

Step 4: Formal Proposal Development

As a proposal writer, it is your job to *persuade* the reviewer that your project is worth funding. Therefore, it is very important for you to communicate your project ideas and plans clearly and completely. A poor presentation can keep a good idea from getting funded. You can increase your chances by:

- Improving your proposal writing skills
- Mastering the various components of a successful proposal

Planning

A little planning can go a long way in preparing your proposal. Get organized before you start writing. This is a good time to review the proposal route on page three. Depending on the scope of your project, development of a competitive proposal may take anywhere from three to twelve months. Here are some planning suggestions:

- **Start early.** Many people make the mistake of waiting until a couple of weeks before the proposal is due; do it now.
- **Read the guidelines and FOLLOW THEM.** Talk to the program officer or the Director of Grants if you have questions or concerns.
- **Use a checklist and/or timeline as a guide to writing your proposal.** List all the tasks to be accomplished. What information will you need to gather/research? Estimate how long it will take you to finish each task and set internal deadlines for completing them.
- **Get a draft of your budget and proposal abstract** to the Grants Office at least 7 to 10 days PRIOR to the deadline.
- **Start working on your internal approval form** *at least* one week prior to the deadline. It can take several days to get all the signatures of approval necessary.
- **Begin collecting and organizing supporting materials early.** This includes figures, tables, photographs, references, and letters of support.

Writing Resources

The final proposal format will depend on the guidelines provided by the sponsor. For example, most federal agencies give very specific instructions and forms on all of the sections to be included in your proposal. A private foundation, however, may provide very little direction on the arrangement and inclusion of various components of the proposal other than a page limitation. There are some basic elements you will find in all proposals, however:

- **Narrative** – This is the WHAT and WHY section of your proposal. Generally, you begin with a statement of need or problem you will address. Next, state the overall goals and specific objectives of your project. Finally, describe your plan of action, providing enough detail for the reviewer to judge whether your project can be run both efficiently and effectively. The narrative should demonstrate that you have carefully thought through all aspects of the project. It must convince the reviewer of the significance of the problem, the appropriateness of your proposed response, and your ability to conduct the planned activities.
- **Evaluation** – Evaluation is important because it demonstrates accountability and concern for program outcomes. You may want to consider adding an evaluation specialist to your proposal development team. Use this section to explain the methodology you will use to determine whether or not your program was a success.
- **Timeline** – Include a well-developed project timeline to help the reviewer understand what you plan to do. It can show that you have thought through your project's long-term needs and goals.
- **Budget** – While many view the budget as a tedious technicality, it is a key element to your proposal. The budget is often used by reviewers to get a quick sense of the project's organization. Typical budget categories include personnel, travel, equipment, materials, and indirect costs. These are discussed in more detail on pages 12-13.
- **Abstract** – The abstract may be the only section read in detail by some reviewers. It should be a concise, one page summary of your project that provides a good overview of the proposed activities and it should capture the reader's interest.
- **Supporting Materials** – Often included in an appendix, these are the graphs, pictures, tables, letters of support, biographical sketches of the project team, and other documents that support the credibility of your project but may interfere with the smooth reading of the proposal.

Here are some general tips for writing good proposals:

- Help the reviewer find the information he or she needs by carefully organizing your proposal. For example, use explicit titles, headings and subheadings throughout your proposal. Be consistent in the use of fonts and formatting. Use tables and graphics to summarize information.
- Ask a colleague who is familiar with your topic to read your proposal for content.
- Check for logical, spelling, and grammatical errors.
- Compare your final proposal to the program guidelines. Did you include all of the requested information? Have you addressed the review considerations?
- Obey the rules given in the program guidelines.
- Start early, revise often, and submit before the deadline!

There are many good grant writing guides available. Visit the Director of Grants for copies of articles and books on writing successful proposals, or try these web sites:

"Hints for Writing Successful NIH Grants" by Ellen Barrett

http://chroma.med.miami.edu/research/Ellens_how_to.html

"A Proposal Writing Short Course" from the Foundation Center

<http://fdncenter.org/onlib/shortcourse/prop1.html>

"The Grantseeking Process" from the Foundation Center

<http://fdncenter.org/onlib/orient/intro1.html>

"A Guide to Proposal Writing" from the National Science Foundation

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/1998/nsf9891/nsf9891.htm>

Internal Forms and Policies

The Internal Approval Form (GC-2) is used by the college and KCTCS to provide tracking information about grant activities and to record college commitments (of time, money, and resources) and approvals. You can download this form at:

www.kctcs.edu/businessaffairs/FORMS/GC2.doc

A final issue of concern when preparing your proposal is **release time** and part-time faculty replacements. Release time is approved on a case-by-case basis by the VP of Academics and the College President, and must be secured prior to submission of the final proposal. While this approval is secured by signature on the preliminary approval form, you may wish to make an appointment with the Dean prior to writing your proposal to discuss this issue in more detail.

Budgetary Assistance

The budget and budget justification sections of a proposal request and defend the dollars and cents required for your project. Therefore, both sections are vitally important to the project and to you! These sections inform the sponsor **how much** it will cost to do the proposed project and **why** the money is required.

There are two general categories of costs for undertaking a sponsored project: **direct costs** and **facilities and administrative costs** (F&A, formerly known as indirect costs).

Direct costs can be specifically identified with a particular sponsored project:

- Salaries and wages
- Personnel benefits
- Supplies
- Travel and communication
- Equipment
- Computer use
- Alterations and renovation

F&A costs are incurred for the general support and management of sponsored projects at an institution. Typical F&A costs include:

- General administration and general expenses
- Plan operation and maintenance
- Library expenses
- Departmental administration expenses
- Depreciation or use allowance
- Student administration and services

A final major issue to consider when preparing your budget is whether or not **cost sharing or matching** is required. **All cost sharing and matching must be approved by the President and VP of Finance & Operations well in advance of the deadline, and may require special tracking if you are funded. A source of the matching funds must be identified, and you must obtain a letter of commitment from the President.**

The final budget must also be reviewed and approved by the KCTCS Grants Office and it is requested that you submit a copy of the final budget and budget justification to their office **5-7** days prior to the proposal deadline.

If you are funded, you will also need to work with the Advancement Account Specialist.

Other concerns about budgetary issues can be addressed to the VP of Finance & Operations.