

Grant Writing Basics Advice for Beginners

There is no single standard format for organizing a grant proposal. Rather, potential funding sources will generally provide information about proposal format, including requirements concerning information to be included in the proposal, the order in which information is to be presented, and the length of specific sections, as well as the overall length of the proposal.

According to Mary Hall, author of *Getting Funded: A Complete Guide to Proposal Writing*, private funding sources generally require shorter grant proposals, but may also provide fewer guidelines than a public funding sources concerning content and organization. Public funding sources, on the other hand, may not only provide more structural information, but may also be less flexible concerning incomplete information or information that is or not structured strictly according to guidelines.

The elements listed here are typical of grant proposals, although funding agencies will emphasize different elements and require specific organizational schemes.

References used to compile these pages:

Bovee, Courtland L. and John V. Thill. *Business Communication Today*. 2nd Ed. New York: Random House, 1989.

Hall, Mary. *Getting Funded: A Complete Guide to Proposal Writing*. 3rd Ed. Portland, Oregon: Continuing Education Publications, 1988.

Harty, Kevin J. and John Keenan. *Writing for Business and Industry*. New York, Macmillan, 1987.

Morrison, David C., and Stephen W. Russell. *Write Winning Grants: A One Day Seminar*. Hoechst Marion Roussel, Kansas City, Missouri. Scientific Education Partnership, 3 May 1996.

Reed, Kevin. Office of Research Support, Grants Administration. The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1994.





Proposal Title

Although the title will be the first thing that reviewers will see, deciding upon a title for your proposal will probably be among the last steps you take in preparing it. Consider your title carefully, for as David C. Morrison and Stephen W. Russell point out, a title not only creates enthusiasm for your project, but also may help determine who from the potential funding agency, will review your project.

Mary Hall (85) makes the following recommendations concerning proposal titles:

The title should be suited to the potential funding source. For discipline-specific funding sources, for example, a highly technical title, or a title including abbreviations well known in the discipline, might be appropriate. For a funding source that is not associated with a specific field, such technicality is probably not advisable.

The title should give the reader a clear idea of what the project is about, and what its purposes are.

The title should be as short as possible. David C. Morrison and Stephen W. Russell suggest that you determine whether the potential funding source has established requirements concerning title length.

Do not include the name of a foundation or company within a title until you have researched that foundation or company. Generally, you should not presume to name a project after an donor until the project has been funded, and the donor has agreed to a project title that includes its name.

Try to construct a title that will be memorable to reviewers. At the same time, avoid a title that is flippant or funny.

Avoid overly used title mechanisms. Specifically, Hall discourages the use of "A Project to..." or cliched titles such as "New Beginnings...".





Proposal Summary or Abstract

Typically, the summary or abstract serves several functions. It describes who you are, the scope of the project, and its projected costs, allowing you to communicate the central message of your proposal right away, so that reviewers know immediately and precisely what the purpose of the proposed project is. It allows you to communicate enthusiasm for and commitment to the proposed project.

In order to be useful to those reviewing the grant proposal, the summary or abstract should generally include the following information:

- a brief introduction to your organization
- an overview of the proposed project
- a discussion about the contribution the project makes to the field
- a discussion about the projects potential to be used by other organizations to meet similar challenges.

Many experts say that this element is the most important part of the grant proposal, because examiners will read this section first, using it to determine whether the proposal is worth further examination and consideration. Some reviewers, in fact, will read only this section of the proposal, or it may be circulated among key officials examining your grant proposal. The document may continue to be used after a project is funded, to inform other officials who are to be involved in the project, or within the funding organization.

Furthermore, you may want to use this document within your organization, in order to elicit support for the project.

Above all, experienced grant writers emphasize that the summary or abstract must be written concisely in clear, direct, and specific language. Readers need to be able to discern the key point efficiently without being bogged down in unnecessary or distracting details or inspecific language (Morrison and Russell).





Grant specialists David C. Morrison and Stephen W. Russell suggest the following planning and writing strategies for the proposal summary or abstract:

- Write the section after the rest of the proposal has been written, so that you can draw upon the clearly laid out elements of the proposal.
- While drafting, take pertinent information from the completed proposal verbatim. Later, edit to make information fit the space allowed.

Generally, the summary/abstract section of the grant proposal will be between 250 and 500 words long, rarely exceeding a page (Hall 87).

Introductions

Some proposals require an introduction, in which you establish your organizations credibility as a funding recipient. This section may include:

- Background information on your organization, including its establishment and its history
- Unique characteristics of your organization.
- Significant accomplishments of your organization.
- Organizational goals.
- Support received from other organizations.

This introduction should be brief, avoiding jargon and tangential information.



Problem Statement or Assessment (Statement) of Need

This section of your grant proposal establishes the specific problem(s) that your project is designed to address. The section should make clear the relationship between your organization and the problem(s) to be solved. The central question that should inform your preparation in this section is why should this project be undertaken? (Other sections of the proposal will indicate what should be done and how it should be done.)

According to Mary Hall (109), this section should demonstrate:

- Understanding of the problem(s) to be addressed, as well as the problem(s) significance to the population beyond your organization.
- A review and analysis of the literature that is pertinent to the problem.
- A timeline for the project, indicating why it needs funding now.
- The originality of the project at either a national or local level. If the project duplicates an earlier project, this section should provide a rationale for the additional funding.
- The generalizability of the project.
- The relationship between this project and your organizations goals, interests, and capabilities.
- A general rationale for the procedures you propose for addressing the problem. These procedures will be further developed in subsequent sections of the proposal.
- The connection between this project and the guidelines or goals of the funding source.



According to numerous grant specialists, a key challenge in this section is maintaining a narrow focus; the problem(s) should be limited to something that can be reasonably addressed by your project. Make sure that the problem and the project match; avoid identifying a problem of very general scope, then introducing a project that will address a limited part of the problem. Research and document the problem, not only to show that it really exists, but also to ensure the funding source that you have done the necessary homework to address the problem in an informed manner. Use statistics in this section, but avoid excessive graphics; those may be included in the appendix.

Program Objectives (Purposes) or Specific Aims

According to David C. Morrison and Stephen W. Russell, this section (which they call Specific Aims) is one of the most important of the proposal, for it is one of the sections that all reviewers are likely to read (the other is the abstract or summary).

While the Purpose section of the proposal tells the funding source why the project is necessary, this section indicates what this project is designed to do, in measurable terms. The key to this section is establishing objectives that are concrete and measurable, and that show a logical connection to the problem or need that you have established.

The following tips may help you write an effective Program Objectives or Purposes section:

Distinguish goals from objectives:

While both of these terms describe a desired condition or outcome these two types of statements usually differ in dimensions of specificity, accountability, and time (Hall 100). Goals make a statement about some overall or far-reaching purpose. Teaching children to become more safety-conscious is an example of a goal. Objectives address the more immediate project outcomes; it should be concrete and measurable. Training children how to use a fire extinguisher is an example of a measurable project objective.





You may want to include both goals and objectives in this section of your proposal. Generally, a project should include no more than two goal statements (Hall 100), while it may include a number of objectives consistent with that overall goal.

Distinguish between the ends (or objectives) of the program and the means (procedures) designed to help your organization reach those ends.

The Methods or Procedures section of your proposal will discuss and clarify how these objectives will be accomplished.

Some research proposals will require *statements of hypotheses*, and most grant applications, according to Morrison and Russell . . . must be hypothesis driven! A hypothesis is a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical or empirical consequences (Morrison and Russell). Funding sources, especially for research proposals, may require that outcomes be stated in hypothesis form (Hall 101).

When developing hypotheses, remember that the hypothesis is not a pre-determined conclusion. The statement "*The central hypothesis is to show that smoking contributes to lung cancer*" is a pre-determined conclusion, not a hypothesis. The statement "*The central hypothesis is that smoking contributes to lung cancer*" is a hypothesis (Morrison and Russell).





Methods or Procedures

This section of the proposal indicates how the project will proceed. It needs to list and describe the various activities that you will use to accomplish your objectives.

According to Mary Hall (115-116), the Methods or Procedures Section should demonstrate:

- That the proposed procedures match the intended outcomes. According to Hall, the proposal may include objectives for which there are no procedures; but it may also include procedures that appear irrelevant and unrelated to any objectives (115). Make sure that the connections between these sections are clear and logical.
- That the proposed procedures are based upon sound rationale.
- That the proposed procedures are feasible. It is helpful to become well-informed about similar programs or projects, noting which procedures worked and which didn't for those organizations.

David C. Morrison and Stephen W. Russell warn that the methods section may detract from the conceptual or exciting part of your application. Therefore, they recommend using detailed descriptions only of methods that would be unfamiliar to your audience, and using brief (but specific descriptions) of methods that are to be used (16).

Hall, on the other hand, recommends an exhaustive Methods or Procedures section. The choice of how detailed to make this section will probably depend upon your evaluation of your audience's familiarity with your discipline. In an exhaustive Methods or Procedures section, Hall recommends the following subsections (116-123):

- An Introduction that previews the overall structure of the section
- An Approach or Design section that discusses the methodology, the population involved in the research, the specific activities to be performed, and the rationale for activities. In this section, it is also advisable to discuss the handling of unexpected results, to indicate where difficulties are anticipated, and to discuss how the project could be revised if necessary





- A Participants section discusses groups to be used in the project, how these groups will be compiled, and it address issues related to various groups (for example, whether or not human subjects are paid for cooperation or how animal subjects will be treated).
- A section or sections on Instrumentation, Data Collection, and Analysis includes specific information on how data will be collected and handled.
- A Work Plan section outlines the sequence of planned activities. It is advisable in this section to use charts or timelines to clarify the narrative of the work plan.
- An Administration section includes information on the personnel and/or agencies that will be involved in the project. This section may include information on how personnel will be chosen, who will be responsible for various aspects of the project, what the administrative rules for the project will be, and how the involvement of other agencies will be handled. This section should indicate to reviewers your organizations competence to manage the project, as well as to justify budget requests that your proposal will make.

Evaluation

This section of the proposal discusses the evaluation tool that you will use to determine whether objectives have been reached, or to what extent they have been accomplished. It is important to build the evaluation section into your proposal, demonstrating to reviewers that the evaluation can begin as soon as the program is initiated.

The Evaluation section needs to be designed so that it gives you information that will allow you (or someone else) to make a judgment about how well a program is meeting or has met its stated objectives.





These potential subsections of the evaluation section, outlined by Mary Hall (130) can help you determine how to plan project evaluation and how to communicate this plan in your proposal:

- Identify what will be evaluated.
- Describe the information that will be needed.
- Describe where information will be obtained.
- Indicate the instruments that will be used to get information.
- Describe the intended analysis.
- Complete the evaluation design, if additional factors have not been addressed in previous steps.
- Describe how results will be reported and utilized.
- Summarize the evaluation section as necessary.

Evaluations may be either subjective, where a program evaluates itself, or objective, where the program is evaluated by an outside organization. Objective evaluation is preferred by some funding sources, and it is ideal if the evaluation instrument and/or proposal for evaluation developed by the external organization can be included in your proposal as well. Hall also notes these specific types of evaluation (129):

- Formative evaluation gives you information that you may use to improve a project while it is in place and functioning; the primary audience for formative evaluation includes project administrators and staff.
- Summative evaluation collects information to be used in assessing the completed project; its primary audience is the funding source. According to Hall, this is the most common type of evaluation requested by funding sources.



- Pay-off or impact evaluation judges the value or usefulness of the projects results. While summative evaluation examines primarily the stated outcomes of a project, and whether or not those were met, pay-off or impact evaluation is more concerned with determining whether project results were worthwhile, regardless of whether it achieved its outcomes.
- Context or antecedent evaluation tries to answer the question of what factors exist in the projects environment or its history that may influence project conduct and outcomes (129). Such information helps the project administration as well as the funding source to assess the value of project outcomes. If contextual issues suggest that outcomes could have been attributable to sources other than project methods, then the project may have limited value, or be impossible to duplicate elsewhere.

Some projects do not seem to warrant evaluation, in the traditional sense of the word. Hall suggests these other possibilities (128):

- A visit from the donor, or a representative of the donor, after initiation of the project, allowing the donating organization to ensure that the project outcomes are being met.
- A local advisory committee or local expert to oversee the project and to communicate with the donating organization concerning the progress of the project and its accomplishment of its outcomes.
- For equipment or facility grants, photographs and a statement of costs to given to the donating organization.



Future Funding

Most proposals need to indicate how the project will continue to be funded after grant funds have been used. If possible, it is advisable to get commitments to future funding in writing; these documents may be included to support the proposal.

Mary Hall notes that some funding organizations request that grant proposals include discussion of dissemination, and it may be necessary for you to discuss, or to devote a section of the proposal to, dissemination activities. Activities may emphasize informing others about the project and its outcomes, or they may be more geared toward helping other use results. Possible dissemination activities include (Hall 147):

- Hosting conferences or seminars for people who are interested in the project or its results.
- Presenting project results at a national conference.
- Establishing an informative newsletter to be distributed to interested parties, or creating a pamphlet reporting results.
- Press conferences, press releases, or briefings for key officials or policy makers who are interested in or affected by the project.
- Producing books, pamphlets, videotapes, television programs about the project.

Budget

When establishing a proposed budget, it is important that you be accurate and as exact as possible. While the budget should allow for necessary increases, most reviewers will recognize it if you pad the budget.

Mary Hall notes that some funding organizations initially ask only for the total amount of the request. You need to be prepared with the more detailed budget information, because they will come back to you later, if they are considering your proposal for funding, and ask for more detailed figures and justification (155).



She describes budgeting in three steps (155):

1. Determining the funding organizations ground rules concerning the budget. This step involves your consideration of rules involving (156):
2. Direct costs: costs that are specific to the project
3. Indirect costs: services, materials, personnel that will be necessary to the project but that are available in the organization or institution making the request for funds. Many private funding sources do not allow the consideration of indirect costs
4. Matching funds: funds that the organization applying for the grant agrees to match, either in money or in kind, providing services that are necessary to the project
5. Determining the projects total costs, and estimating how money will be utilized during the projects various phases. Hall suggests using a worksheet to structure the budget, and to keep records of all computations so that you will be prepared to discuss the impact of budget cuts.
6. Translating this information into appropriate budget categories and record[ing] this on required forms or a suitable journal.

David C. Morrison and Stephen W. Russell note that some cuts are almost inevitable. To prepare a budget that will work for your project, and that will establish your credibility with reviewers, they suggest keeping the following suggestions in mind:

- Make sure that the budget demonstrates that you know how much things cost
- Demonstrate sound reasoning, and show that you have logical reasons for needing the funds that you request.
- When budgeting for personnel, carefully justify each personnel position, indicating how each position will contribute expertise to the project.

If possible, include names with positions. TBA positions are the ones most likely to be cut.

Additional Resources:

<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/index.html>