General Proposal Guidelines

Many foundation and corporate sponsors do not provide detailed guidelines with respect to proposal preparation. In these cases, the following provides a guide to the basic organization and elements of a proposal

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This section is optional depending on the length and complexity of the proposal. As well as providing an outline, it should assist a reviewer in finding her/his way through the proposal.

Abstract

A clear and concise summary of the project. The abstract or summary is a 100 to 300 word condensation of the *essential information* in a proposal. It should be clearly and concisely written section emphasizing the following:

- the timeliness, significance and need
- the specific objectives
- the general procedures and evaluation methods
- the anticipated impact, indicating who will benefit and how

The abstract is very important because many funding decision-makers may read only the review comments and the abstract.

Project Description

This is the main body of the proposal, the section on which the decision will turn. The basic idea is expressed here, the philosophy or premise underlying it explained, the methods for developing it are described, and its ultimate purpose is stated and defended. The project description can be subdivided into the following components:

Introduction

This should be a brief summary of the problem (or need), proposed method of solution, and anticipated outcomes. It may contain information showing that the proposer is well-acquainted with the past and current work and literature in the field and that the proposed project will advance or add to the present state of knowledge in this field.

Problem statement (or statement of need) and significance

This section defines the project rationale including the overall purpose, need and justification for the project. It explains the significance of the proposed idea in relationship to the sponsor's goals and objectives in a way that will logically justify the expenditure of funds

Goals and Objectives

Goals and general statements specifying the project's desired outcomes. They are value statements indicating the general direction of the project. Objectives are specific statements of the expected accomplishments of the proposed activities and usually include the following:

- description of the outcome in measurable terms
- the criteria for measuring the acceptability of the outcome.

Procedures and Methods

Describe in as much detail as practical the approach to be used in the proposed activity. Describe in a step-by-step sequence (including time estimates) techniques or methods to be used. Do not hesitate to use figures or tables wherever they will help clarify a point. If the proposed activity will require an unusual amount of funds for any particular category of expense, explain in detail. (Most declined proposals fail because of poorly-defined methodology.)

In general, the procedures and methods section will answer the following:

- What is going to be accomplished?
- How is it going to be accomplished?
- When is the activity going to be undertaken?
- Why was this particular methodology or action plan chosen?

Evaluation

This section presents the overall evaluation process, both for assisting the on going progress toward achieving the objectives and the actual outcome of the proposed activities. The evaluation component will perform the following functions:

- It will monitor progress to determine whether the project is being implemented as planned
- It will access actual outcomes to determine the extent to which the objectives are being achieved
- It will provide the feedback necessary to assess whether modifications in the project are necessary

Dissemination

Many sponsors, especially private foundations, require a dissemination plan to be included in a proposal. The dissemination section should emphasize any reasonably anticipated outcomes or activities for making them available to others. Dissemination provides results of individual or local research to a regional or national audience. In doing so, it stimulates ideas, suggestions and constructive criticism from desired or concerned groups.

Two important rules:

1. Let the language of the proposal reflect your knowledge of the field; however, make it understandable to the least knowledgeable of anticipated reviewers.
2. let the language convey your *enthusiasm* for the project.

Budget

This section includes all the financial items needed to perform research. The following are common elements in a proposal budget:

- Salaries and Wages
- Fringe Benefits
- Materials and Supplies - These include consumable supplies such as office supplies, glassware, chemicals, computer supplies, etc. These may be listed under one general heading with an explanation of the types of items to be purchased. If the cost is substantial, the breakdown should be more detailed.
    - For proposals requesting federal funding, general office supplies are ordinarily considered part of indirect costs, and should not be included in the direct cost budget unless the nature of the project requires more than minimal expenditures and is easily justifiable.
- Equipment - Because equipment is an expense that many sponsors are reluctant to fund, any pertinent agency guideline should be reviewed and observed.
- Travel - This section should detail each trip, the destination, purpose, and expense, and should include transportation, lodging, per diem, and incidentals. In budgeting for foreign travel, keep in mind that for federally funded projects, the government requires the use of U.S. air carriers, regardless of cost or convenience.
- Communications - This category usually includes telephone, courier, fax, postage, etc. costs associated with the project. Depending on the significance of communications costs and the preferences of the proposer and the sponsor, this category is sometimes included in the "other direct costs" category.
    - Proposals submitted for federal funding should not include requests for postage or local telephone costs unless the nature of the project is such that expenses for these items will be unusually great. If, for instance, the project includes mass mailings or telephone survey work, the costs are appropriate.
- Publications - Included in this category are the costs of preparing and publishing the results of the activities conducted under the sponsored project, including costs of reports, reprints, page charges, illustrations, and other journal costs.
- Contractual Costs - This category should contain any contractual agreements to be entered into by the University, under which non-University employees or entities will be paid for contributions to the project as either consultants or subcontractors.
    - Consultant services should be justified and information should be furnished on each consultant's expertise, primary organizational affiliation, compensation rate, and number of days or percent of time contemplated. Some agencies limit the daily rate that may be paid to consultants. In any event, the daily rate should not exceed the rate that the consultant customarily receives for similar work.
    - When funding for subcontracts is requested, a subcontract proposal, including an appropriate budget signed by the authorized subcontractor official, should be included in the proposal.
- Other Direct Costs - Miscellaneous items that do not fit into any other category are entered as other direct costs. Examples might be payments to subjects, animal maintenance costs, and repair and maintenance contracts. These costs should be itemized by unit and category.
- Indirect Costs - Indirect costs are the costs that cannot be tied specifically to a project, such as libraries, janitorial services, utilities, maintenance and depreciation of facilities, and general administrative costs. When preparing your budget, all of the direct cost items are listed first. Then the appropriate indirect cost percentage rate is assessed against the total of the allowable direct costs.
    - Indirect costs are usually expressed as a percentage of Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC). MTDC are total direct costs excluding the costs of equipment, patient care, tuition and fees, and that portion of each subcontract exceeding $25,000. A copy of the rate agreement can be obtained from your Contracts and Grants administrator or you may view the rates online.

    - Indirect costs must be requested at the approved rate unless a sponsor has a published policy restricting the payment of indirect costs. Any exceptions must be specifically approved by the appropriate Dean/Director.
- Cost Sharing - Cost sharing is the process by which the total costs of a project are shared by the sponsor and the performing institution. Formal cost sharing obligates the University to provide the resources in the agreed fashion and to account for their use in the performance of the project. Cost sharing must be authorized and approved by the Department Chair and Dean/Director.
    - One form of cost sharing is charging indirect costs at less than the full approved rate when required by the sponsor's policy, and as approved by the appropriate dean. When this is the case, the difference between the dollar amount that would have been charged at the full rate and the dollar amount allowed by, or agreed to, with the sponsor should be shown in the budget as cost sharing. Another common form of cost sharing is the contribution of individuals' time to a project when the portion of their time spent on the project is not funded by the sponsor. In these cases, the applicable benefits and indirect costs, in addition to the salary, should be calculated and shown as part of the cost sharing.

Budget Justification

This section should explain and justify any budget items that may not be clear or that may raise questions.

References

This section should be included only if literature has been cited in the proposal narrative. The number of references should be kept to an essential minimum. A numbered list, or any acceptable bibliographic method, may be used.