some big problems they were concerned about. What were those big problems?* (Look for "big picture" problems that really trouble the sponsor.) *Are there problems or difficulties in this area that are particularly challenging now?* (Take note of priorities among complex problems: what are the top issues?) *Generally speaking, what are the disadvantages of the way these problems are being handled now?* (Pay attention to what's wrong today and will be worse tomorrow.)
- **Expectation Questions:** *Given the problems you identified, what are the implications of those difficulties?* (Get the informant talking about the consequences of existing problems.)

*What's the desired impact on these problems, balancing project breadth, depth, and financial resources available? (The answer to this question helps you find a proper balance within budgetary constraints.) What would you do differently next time? (Invariably, people learn from the positive experience of getting a grant and have a number of suggestions about things they would do next time to strengthen a proposal.)*

- **Priority Questions:** *Why did the sponsor think it important to solve the problem you identified? (This will give you insight to the sponsor's motivation for solving the problem.) What are the benefits you see of your approach? (Look for reasons why the sponsor found this solution so useful.) Would this approach be useful for cost reasons or something else? (Narrow the general benefits to that major motivator: money.)*

**Step Three: Call a Past Reviewer.** Contact some past reviewers and indicate that you understand they were reviewers for the grant program you intend to approach. Your goal is to learn about the actual process to be followed as your proposal is reviewed. For example, if a reviewer has only three minutes to review your proposal, you will write differently than if the reviewer has three hours to review your proposal. Ask

- **Position Questions:** *How did you get to be a reviewer? (Usually you just submit a resume and express an interest, showing how your background and expertise meshes with agency interests. Consider becoming a reviewer yourself; it's an easy way to get "inside information" and improve your success rate.) How many proposals were you given to read and how much time did you have to read them? (This answer will give you an idea of what your immediate competition will be like and the conditions under which proposals will be evaluated.) Did you follow a particular point or scoring system? (Invariably, some portions of a proposal carry greater weight than other portions. This information will enable you to concentrate your greatest efforts on the highest-scoring portions.)*
- **Rationale Questions:** *What were you told to look for? (Sometimes, reviewers are instructed to look for elements of proposals that are not requested in the application guidelines. Your proposal should respond to all items on the application guidelines and the reviewer's evaluation form.) What were the disadvantages of the way the targeted problem areas were being approached in the proposals you read? (This answer highlights reviewers' insights into problems not being addressed in the proposals they reviewed, problems that you may be able to incorporate in your proposals.) What difficulties linger that still are not being addressed? (This answer spotlights existing problems that are still being avoided.)*
- **Expectation Questions:** *What were the most common mistakes you saw in the proposals you read? (The answers are errors that you want to be sure to avoid, such as failing to number the pages, omitting the resumes of project directors or consultants, or miscalculating budgets.) If there were no budget limits, what should have been proposed that wasn't? (Playing "what if" invites creative solutions that are not normally considered.) How would you write a proposal differently now that you have been a reviewer? (People invariably learn from the positive experience of seeing the inside process of awarding grants and have a number of suggestions about things they would do if they were asked to write a proposal again.)*
- **Priority Questions:** *What's not happening in this area that should? (This answer highlights areas that need attention.) What would be the key features of an ideal solution? (Among various options, this answer indicates the components of an ideal solution.) What might be*

*the benefits of this approach?* (The response compiles the benefits list for the intervention strategy.)

**Step Four: Contact the Program Officer.** Tell your program officer you have studied the program guidelines carefully and you have some additional questions. Realize, however, that your credibility will decrease if you ask questions that are answered in their written guidelines. Use this contact as an opportunity to obtain "between the lines" information. Start by briefly describing your project, stressing its objectives and outcomes, then ask

- **Position Questions:** *How much of the money distributed this year will be available for new awards as opposed to noncompeting continuation awards?* (This answer will tell you how much money is actually available for new applicants like you.) *How are proposals being evaluated?* (This response will help you to identify the yardstick against which proposals are measured.) *Would you review our draft proposal if we got it to you early?* (A favorable response will help you better cast your proposal to meet the sponsor's expectations.)
- **Rationale Questions:** *Why have you targeted your program dollars toward this problem?* (This answer explains why money will solve the problem.) *What are the biggest hurdles in this area now?* (The response points out the biggest challenges people in the field now face.) *Which dimensions of this problem need to be addressed next?* (This answer points to the "big impact" needs.)
- **Expectation Questions:** *Does my project fall within your current priorities?* (If it does, begin writing. If it doesn't, explore different activities that might yield a better fit or ask for suggestions of other grant programs that might be interested in your project.) *What would you like to see addressed in a proposal that others may have overlooked?* (This question provides program officers with an opportunity to articulate their pet ideas.) *Can you provide me with a copy of the reviewer's evaluation form?* (Use this form to organize your proposal, using the same headings and subheadings, even if they differ from those in the application guidelines.)
- **Priority Questions:** *Would this approach produce what is needed?* (This answer helps map out a successful action plan.) *What are the long-term benefits of this solution?* (This answer describes the long-range implications of your solution.) *What outcomes do you expect from grantees?* (This answer clarifies what the program officer will expect from you.)

Successful grant seekers who follow this four-step proposal planning process can use that information to write winning proposals.

## PROPOSAL WRITING

### Overview

Public sponsors usually require full proposals that range from 15 to 100 pages and contain such sections as a cover letter, title page, abstract, introduction, need/problem, objectives, methods, evaluation, dissemination, budget, and appendixes. In contrast, private sponsors often require a letter proposal, a brief two- to five-page document in letter form that concentrates on the problem and solution portions. The remaining section of this *Guide* offers suggestions and tips on the major components of public and private proposals. For more details and examples of successful

proposals, refer to *Proposal Planning and Writing (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2003)*, and the sample letter proposal following this article. For an extensive critique of winning proposals funded by public and private sponsors, see the Greenwood publication, *Models of Proposal Planning and Writing (2005)*, by Jeremy T. Miner and Lynn E. Miner. It walks you step-by-step, from beginning to end, through an integrated process of planning and writing persuasive proposals. You will read actual proposals, including paragraph-by-paragraph analyses of the key features that made them persuasive, as well as verbatim reviewer comments and grant award letters.

## Introduction

**Purpose of Introduction Statement.** The introduction is a credibility statement that describes your professional and organizational qualifications and establishes the significance of your idea. Your qualifications, or credibility, may have more to do with your being funded than anything else. In a government proposal, the application guidelines may or may not ask for an introductory section.

The introduction section establishes the tone of the whole proposal. Novice proposal writers focus on their own need for funds instead of using the introductory section to link their project with the sponsor's priorities. Successful grant seekers capitalize on the partnerships they build with sponsors during their preproposal contact and cast their projects in ways that mesh with sponsors' values. For novice writers, the psychological orientation is "I-I, Me-Me" while successful writers take a "You-You" perspective.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write the introduction, answer these questions. Does your introductory section

1. Clearly establish who you are?
2. Describe your organizational goals?
3. Establish your credibility in the project topic area?
4. Lead logically to the problem statement?

**Writing Tips for Introduction Section.** The introduction section of a proposal represents a credibility statement about you and your environment. While your resume is an important credibility statement, particularly in government proposals, it may not communicate the fact that you work in an environment that will support your project. Weave this point into your introduction. Tell the reviewer about your track record in projects of this kind and how this project fits into your overall organizational goals. If you don't have a strong track record in your proposed project area, borrow credibility from other field experts through the use of project consultants, letters of endorsement, and supporting statistics.

## Statement of Problem or Need

**Purpose of Problem Statement.** Your statement of the problem--your need--represents the reason behind your proposal. Experienced grantseekers know it is the single most important part of the proposal that influences funding success. The problem statement specifies the conditions you wish to change. It should be supported by evidence drawn from your experience, from

statistics provided by authoritative sources, and from appropriate literature reviews. Your need statement should quickly summarize the problem, show your familiarity with prior research or work on the topic, reinforce your credibility for investigating the problem, and justify why this problem should be investigated. Do not assume that everyone sees the problem as clearly as you do. Even if the problem is obvious, your reviewers want to know how clearly you can state it.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write your statement of problem or need, answer these questions. Does your problem statement

1. Demonstrate a precise understanding of the problem or need that you are attempting to solve?
2. Clearly convey the focus of your project early in the narrative?
3. Indicate the relationship of your project to a larger set of problems or issues and justify why your particular focus has been chosen?
4. Establish the importance and significance of the problem?
5. Justify why your problem should be of special interest to the sponsor?
6. Demonstrate that your problem is feasible to solve?
7. Make the reviewer want to read further?
8. Indicate how the problem relates to your organizational goals?
9. State the problem and outputs in terms of human needs and societal benefits?

**Writing Tips for the Problem Section.** A common error is to paint the problem in grand or general terms. Don't say "little is known about...", "there is a lack of information about...", or "no research has dealt with..." this problem. Arguing for something that isn't makes for a weak need statement. Instead, go one step further. Explain the consequences of the information void. Describe the need in human terms. For example, if you want to buy computers for your school, talk about the happy, computer-literate students who will benefit in the future. Beyond discussing the importance of the project's topic, demonstrate the need for your methodology; the reviewers should be able to anticipate your solution based upon your analysis of the problem. This important transition paragraph is frequently left out of proposals written by beginning proposal writers.

## Objectives

**Purpose of Objectives Statement.** Your objectives specify the outcome of your project, the end product(s). When sponsors fund your projects, they are literally "buying" your objectives. That's why it is extremely important to state your objectives clearly. When you write your objectives, follow the acronymic advice: "Keep them S-I-M-P-L-E." Your objectives should be

**Specific**--indicate precisely what you intend to change through your project.

**Immediate**--indicate the time frame during which a current problem will be addressed.

**Measurable**--indicate what you would accept as proof of project success.

**Practical**--indicate how each objective is a real solution to a real problem.

**Logical**--indicate how each objective systematically contributes to achieving your

overall goal(s).

Evaluable--indicate how much change has to occur for the project to be effective.

Although these categories are not mutually exclusive, each of your objectives should meet at least two or three of these six criteria.

For instance, given the goal of "improving the quality of life for homeless individuals in our city," a proposal objective might be for the "Midwest Home Shelter Agency to reduce the number of homeless [Specific] [Practical] [Logical] during the next 24 months [Immediate] by 15 percent [Evaluable] as noted in the Department of Social Welfare Homeless Survey Report [Measurable]."

Your objectives section indicates precisely what you intend to change through your project and what you would accept as proof of project success for your target population. Your objectives provide the yardstick you use to conduct your evaluation section; that is, if you write your objectives in precise, measurable terms, it is easy to write your proposal evaluation section because you know exactly what will be evaluated.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write the objectives section, answer these questions. Does the section

1. Clearly describe your project's objectives, hypotheses, and/or research questions?
2. Signal the project's objectives without burying them in a morass of narrative?
3. Demonstrate that your objectives are important, significant, and timely?
4. Include objectives that comprehensively describe the intended outcomes of the project?
5. State your objectives, hypotheses, or questions in a way that they can be evaluated or tested later?
6. Demonstrate why your project's outcome is appropriate and important to the sponsor?

**Writing Tips for Objectives Section.** List your specific objectives in no more than one or two sentences each in approximate order of importance. Don't confuse your objectives (ends) with your methods (means). A good objective emphasizes what will be done and when it will be done, whereas a method will explain why or how it will be done. Include goals (ultimate) and objectives (immediate) statements.

## Methods

**Purpose of Methods Section.** The methods section describes your project activities in detail, indicating how your objectives will be accomplished. The description should include the sequence, flow, and interrelationship of activities as well as planned staffing for the project. It should present a clear picture of the client population, if any. It should discuss the risks of your method, and indicate why your success is probable. Finally, tell what is unique about your approach.

**Key Questions to Answer.** Here are some key questions to answer. Does your proposal

1. Explain why you chose one methodological approach and not another?
2. Describe major activities for reaching each objective?
3. Indicate the key project personnel who will carry out each activity?
4. Show the interrelationship among project activities?
5. Identify all project data that will be collected for use in evaluating proposal outcomes?

**Data Collection.** You will probably need to collect some data as a part of your project. Common data collection methods include achievement tests; psychological tests; role-playing exercises; clinical examinations; personal diaries; ratings by program staff, management participants, or experts; interviews; observations by program staff or evaluators; daily program records (telephone logs, tracking slips, referral forms); historical program records and archives; government records; searches of news media; questionnaires; and surveys.

You can either make up your own data-gathering instruments or use existing ones. To find out if an appropriate instrument already exists (and avoid reinventing the wheel), consider looking through *Buros' Yearbook of Mental Measurements*, a two-volume listing of available tests in many different fields. The Buros' volumes review the various attitude, behavior, and motor tests that exist. Each review includes a description by the test author(s) and critiques by several experts in the field. The descriptions include the purpose, statistical characteristics, and, when available, the test norms. The Buros' Web site address is <http://www.unl.edu/buros>. You can also try the *ETS Collection Catalog*, a six-volume set of standardized tests and research instruments ranging from vocational tests to personality tests; it is available from the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, NJ: <http://www.ets.org>.

**Writing Tips for Methods Section.** Begin with your objectives. Describe what precise steps you will follow to carry out each objective, including what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be done. If you have trouble writing this section, assume the sponsor's check just arrived in the mail. What is the first thing you will do? Hire additional staff? Order equipment? What will you do next? Keep asking and answering the "What's next?" question and you will lead yourself through the methodology section (sometimes called procedures in other proposal guidelines).

Once you have determined the sequence of events you will follow in completing your project, cast the major milestones into a time-and-task chart. In graphic form, it segments your total project into manageable steps and lets your reviewers know exactly what you will be doing--and when. It says to the reviewers that you are organized and have thought out the major steps of your project. It lets them know you have done significant planning and are not just proposing on a whim. It gives them a road map of the territory you plan to cover. Finally, the time-and-task chart represents a clear, one-page, visual summary of the entire methodology section.

## Evaluation

**Purpose of Evaluation.** Evaluations pinpoint what is really happening in your project so you can improve your project efficiency. Based on evaluation information, you can better allocate resources, improve your services, and strengthen your overall project performance. Beyond these

immediate benefits, a project evaluation can uncover needs to be served in your next proposal and make it easier to get and sustain funding.

If you want to include an evaluation component in your proposal but know nothing about the subject, consider borrowing ideas from the evaluation plans developed for similar programs or ask a colleague or consultant to review the rest of the proposal and develop an appropriate evaluation strategy. Too frequently, proposals don't explain how the project will be evaluated. At best, they mention some vague process, such as holding a discussion meeting or assigning the evaluation to an expert, with no specifics on how the evaluation will be conducted or what will be learned from the evaluation.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write the evaluation section, answer these questions. Does your evaluation section

1. Describe why evaluation is needed in the project?
2. Provide a definition of what is meant by evaluation?
3. Clearly identify the purpose of your evaluation and the audiences to be served by its results?
4. Demonstrate that an appropriate evaluation procedure is included for every project objective?
5. Provide a general organizational plan or model for your evaluation?
6. Demonstrate that the scope of the evaluation is appropriate to the project? Demonstrate the extent to which the project is practical, relevant, and generalizable?
7. Describe what information will be needed to complete the evaluation, the potential sources for this information, and the instruments that will be used for its collection?
8. Clearly summarize any reports to be provided to the funding source based on the evaluation, and generally describe their content and timing?

**Using Evaluators Effectively.** Whether you use an internal or an external evaluator, or both, be sure to include them in the proposal development process. A common proposal-writing mistake is to budget an amount for evaluation costs and worry later about the evaluation procedure. Instead, involve evaluators in the proposal writing. Be sure to give them a copy of your project objectives. Remember that pointed objectives will simplify the evaluation process.

An evaluator should provide you with important proposal information. Specifically, ask your evaluators to identify precisely what will be evaluated, what information they will need to conduct the evaluation, where that information will be obtained, how often data will be collected, what data collection instruments will be used to get that information, what evaluation design will be used, what analyses will be completed, and what questions you will be able to answer as a result of the evaluation.

**How to Evaluate.** Evaluation is essentially a four-step process. As you will see, if the objectives and methodology sections of your proposal are precise, you are well on your way to completing the evaluation protocol.

1. Identify precisely what will be evaluated. If you wrote measurable objectives, you already know what to evaluate.
2. Determine the methods you will use to evaluate each objective. More precisely, you will need to describe the information you will need and how you propose to collect it.
3. Complete your evaluation design. Specify the analyses you plan to make and then carry out your evaluation by collecting and interpreting the data needed for each objective. Your evaluation design may be simply to observe the behavior of a particular population or something more complex like a rigorous experimental and multiple control group design.
4. Summarize the resulting data analyses and indicate its use. Consider including mock data tables that show what your resulting data might look like.

Note that of these four steps, the first two are completed as you write the objectives and methods sections of your proposal. In other words, you are half-done with the evaluation section before you start it.

**Writing Tips for Evaluation Section.** Include a separate evaluation component for each project objective. Strengthen your evaluation section by including examples of surveys, questionnaires, data collection instruments, data analysis forms, and other evaluation methodologies in order to demonstrate the credibility of your evaluation section. If you use outside evaluators, identify costs, credentials, and experience. Evaluation sections are less likely to be included in basic research than training grants. Replicability is the primary evaluation criterion in most basic science research proposals.

## Dissemination

**Purpose of Dissemination.** Dissemination is the means by which you let others know about your project: its purpose, methods, and accomplishments. Among other things, it generates publicity for your sponsor and you. As grants become more competitive, dissemination of results is increasingly important. No longer is it sufficient to say you will submit a journal article or present a paper at a professional society meeting. Instead, specify the tentative titles, target journals, and submission dates. Likewise, indicate which meetings will be attended, including dates and locations for presenting papers.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write the dissemination section, answer these questions. Does your dissemination section

1. Indicate why dissemination activities are important to your project?
2. Clearly identify the intended outcome of the dissemination effort?
3. Include a feasible and appropriate plan for dissemination?
4. Succinctly describe any products resulting from the dissemination effort?
5. Demonstrate that you are well grounded in theory and research on the dissemination and utilization of knowledge?
6. Provide sufficient detail on proposed dissemination procedures to justify the budget request?
7. Specify clearly who will be responsible for dissemination and why they are capable?

8. Indicate why the dissemination will get the necessary information to the appropriate audiences in a form they can use when needed?

**Writing Tips for Dissemination Section.** Project results can be disseminated verbally or visually. The visual/verbal distinction emphasizes how you – as project director – choose to communicate your project results to your target audiences. Additionally, your project dissemination strategies can be active or passive. The active/passive distinction refers to your target audiences and the role they play in processing the visual or verbal information you present. If you choose to write up a report of your project results, you have chosen a visual channel of communication to which the reader responds passively, since reading is a passive process. On the other hand, you may involve the target audience in a hands-on demonstration of project results. In this illustration, the results are presented verbally and the target audience is actively involved. While the visual/verbal and active/passive distinctions are not wholly discrete, the following table illustrates how the more common dissemination strategies might be classified.

Process	Verbal	Visual
Active	Conferences and Seminars Demonstrations Site Visits Web Casts+Chat Rooms Teleconferences	Courses/Seminars Displays/Poster Sessions Commercial Distributors Instructional Materials Web Sites Video Conferences
Passive	Convention Papers Staff Presentations	Books and Manuals Computer Disks Executive Summaries Interim Working Papers Journal Articles National Information Sources Newsletters + Listservs Pamphlets Press Releases

In most proposals, you will want to use an appropriate mix of active/passive and verbal/visual dissemination strategies.

## Budgets

**Purpose of the Budget.** A project budget is more than just a statement of proposed expenditures; it is an alternate way of expressing your project. Programs officers will look at your budget to see how well it fits your proposed activities. Incomplete budgets are examples of sloppy preparation. Inflated budgets are signals of waste. Budgets that are too low cast doubt on your planning ability. In essence, your budget is as much a credibility statement as your project narrative.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you prepare your budget, answer these questions. Does your budget

1. Provide sufficient resources to carry out your project?
2. Include a budget narrative that justifies major budget categories?
3. Present the budget in the format desired by the sponsor?
4. Provide sufficient detail so the reviewer can understand how various budget items were calculated?
5. Separate direct costs from indirect costs and describe what is covered in the latter?
6. Relate budget items to project objectives?
7. Include any attachments or special appendixes to justify unusual requests?
8. Identify evaluation and dissemination costs?

**Allowable Budget Categories.** Unless the sponsor guidelines dictate otherwise, you can include in your budget request such things as accounting, advertising, animals, audiovisual instruction, auditing, binding, books, computer time, consultants, dues, equipment, fringe benefits, indirect costs, instruments, insurance, legal services, maintenance, periodicals, postage, publication, recruitment, registration fees, relocation, renovation, rent, repairs, salaries and wages, security, subcontracts, supplies, telephone, travel, and tuition.

**Direct Costs.** Those costs that are line items listed in the budget as an explicit project expenditure are called direct costs. The direct costs are usually categorized into personnel (people) and nonpersonnel (things) components. Personnel costs include such items as salaries, wages, consultant fees, and fringe benefits. Nonpersonnel costs include such items as equipment, supplies, travel, and publication charges. Space and utilities may be reflected as direct costs or included as a part of your indirect cost rate.

**Indirect Costs.** Those costs that are not directly listed in the budget and yet are costs incurred in the project are called indirect costs. Indirect costs are real costs that are hard to pin down, such as payroll and accounting, library usage, space and equipment, and general project administration. Do you include in your proposal budget the costs associated with preparing payrolls or the time your boss spends talking with you about the project? While you could cost out those factors, and others, they become more difficult to quantify. At the same time, they are real project costs--someone has to write your payroll checks. Rather than calculating a strict cost accounting of these nebulous factors, many sponsors allow you to calculate a percentage of your direct costs and add it to your budget request.

Semantically, the federal government uses the term indirect costs to refer to these extra project operating costs. These costs are usually figured as a percentage of the grant, either of the total direct costs or the total project salaries and wages. Organizations regularly receiving federal grants have an approved federal indirect cost rate that is included in the budgets of federal proposals. If you plan to submit federal proposals periodically but do not have a federal indirect cost rate, ask your federal program officer to refer you to the appropriate federal agency so you can negotiate a federal indirect cost rate for your organization.

Foundations usually use the term administrative costs rather than indirect costs when referring to extra project operating costs, though the terms are interchangeable. Foundations vary considerably in their policies regarding the allowability of administrative costs. Some will pay administrative costs on grants, and their application guidelines specify the allowable percentage

of total direct costs. Others say explicitly in their application materials that they **do not** allow administrative costs.

In contrast to governments and foundations, corporations use the term overhead to mean administrative or indirect costs. As business professionals, they are accustomed to the concept of overhead and are apt to have a fairly high overhead rate. In most instances, corporate application materials do not specify a policy regarding the payment of overhead. You have three options for determining a reasonable overhead rate to include in your proposal. First, if they are a publicly held company, you may be able to determine their overhead rate by studying the latest annual report. Second, some corporate officials might be willing to tell you what their overhead rate is as a percentage of their total costs. Third, if you have no basis for calculating their corporate overhead, you can use your federally negotiated indirect cost rate since it is an audited figure. If none of these three options is acceptable, your fallback position is to include all costs as direct-cost items.

**Cost Sharing.** Those costs that your organization will contribute to the total project costs are called shared costs. You may contribute partial personnel costs, space, volunteer time, or other costs towards the total project expenses. Your cost sharing may be in the form of "hard" dollars (cash) or "soft" dollars (in-kind contributions). In-kind contributions do not require a cash outlay from your organization yet would cost real dollars if you had to pay for services rendered. Volunteer time is one example of in-kind cost sharing.

Cost sharing may be mandatory or voluntary. Mandatory cost sharing is often referred to as "matching funds;" it is required whereas voluntary cost sharing is optional. Your promise of cost sharing in a proposal budget may be a key factor in a sponsor's funding decision.

- **Mandatory**—as one of the eligibility requirements of the grant, the sponsor requires you to share a certain percent of the total project costs. For example, "Local organizations are required to provide a local match totaling 75 percent of the requested grant funds." In this case, if a sponsor provides \$20,000, you must provide an additional \$15,000 toward the total project cost of \$35,000.
- **Voluntary**—you offer cost sharing in your proposal as an incentive to get the grant award. For instance, a sponsor may indicate, "Consideration will be given to organizations with in-kind contributions." In response, you may offer 20 percent cost sharing of personnel time toward the total project cost of \$150,000. This means the sponsor would contribute \$125,000 and you would provide \$25,000 of the total project costs. However, you can cost share too much: for some agencies, higher levels of cost sharing require more administrative monitoring on their part, something program officers may wish to avoid. Accordingly, check with your project officers to see if they have a "preferred level" of voluntary cost sharing.

Assuming you've decided to cost share on your proposed budget, the funds may come either from internal or external sources-or both.

- **Internally**--you may allocate a portion of your direct or indirect costs to your proposed project. These shared costs may take on the form of cash or in-kind contributions. Consider

this internal cost sharing example: assume you decide to cost share 20 percent of the project director's salary towards your proposed project. This means that instead of your project director receiving 100 percent of her salary from your agency personnel budget, she will now receive 80 percent from that source and the remaining 20 percent from the cost sharing account on the grant; you merely reallocate a portion of her salary; her income remains the same; the source(s) of income are changed on the bookkeeping records.

- **Externally**—you may allocate extramural dollars from other sources to the project. For instance: (a) you have a matching grant from another sponsor; (b) a wealthy philanthropist has given you unrestricted dollars that can be earmarked to this project; or, (c) revenue is generated from another fund raising activity, e.g., golf outing income, can be directed to this project. In each case, you can redirect dollars from those sources to help support the total costs of your proposed project, thereby showing your sponsor you are financially committed to supporting your proposal.

**Writing Tips for Budget Section.** Here are some tips for planning your budget. Make sure your calculations are as clear as possible. Show the basis of your calculations. Fuzzy: travel = \$324. Specific: local mileage for project director, 100 mi/mo @ .27/mi x 12 mo = \$324. Indicate name, location, and date of travel. Estimate office supplies (pens, pencils, paper clips, and so forth) at an average of \$300/year per key person. List the components of your fringe benefit rate; indicate whether they include FICA, health, life, retirement, dental, and disability insurance, and other benefits. In multiyear budgets, allow for yearly increases; indicate annual percent increases. (Ask your program officer what percentage increases are currently being approved in multiyear budgets.) If the project is to occur in phases, identify the costs associated with each phase. Don't overlook budget support for such things as service or maintenance contracts, insurance, shipping, or installation. If you anticipate training costs associated with the purchase of new equipment, include those costs in your budget as well. Include a budget narrative immediately following your budget to explain or justify any unusual expenditure items, even if one is not required by the sponsor.

Some sponsors expect you to continue funding your project after the grant expires. If you have a financing plan for future funding, briefly outline it. Other fund-raising options include membership fees, user charges, local organizations, other granting agencies, wealthy individuals, product sales, publications, service fees, direct mail, bequests, memorial gifts, phone-a-thons, and capital campaigns.

## Abstract

**Purpose of Abstract.** The abstract is usually the last written and first read section of your proposal. It should be carefully written, providing a cogent summary of your proposed project. It should provide a quick overview of what you propose to do and clear understanding of the project's significance, generalizability, and potential contribution. Project end-products should be clearly identified. Often, proposal reviewers must write up a summary of your project for presentation to a larger review panel. If you write a quality abstract, you make your reviewer's job easier. If the abstract is poorly written, the reviewer's job is more difficult and your funding chances diminish.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write your abstract section, consider these questions.

1. Does my abstract effectively summarize the project?
2. Does it place appropriate emphasis on the various proposal components?
3. Does it enumerate project outcomes?
4. Does it comply with length or word requirements of the sponsor?
5. Does it use key headings and subheadings to highlight proposal sections?

**Writing Tips for Proposal Abstracts.** Don't write the abstract until you have completed the proposal. Generally, the abstract section contains 250 to 500 words. Include at least one sentence each on problem, objectives, and methods, using the major headings and subheadings you used in the proposal.

## Appendixes

**Purpose of Appendixes.** Appendixes contain information peripheral to your proposal, such as reprints of articles, definitions of terms, subcontract data, consortia agreements, tabular data, certifications, lists of board members and officers with titles, recent annual reports, organizational fiscal reports, organizational charts, resumes, past success stories, significant case histories, agency publications, publicity, and letters of support and commitment. Some grantmaking agencies do not circulate copies of appendixes when transmitting proposals to reviewers. (Ask your program officer about this, and if materials are not circulated, include essential proposal information in the narrative.) Nevertheless, the use of appendixes is recommended, especially when page limits are sponsor-imposed.

**Key Questions to Answer.** Ask yourself these key questions as you plan your appendixes.

1. Could reviewers evaluate the proposal without any appendix information?
2. Have strong letters of support and commitment been included?
3. Are assurances of cooperation provided in instances of inter-agency support?
4. Are the resumes included for all key project personnel and consultants?

**Writing Tips for Appendixes.** After your proposal is written, reread it to make sure your reviewers could make an informed funding decision without any appendix information. Include strong letters of support and endorsement. Attach assurances of cooperation in instances of inter-agency proposals. Be sure to include the resumes of all key project personnel, including consultants.

## PROPOSAL APPEARANCE

While you will obviously spend much time working on the content of your proposal, you should also pay attention to the appearance or design of your proposal. Just as clothing is important in the business world for establishing initial impressions, so, too, is the appearance of your proposal as it reaches the reviewer's hands. The proposal should "look" familiar to the reader. A familiar proposal is a friendly proposal. Look at the printed materials issued by the sponsor. Note their use of type size and style, white space, and headings. Structure your proposals to match the

private foundation's publication preferences; when appropriate, use the same type size, style, layout, and headings as they do in their publications. Your proposal will look more credible when you consider these factors.

As you learn about your audience and consider proposal appearance, try to anticipate which reading styles the reviewers are likely to use: skim reading, search reading, or critical reading. Recall that your earlier prospect research from a past reviewer or program officer identified the likely manner in which your proposal would be reviewed. Reviewers skim proposals when they have many pages to read in a very short time. Reviewers search proposals when they are following an evaluation sheet that assigns points to specific proposal sections. Reviewers always critically read proposals, especially when the reading occurs in the time luxury of a mail review. The following writing and editing tips are particularly appropriate for all three reading styles.

### Proposal Writing Tips

Read and reread proposal guidelines--and believe them! Use the guidelines and the reviewer's evaluation form, if available, as a basis for creating your proposal outline. Strengthen your proposal by following the format tips that experienced proposal writers use.

**Bold Type.** Bold type is easier to read than underlining, italics, or all capital letters as a means of creating emphasis. Use bold type to emphasize key words and ideas, but avoid overemphasis.

**Lists.** Lists help to get the message to the reader with a sense of immediacy, without being wordy. Furthermore, because lists are easy for readers to skim, they convey chunks of information quickly. Use a numbered list when items need to be examined in a specific sequence. Use a bulleted list when items are all equally important.

**Ragged Right Margins.** A ragged right margin is easier to read than one that is right justified because the proportional spacing slows readability. It is easier for the reader's eye to track from the end of one line to the beginning of the next line when the right-hand margins are jagged.

**Type Size.** Adjust your word processing program for a 12-point type style. Text smaller than 12-point becomes difficult to read and makes the reviewer's job harder. Rather than reducing type size to make all your ideas fit on the page, try tightening sentences and editing wordy phrases.

**Type Style.** If a type style is not specified in the application guidelines, consider using serif typefaces for the text of your proposal and sans serif typefaces for titles and headings. Serif type styles such as Times Roman and Courier have small strokes that finish off the main stroke of a letter and make it easier to read. Sans serif type styles such as Universal and Arial, which do not have the small finishing strokes, are ideal for titles and headings because they stand off from the body of the text. Avoid using ornate type styles, such as Cloister Black and Freestyle Script, which are hard to read and distract from the content of the proposal.

### Proposal Editing Tips

Successful grantseekers estimate they spend 25 percent of their time writing the first draft of their proposal and 75 percent of their time editing it. Editing is a multistage process: edit for only one feature at a time. The multiple editing loops through the proposal ensure that all elements are presented with punch and persuasion.

**Headings.** Headings and subheadings act like a table of contents placed directly in your proposal text; that is, at a glance they reveal the main ideas and the organization of your proposal to the reader. Ask your program officer for a copy of the reviewer's evaluation form, and use those same headings and subheadings in your proposal. If a reviewer's evaluation form is not available, use headings and subheadings that are specific to your proposal.

**Page Numbering.** Place page numbers in the top right or bottom center of the pages of your proposal. Do not number the first page.

**Proofreading.** Proofread and proofread your proposal. Proofread your proposals in multiple readings, looking for different features on each reading. As you proofread, look at

1. **Content and Organization:** Does your proposal have enough substance? Are your ideas complete? Is your organization logical?
2. **Clarity:** Have you included appropriate transitions? Are ideas expressed clearly? Are all acronyms defined?
3. **Mechanics:** Are words spelled correctly, especially proper names? Are all numbers and computations accurate? Are sentences grammatically correct, including subject-verb agreement? Are sentences punctuated properly?
4. **Design:** Is the proposal design visually appealing? Did you include ample white space? Are headings specific to your project?

**Transitions.** Transitional expressions are words and phrases that signal connections among ideas; these connectors can help you achieve coherence in your writing. Common transitional words can indicate: *addition* (also, and then, further, moreover), *example* (as an illustration, for instance, in fact, that is), *result* (accordingly, consequently, hence, in short), and *summary* (finally, in conclusion, on the whole, to sum up).

**White Space.** Use white space to break up long copy. Ample white space makes your proposal appear inviting and user-friendly. White space can indicate that one section is ending and another is beginning, or that an idea is so central to the proposal that it needs to be set off by itself. Judicious use of white space breaks your proposal into smaller, manageable chunks of information. Even a simple use of white space between paragraphs helps the mind to see the information in that paragraph as a unit. One creative use of white space is the making of lists.

## LETTER PROPOSAL

A letter proposal is a short grant proposal, usually two to four pages long. Written in letter form, it is primarily targeted to private sponsors, such as foundations and corporations, though it can be used as a preproposal for federal sponsors. Most federal program officers like to receive a letter proposal because it presents them with a "concept paper," or a "conceptual shell" of what you

propose. With many private sponsors, the letter proposal is all that is required; they make funding decisions on the basis of your brief letter, whether you are asking for \$100 or \$1 million. However, some private sponsors use the letter proposal as a screening device and request an expanded proposal if your idea captures their interest. In either case, you face the challenge of clear, concise writing.

In certain respects, a short proposal is more challenging to write than a long proposal. In seven brief sections, you must anticipate and answer the major questions that the sponsor will be asking as your letter proposal is read. Each sentence must carry a heavy load of information. To aid in the writing process, the components of a letter proposal are identified and discussed below.

**Part One: Summary.** Your objective is to summarize the entire proposal in one sentence. The critical elements of the sentence include: (1) self-identification (your organizational name); (2) uniqueness (your claim to fame); (3) sponsor expectation (what you want them to do); (4) budget request (how much money you want); and (5) project benefit (major project outcomes).

**Part Two: Sponsor Appeal.** Your objective is to explain why you are approaching this sponsor. Conduct background research on the sponsor to determine prior funding patterns, usually available in annual reports and tax records. Identify values that the sponsor seems to cherish as evidenced by their funding patterns, e.g., high-risk projects not normally funded by the government, cutting-edge research, demonstration projects with a national impact, or low cost/high benefit projects.

**Part Three: Problem.** Your objective is to briefly summarize the current problem. Focus the problem or need statement from the sponsor's perspective, not yours. Funding your project is not their end goal. You must show how funding your project can be a means for them to reach their end goal--their mission. Remember that a *need* is really a gap between *what is* and *what ought to be*. Document that gap with statistics, quotations, reasoning, or surveys and express it in human terms. Limit your documentation to brief but clear statements. Beware of the excessive use of statistics, which only confuses the reader.

**Part Four: Solution.** Your objective is to describe your approach to the problem. Summarize the objectives that you will meet with your approach. Convey confidence that you can close the gap between *what is* and *what ought to be*. You can detail your precise methodology in a one-page attachment by use of a time-and-task chart. This visual device lets reviewers know exactly who will be doing what and when. Do not include extensive methodological detail in the letter proposal.

**Part Five: Capabilities.** Your objective is to establish your credentials to do the project. More precisely, your job is to establish three types of credibility: you have a (1) credible organization proposing a (2) credible idea to be directed by a (3) credible project director. You must demonstrate what is unique about your group in order to show that you can solve this problem.

**Part Six: Budget.** Your objective is to request a specific dollar amount in the proposal. Ask for a precise amount. Base your request on the review of tax records or other giving references so you are asking for a reasonable amount as viewed by the sponsor. Express your request in meaningful

units, e.g., hours of instruction, numbers of students, or healthy patients. If you plan to submit this or a similar proposal to other sponsors as well, mention this.

**Part Seven: Conclusion.** Your objective is to identify the desired action you wish the sponsor to take. Avoid the hackneyed "We'd be happy to talk with you further about this. Please call if you want more information." Identify a contact person for more details if requested. Have a "heavyweight" sign the letter.

## GRANT REVIEW AND FUNDING DECISIONS

Once your proposal is submitted, it will undergo review. Whether your proposal is funded or declined, you should plan to deal with either outcome option. Further, since your proposal represents a valuable piece of intellectual property, consider submitting it to other sponsors as well while you are awaiting a funding decision.

**Review Criteria.** Proposal review usually covers five basic areas: scope of work, personnel, facilities, track record, and budget information. Experienced proposal writers often conduct proposal review sessions within their organizations prior to formal submission using the same evaluation form that their actual reviewers will use.

**Dealing with Grant Decisions.** Planned reactions become planned options. How do you plan to behave if your proposal is funded? Rejected? What are your options? When you have a powerful itch, it is almost unbearable waiting to get it scratched! Having to wait to get what you want demands patience and tolerance--unless you have planned options. Patient people turn to other activities to meet other needs while they are waiting for grant decisions. This keeps them strong and in control. Strong people wait a lot. It may take many months before the decision on your proposal is made.

At some point, you will find out if your proposal was successful, and besides getting started, there are certain things you should do. For example, if you were successful, request a copy of the reviewer comments, if allowed by the sponsor. Ask the program officer about common mistakes other grantees make so you don't fall into the same trap. Ask how you can be a good steward of their money. Clarify the submission deadlines for technical and financial reports. You can keep your program officer very happy if you submit your reports on time. Invite your program officer to come and visit you. Add your program officer to your organizational public relations list for information about your agency.

If you were turned down by the sponsor, thank the source for considering the proposal. Ask what can be done to improve the proposal. If it is their policy, request reviewer comments, particularly verbatim comments; otherwise you may only receive summary comments, which are less specific. Ask if you should reapply next year. Use this as an opportunity to build a relationship with the sponsor for the next submission cycle. Periodically send a photocopy of articles or publicity with a note: "Thought you might be interested in this." Invite them to your agency to get to know you better. Avoid making them feel as if you only need them at submission time.

**Multiple Submissions.** One of the things you should do while waiting to hear from your first sponsor is submit your proposal to other sponsors. This is commonly done and, indeed, expected by sponsors. However, you are ethically obligated to tell a sponsor that you have submitted a similar proposal to a different sponsor. This will not jeopardize the likelihood of getting your proposal funded. In fact, it could help as there is a close communications network among sponsors with similar interests. Cofunding is not uncommon in some cases; that is, several sponsors may contribute to the total project cost. Finally, engaging in multiple submissions communicates to sponsors that you are seriously committed to your project and are willing to exert considerable effort to secure funding.

## Example of Letter Proposal

An example follows of a letter proposal to a private foundation that seeks support for a project to improve police-community relations.

Today's Date

Mr. Hubert Williams, President  
Law Enforcement Foundation  
1001 23rd Street, N.W., Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Mr. Williams:

The Center for Urban Problems (CUP), as Washington's largest organization dealing with police-community relations, invites your investment in a \$66,240 special project to improve community relations with minorities.

We are encouraged that the Law Enforcement Foundation supports innovative projects that improve the delivery of police services. Over 85 percent of your grant dollars during the past three years have been invested at the local community level. Clearly, your support fills a valuable niche in light of the more conservative funding offered by the federal government. This strong commitment to unique projects is shared by the researchers and evaluation specialists at CUP.

**The Problem: Spiraling Tensions.** Despite proactive community relations programs, an unchecked tension exists between municipal police and minority community members. Relationships between law enforcement officers and minorities--Chicano, African American, Puerto Rican--are at a critical stage. One out of every three arrests in Washington, DC, currently involves a member of a minority community; the incidence is even higher in such cities as San Antonio, Kansas City, and Los Angeles.

Many factors contribute to the growing minority community-police tensions: increasing complexity of urban life, unemployment discrimination, and housing problems. Although these nationwide social problems were not created by the police, the police must cope with the

consequences of these problems. This vast social dislocation spawns minority attitudes of prejudice and contempt. To counterbalance these problems, many police communities have adopted public relations programs to "sell" their departments to the minority communities without the concomitant need to be ready to work with those communities. As a result, there is an ever-widening gap between present and potential minority community acceptance of police behavior.

**The Solution: Evaluating Police-Community Relations Bureaus.** Successful claims regarding the effectiveness of police-community relations bureaus remain undocumented. Police departments are latching on to a new fad without understanding the key components of a police-community relations program. Some features of the bureau approach work; others don't. The goal of this project is to identify the successful features of existing bureaus, so that success can be delivered more quickly to police departments serving substantial numbers of minority citizens. The CUP research staff will follow standard social science research techniques as detailed in our time-and-task chart, Attachment A.

**CUP Credentials: National Experience and Networks.** CUP is uniquely suited to conduct this evaluation project on police-community relations bureaus. As a nonpolice-linked organization, it can objectively and independently assess current practices. This project represents a systematic continuation of prior CUP efforts in this area with state and municipal organizations as well as private police-related associations. Its staff has a cumulative 100 years of experience in evaluating police-related projects. Finally, local and national networking with 28 regional offices make it well postured to effectively conduct this assessment.

**Budget Request: \$66,240 Payable Over Six Months.** With the demonstrated concern that you've shown in the delivery of police services to minorities, I am requesting a grant of \$66,240. Quite frankly, the project extends beyond the financial boundaries of CUP. Accordingly, we must now reach out to the community for assistance in what surely is a vital service to the police community. The outcome of this project will touch the operations of over 6,000 law enforcement groups nationwide, resulting in a \$13 investment in each existing municipal and state police organization, or a cost of seven cents (7¢) per police official.

In making this investment, the Law Enforcement Foundation will be supporting a cost-effective approach to the delivery of police services for the minority communities where major problems exist. Mr. Lloyd Solomon, National Program Director for CUP, can be reached at (202) 123-4567 to answer questions or give further information.

Sincerely,

Organizational Heavyweight  
President

P.S. Please come visit us and see this important project for yourself.

Enclosures:

Attachment A: Time-and-Task Chart

Attachment B: IRS Nonprofit Certification