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## **An Introduction to Project Proposal Writing (Part Two)**

### **9 The Project Description**

This section of your proposal should have four subsections: objectives, methods, staffing/administration, and evaluation. Together, objectives and methods will dictate your staffing and administrative needs. They then become the focus of the evaluation to assess the results of the project. Taken together, the four subsections present an interlocking picture of the total project.

#### Objectives

Objectives are the measurable outcomes of the programme. They define your methods. Your objectives must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable, and achievable in a specified time period. Organisations seeking funding often confuse objectives with goals. Goals are conceptual and more abstract. To illustrate this, here is the goal of a project with a subsidiary objective:

Goal: Our micro-finance project will increase women's independence.

Objective: *Our micro-finance project will assist 150 - 200 women in the target communities to take a measurably more active role in the running of their households and greater involvement in their communities at village and district levels, while raising their families' overall measurable financial status by an average of 20% over the first year.*

The goal here is abstract: improving independence, while the objective is much more specific. It is achievable in the short term (one year) and measurable (improving 150 - 200 women's households' financial status by an 20%). When competition for limited resources is great, well-expressed and clearly defined objectives are increasingly critical to a proposal's success.

Using a different example, there are at least four types of objectives:

Behavioural — A human action is anticipated. Example: Fifty of the seventy participants will learn basic literacy and mathematical skills.

Performance — A specific time frame within which a defined behaviour will occur, at an expected proficiency level, is expected. Example: Fifty of the seventy participants will learn to sign their names and do simple mathematical calculations (addition and subtraction) within six months and will complete a Stage One literacy and numeracy test administered by a UNICEF representative.

Process — The manner in which something occurs is often an end in itself. Example: We will document the training methods in order to identify those with the greatest impact.

Product — There is a tangible item as a result. Example: A manual will be created for use by numeracy and literacy trainers for future similar projects.



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In any proposal, you will find yourself setting one or more of these types of objectives, depending on the nature of your project. Make sure you present your objectives very clearly. Make sure that they do not become lost in unclear or unnecessarily long text and that they stand out on the page. You could, for example, use numbers, bullets, or indentations to identify the objectives in the text. Above all, be realistic when you set your objectives. Never promise what your project cannot deliver. Remember that the donor will want to be told in the final report that your project actually accomplished its objectives.

## **10 Methods**

By means of the objectives, you have explained to the donor what will be achieved by the project. The methods section describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve your project's objectives. It might be helpful to divide our discussion of methods into the following: how, when, and why.

**How:** This is the detailed description of what will happen from the time the project begins until it is completed. Your methods should match the previously stated objectives.

**When:** The methods section should present the order and timing for the tasks. It might make sense to provide a timetable so that the donor does not have to map out the sequencing on him/herself, for example using a Gantt chart. The timetable tells the donor 'when' and provides another summary of the project that supports the rest of the methods section.

**Why:** You may need to defend your chosen methods, especially if they are new or unorthodox. Why will the planned work lead to the outcomes you anticipate? You can answer this question in a number of ways, including using expert testimony and examples of other projects that work, possibly examples from other countries or parallel approaches from other activity streams.

The methods section enables the donor to visualise the implementation of the project. It should convince the donor that your organisation knows what it is doing, thereby establishing its credibility.



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## **11 Staffing/Administration**

In describing the methods, you will have mentioned staffing for the project. You now need to devote a section of your proposal to discussing the number of staff, their qualifications, and specific assignments. Details about individual staff members involved in the project can be included either as part of this section or in the appendix, depending on the length and importance of this information. 'Staffing' may refer to volunteers or to consultants, as well as to paid staff. Most proposal writers do not develop staffing sections for projects that are primarily volunteer run. Describing tasks that volunteers will undertake, however, can be most helpful to the proposal donor. Such information underscores the value added by the volunteers as well as the cost-effectiveness of the project. For a project with paid staff, you must describe which staff will work full time and which will work part time on the project. Identify staff already employed by your organisation / NGO and those to be recruited specifically for the project. How will you free up the time of an already fully deployed individual? Salary and project costs can be affected by the qualifications of the staff. Describe the practical experience you require for key staff, as well as level of expertise and educational background. If an individual has already been selected to direct the programme, summarise his or her credentials and include a brief biographical sketch in the appendix. A strong project director can help influence a grant decision. Describe for the donor your plans for administering the project. This is especially important in a large operation, if more than one organisation is collaborating on the project, or if you are using a fiscal agent. It needs to be crystal clear who is responsible for financial management, project outcomes, and reporting.

## **12 Evaluation**

An evaluation plan should not be considered only after the project is over; it should be built into the project. Including an evaluation plan in your proposal indicates that you take your objectives seriously and want to know how well you have achieved them. Evaluation is also a sound management tool. Like strategic planning, it helps a organisation / NGO refine and improve its programme. An evaluation can often be the best means for others to learn from your experience in conducting the project. There are two types of formal evaluation. One measures the impacts; the other analyses the process. Either or both might be appropriate to your project. The approach you choose will depend on the nature of the project and its objectives. For either type, you will need to describe the manner in which evaluation information will be collected and how the data will be analysed. You should present your plan for how the evaluation and its results will be reported and the audience to which it will be directed. For example, it might be used internally or be shared with the donor, or it might deserve a wider audience. A donor might even have an opinion about the scope of this dissemination.



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### **13 The Budget**

The budget for your proposal may be as simple as a one-page statement of projected expenses. On the other hand, your proposal may require a more complex presentation, perhaps including a page on projected support and revenue and notes explaining various items of expense or of revenue.

#### The Expense Budget

As you prepare to assemble the budget, go back through the proposal narrative and make a list of all personnel and non-personnel items related to the implementation of the project. Make certain that you list not only new costs that will be incurred if the project is funded but also any ongoing expenses for items that will be allocated to the project. Then get the relevant costs from the person in your organisation who is responsible for keeping the books. You may need to estimate the proportions of your organisation's ongoing expenses that should be charged to the project and any new costs, such as salaries for project personnel not yet hired. Put the costs you have identified next to each item on your list. Your list of budget items and the calculations you have done to arrive at a financial figure for each item should be summarised on worksheets. You should keep these to remind yourself how the numbers were developed. These worksheets can be useful as you continue to develop the proposal and discuss it with donors. These worksheets are also a valuable tool for monitoring the project once it is under way and for reporting after completion of the project period. A portion of a worksheet for a one year long project might look like this:

#### Item/Description/Cost

Section manager/Supervision/10% of salary = \$10,000 25% benefits = \$2,500

Project director/Hired in month one/11 months at \$35,000 = \$32,083 25% benefits = \$8,025

Trainers/12 working 10 hours per week for three months  $12 \times 10 \times 13 \times \$ 4.50 = \$7,020$

Resource centre/Requires 25% of current space/25% x \$5,000 = \$ 1,250

Overhead/20% of project cost/20% x \$64,628 = \$12,926

With your worksheets in hand, you are ready to prepare the expense budget. For most projects, costs should be grouped into subcategories, selected to reflect the critical areas of expense. All significant costs should be broken down within the subcategories, but small ones can be combined on one line. You might divide your expense budget into personnel and non-personnel costs. Your personnel subcategories might include salaries, benefits, and consultants. Subcategories under non-personnel costs might include travel, equipment, and printing, for example, with a specific price figure attached to each line.



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## Budget Narrative

A narrative portion of the budget is used to explain any unusual line items in the budget and is not always needed. If costs are straightforward and the numbers tell the story clearly, explanations are unnecessary. If you decide that you need a budget narrative, you can structure it in one of two ways. One option is to create 'Notes to the Budget,' with footnote-style numbers on the line items in the budget keyed to numbered explanations. If an extensive or more general explanation is required, you can structure the budget narrative as straight text. Remember, though, that the basic narrative about the project and your organisation belong elsewhere in the proposal, not in the budget narrative.

## **14 Organisational Information**

Normally a resume of your organisation / NGO organisation should come at the end of your proposal. Your natural inclination may be to put this information up front in the document. But it is usually better to sell the need for your project first and after that your organisation's ability to carry it out. It is not necessary to overwhelm the donor with facts about your organisation. This information can be conveyed easily by attaching a brochure or other prepared statement. In two pages or less, tell the donor when your organisation / NGO came into existence; state its mission, being certain to demonstrate how the subject of the proposal fits within or extends that mission; and describe the organisation's structure, programmes, and special expertise. Discuss the size of the board, how board members are recruited, and their level of participation. Give the donor a feel for the makeup of the board. (You should include the full board list in an appendix.) If your organisation is composed of volunteers or has an active volunteer group, describe the function that the volunteers fill. Provide details on the staff, including the numbers of full and part-time staff, and their levels of expertise. Describe the kinds of activities in which your staff engage. Explain briefly the assistance you provide. Describe the target group(s) you serve, any special or unusual needs they face, and why they rely on your organisation. Cite the number of people who are reached through your programmes. Tying all of the information about your organisation/NGO together, cite your organisation's expertise, especially as it relates to the subject of your proposal.

## **15 The Conclusion**

Every proposal should have a concluding section, even just a paragraph or two. This is a good place to draw attention to the future, after the funding has been spent. If appropriate, you should outline some of the follow-up activities that might be undertaken to begin to prepare your donors for your next request. Alternatively, you should state how the project might be sustained without further financial support or be turned over to the local community. This section is also the place to make a final appeal for your project. Briefly restate what your organisation / NGO wants to do and why it is important. Emphasise why your organisation needs funding to accomplish it. Don't be afraid at this stage to use a bit of emotion to solidify your case.



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## **16 What Happens Next?**

Submitting your proposal is nowhere near the end of your involvement in the fund seeking process. Funding review procedures vary widely, and the decision-making process can take anywhere from a few weeks to six months. During the review process, the donor may ask for additional information either directly from you or from outside consultants or professional references. Invariably, this is a difficult time for the organisation. You need to be patient but persistent. Some donors outline their review procedures in annual reports or application guidelines. If you are unclear about the process, don't hesitate to ask. If your hard work results in funding, immediately acknowledge the donor's support with a formal acceptance and letter of thanks. You also need to find out whether the donor has specific forms, procedures, and deadlines for reporting the progress of your project. Clarifying your responsibilities as a guarantee at the outset, particularly with respect to financial reporting, will prevent misunderstandings and more serious problems later.

Rejection is not necessarily the end of the process. If you're unsure why your proposal was rejected, ask. Did the donor need additional information? Would they be interested in considering the proposal at a future date? Now might also be the time to begin cultivation of a prospective donor. Put them on your mailing list so that they can become further acquainted with your organisation. Remember that there's always next year.

### Additional Resources:

- Burns, Michael E. *Proposal Writer's Guide*, New Haven, CT: Development & Technical Assistance Center.
- Coley, Soraya M., and Cynthia Scheinberg. *Proposal Writing*. Newburg Park, CA: Sage Publications
- Geever, J. and McNeill, P. *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing*, New York: The Foundation Center.
- Gooch, Judith Mirick. *Writing Winning Proposals*. Washington, D.C.: Council for Advancement and Support of Education.
- Hall, Mary. *Getting Funded: A Complete Guide to Proposal Writing*. 3rd ed. Portland, OR: Continuing Education Publications.
- Kiritz, Norton J. *Programme Planning and Proposal Writing*. Expanded version. Los Angeles, CA: The Grantsmanship Center.