

Writing Winning Grant Proposals For Technology



**SEIR*TEC at SERVE
3333 Chapel Hill Blvd., Suite C-102
Durham, NC 27707
919-402-1060
<http://www.seirtec.org>**

Characteristics of Strong Proposals

Proposals with the following characteristics have a greater chance for funding.

- The project is compelling and is likely to have a positive, lasting impact.
- The proposal addresses grantor's priorities.
- The project will contribute to the field of knowledge.
- The need for the project is well documented.
- Elements of the proposal are integrated.
- The proposal format is easy to follow.
- The organization of the proposal content corresponds to the components of the RFP
- The proposal does not contain unexplained jargon or acronyms.
- The document is appealing.

Tips for Writing Strong Proposals

Preparing to Write a Proposal

1. If at all possible, conduct a needs assessment to help you define the problem(s) you intend to address through a grant proposal; identify potential solutions to the problem(s). Solicit input from partners and constituent groups: teachers, students, parents, administrators, businesses, university partners, community groups, and so forth. Your proposal will be stronger if you have some data showing the strength of the need or problem. On the other hand, don't take up space with irrelevant or redundant information. Consider the difference between a need and a want. Most funding agencies fund projects that will meet a particular need or solve a certain problem.
2. Create a literature file of information or data that could be useful in the first chapter of a proposal. The file might contain language from federal or state legislation (e.g., *No Child Left Behind*), demographic information for the target population, results of surveys or needs assessments, current research literature on the problem to be addressed, etc. Do your homework. Find out how other districts have been successfully implementing projects similar to the one you have in mind. Check professional literature and the U.S. Department of Education's Web site to find the results of major studies on technology.
3. Create a résumé file of staff members who are likely to be listed as key personnel for the project. Be certain résumés are up-to-date, attractively formatted, and no longer than two or three pages. Create a "blurb" file that will form the basis of the proposal's personnel chapter. A blurb usually contains two or three paragraphs describing a person's current job responsibilities, relevant experience, and education or training.
4. Create a financial file that will help you create the budget. Include current information such as salaries, benefits, overhead rates, and per diem rates. If you are going to ask for equipment as part of the budget, figure out what you will need and how much it is likely to cost.
5. Look at models for staff development, performance-based assessment, evaluation, and technology integration in the professional literature. You can

often adopt or adapt existing models, rather than "re-inventing the wheel." Good publications on these topics are available from: ERIC databases, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), and the National School Boards Association (NSBA).

Identifying and Selecting the Most Promising Funding Sources

1. Monitor the Federal Register and other sources of information about upcoming competitions. Call the office of the government agency to which you plan to apply, and ask to be put on the mailing list for applications.
2. Read new application packages word for word, and cover to cover. If you have any questions, call the competition manager at the funding agency. Pay particular attention to the funding priorities. If the project you have in mind doesn't meet the funding priorities, it doesn't stand much chance of being funded, no matter how good the idea or how great the need.
3. Once you've identified a promising competition, call the program officer and let him or her know you are interested in applying. Try to find out as much as you can about the competition: who is likely to apply, how many proposals are expected, and how many will be funded. If a competition has been held in prior years, ask the program officer for abstracts of the projects that have been funded. Also ask about specific things they will be looking for in proposals that might not be discussed in the application package, such as emphasis on minority or economically disadvantaged populations. Ask the program officer if he or she would be willing and able to discuss your ideas for a project.
4. Network with colleagues in other organizations to gather intelligence on potential competitors and to find out if there is an incumbent or if someone has an inside track.

Logistics and Pre-Planning

1. Let key personnel within your organization know that you are planning to submit a grant proposal and ask for their support and understanding.
2. Identify organizations that could be potential partners in your project. If you haven't written a proposal before, consider going into a new project as a subcontractor. Solicit participation in the project, both within and outside the organization.
3. Form a proposal development team. You'll need people with the following skills and experience: content expertise; writing; editing; word processing, including the creation of charts and graphics; production (photocopying, putting the whole document together and preparing it for delivery or mail); coordination (someone who is detail oriented to make sure everything gets done correctly and on time); and management (someone to take responsibility for the whole process and to make decisions in case there are disagreements among team members).
4. Make a checklist of everything that is required in the proposal. Be sure that everyone on the proposal development team has a copy of the list and other pertinent information from the application package. Look over the forms in the application package to see what additional information must be collected, such

as the congressional district, and the employer identification number. Make sure you have this information on hand.

5. Bring the members of the proposal development team together to discuss the goals and objectives of the project, and to make writing assignments.
6. The identified needs and problems should determine the project's goals. The goals should be attainable. In general, it's a good idea to have no more than three goals for a project. One or two would probably be fine. Check to be sure the goals are in line with the funding agency's stated priorities.
7. Each goal should have several supporting objectives. Objectives should be measurable. The objectives are the threads that connect the different components of the proposal and make it a cohesive document. They are the heart of the design; they drive the technical approach, management plan, personnel, resources, evaluation, and budget. A literature search might also help you determine outcomes and set realistic expectations for the project. In terms of expected outcomes, think beyond student scores on standardized tests to include other potential factors, such as lower dropout rates, lower absenteeism, higher quality of students' work, teacher productivity, or changes in communication patterns.
8. Make writing assignments based on your checklist of what is required in the proposal. If feasible, let people choose which chapter(s) they want to write. Ask junior staff to work on the "back" chapters. An assistant can collect resumes and create word processing shells for each chapter. If you have multiple writers for the proposal, designate your best writer as the person to put all the sections together and give you proposal one voice, i.e., make it read as if it one person wrote it. Keep your eye on the prize. Remember that the goal of putting the effort into a proposal is to win funding for a project. Don't let any one person's ego get in the way; instead, capitalize on the strengths of each person on the team.
9. Develop a common calendar and a timetable for everyone to finish their assignments. You should have good drafts of all the chapters at least five days before the proposal is due. Identify existing dates that are already committed, and select open days to work on the proposal. To the extent possible, have every member of the proposal team clear his or her calendars for 10 work days before the due date. You'll probably have to work in the evenings and on the weekends, too, especially near deadline dates. Mark "deadline" days, and if possible, push every date back one week so that you finish and submit the proposal early.
10. If the application is to be submitted online, check with the grantor to determine what pass codes you need, what formatting is allowed (if this is not stated clearly in the instructions), and whether you can submit parts of the application over time. This will allow you to determine if you might encounter problems with the online submission process.

Writing the Proposal

1. Give yourself plenty of time. Proposals that are thrown together at the last minute usually look it. For some reason, it takes at least two weeks to put together a good proposal, regardless of the number of pages.
2. As soon as possible, ask partners, consultants, and other involved parties, to write a letter of support or agreement. Give them a deadline that is three days before the due date (they'll probably fax it at the last minute anyway). They might want you to provide them with some language for their letters, but try to keep all the letters from containing the same wording.
3. As soon as you've nailed down the goals and objectives, start working on the budget to make sure you can do what you want to do within the funding limit. That way, you won't have to keep revising the plan of operation's description of proposed activities under each objective. A preliminary budget will also help you identify staffing levels (FTEs), which you can plug into the personnel chapter and the person-loading chart.
4. If you conducted a needs assessment to help determine your project's priorities, mention this multi-participant input into the project's design in your proposal.
5. Remember that success breeds success. If you have conducted similar projects, be sure to mention how successful they were, without bragging or going into details.
6. Don't assume that the reviewers will make the connection between the project's goals and the funding agency's program priorities. Explain how the project addresses the priorities. If you have boilerplate sections from prior proposals or other materials, be sure to tailor them to the project you are proposing. Your proposal will be more compelling if the goals focus on the improvement of teaching and learning rather than training, equipment acquisition, or infrastructure development. For example, it's better to say the goal is "for teachers to use technology skillfully and effectively in everyday classroom activities" than to say the goal is "to train teachers to use technology." Developing and implementing training might be an objective or strategy for meeting the goal.
7. Also don't assume that the reviewers know anything about your district, the problem you're addressing, the technologies you plan to use, or the strategies you plan to implement. You don't want to talk down to them, but you do want to make your narrative and charts very clear. Think about the tone you are setting, and adjust it to fit the audience. Show confidence in your ability to carry out the project, but don't be arrogant.
8. Check the narrative to be sure that all the costs included in the budget are explained in the section where you've discussed the proposed project activities or strategies.
9. As each chapter is completed, give it a close edit. It's a good idea to put the date or time on each version of edits. When possible, use active voice rather than passive. Say, for example, "The project director will convene a meeting" instead of "A meeting will be held." Try to use the language of proposals. For example, the document you're writing is proposal, not a grant. The grant is the award you're trying to win. Also, the U.S. Department of Education is referred to as

USED, not DOE. DOE is the U.S. Department of Energy. Put yourself in the reviewer's shoes. Is this proposal interesting? Is it compelling? Does it have a certain quality that will make it stand out among all the others? If you don't love the project, chances are the reviewers won't either.

Formatting and Submitting the Proposal

1. Don't wait until the last minute to have the head of your organization sign necessary forms.
2. Read the deadline to see if it's when the proposals have to be postmarked or when they must be received. If you don't follow the instructions to the letter, chances are your proposal won't even be reviewed. As a measure of safety, get written verification that you met the deadline, such as a receipt from Federal Express or registered mail.
3. Reserve the last 24 hours for final editing, photocopying, and mailing/delivery.
4. When you have the first solid draft, ask one of your detail-oriented colleagues who is not involved in the project to read it to see if all the basic elements are there, the concepts are sound, the writing and charts are clear, the various sections fit together into one cohesive project design, and there are no inconsistencies, especially in the way you talk about goals and objectives from chapter to chapter and in the allocation of personnel time (FTEs). Tell them to be ruthless in their critique.
5. Give edited components to the person who will coordinate the word processing. That person will format it and insert charts and graphics. Once in their hands, subsequent changes should be made on hard copy rather than disk to avoid confusion over which version is the freshest. Don't even think about going over the page limit or using smaller margins than specified in the application package.
6. Think about the visual appeal of your document. Try not to have more than three consecutive pages of unbroken text. Use bullets, enumeration, charts, graphs, or side bars to make the document easier to read. Quotes in boxes add interest.
7. Return to your checklist just before you assemble the final document to make sure all of the required proposal elements are present and in the right order. Be absolutely certain that the proposal has addressed all the review criteria listed in the application package!
8. Check the photocopies to make sure they are attractive, e.g., shading looks good, there are no stripes or splotches. If you can, use higher quality paper than you normally use for everyday office work - use paper that has a nice weight and shows the print well.

After Submitting the Proposal

1. Call your Congressional representatives and let them know you have applied for a grant and which agency is reviewing it. They might ask you to send them a copy.
2. After a couple of months, you can call the program officer to find out if the proposals have been reviewed and when announcements will be made.

Sample Review Criteria

Adapted from: *Reviewing Applications for Discretionary Grants and Cooperative Agreements: A Workbook for Application Reviewers*. (1991). Horace Mann Learning Center: U.S. Department of Education.

Meeting the Purposes of the Funding Program

1. What are the purposes of the funding program?
2. What are the objectives of this project?
3. How will these objectives further the purposes of the program?

Extent of Need for the Project

1. What needs are outlined by the funding program?
2. What needs does the applicant identify?
3. How did the applicant identify those needs; i.e., what specific documentation or evidence does the application offer to support the applicant's assessment of need?
4. Are the needs identified by the applicant consistent with the purposes of the funding program?
5. Does the applicant identify too many or too few needs for the proposed time frame and resources of the project?
6. Are the identified needs well defined so that the project can be focused on them, or are the identified needs very generic?

Plan of Operation

1. Do the project objectives serve the purposes of the funding program?
2. How well is the project designed?
 - a. Are project objectives consistent with stated needs?
 - b. Are project activities consistent with project objectives?
 - c. Are project objectives measurable?
3. How will the applicant use its resources and personnel to achieve each objective?
4. Has the applicant developed an effective management plan that will ensure proper and efficient administration of the project?
5. Do project milestones represent a logical progression of times and tasks?
6. Does the applicant propose a realistic time schedule for accomplishing objectives?
7. Will the proposed activities accomplish the project's objectives successfully?
8. Are the approaches planned based on sound research that indicates they will be successful for the population to be served?
9. Does the project have clearly developed provisions for providing equal access to eligible participants who are members of traditionally underrepresented groups (racial or ethnic minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, elderly persons)?

Quality of Key Personnel

1. Do the job descriptions adequately reflect skills needed to make the project work?
2. Are the duties of personnel clearly defined?
3. What relevant qualifications do the proposed personnel possess, especially the Project Director? (Focus on their experience and training in fields related to the objectives of the project, though other information may be considered.)
4. Will proposed personnel need to be trained for the project?
5. How much time will the proposed personnel actually devote to the project?
6. To what extent does the applicant encourage employment applications from members of traditionally underrepresented groups (ethnic or racial minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, elderly persons)?

Evaluation Plan

1. Are the proposed methods of evaluation appropriate for the project?
2. Will the proposed evaluation be objective?
3. Will the proposed evaluation methods measure the effectiveness of project activities in meeting project objectives?
4. Will the evaluation plan produce valid and reliable data concerning the accomplishment of project objectives?
5. Does the evaluation plan include criteria that project leaders will use to make decisions about the effectiveness of activities and strategies?
6. Does the evaluation plan measure the effectiveness of project management?
7. Does the evaluation plan measure the project's effect on the project audience?

Adequacy of Resources

1. Are the proposed facilities adequate for project purposes?
2. Is the proposed equipment adequate for project purposes?
3. Does the applicant have access to special sources of experience or expertise?

Budget and Cost Effectiveness

1. Is the budget adequate to support the project's proposed activities?
2. Are overall project costs reasonable in relation to project objectives?
3. How much of the project's total cost is devoted to administrative costs?
4. Are budget items sufficiently justified?
5. Is the budget padded?

SOURCES OF FUNDING

A Selected Listing

The links below connect to agencies, foundations, and organizations that regularly make grants for educational purposes and to additional resources for learning about grants and grant writing. They were compiled from a variety of sources. It is not a complete list, but rather one that is intended to show the variety of funders and types of programs that are funded, to assist in locating additional lists of funders, and to provide grant writing resources.

AlphaSmart, Inc. - <http://www.alphasmart.com/alphagrants/>

American Express Philanthropy-<http://home3.americanexpress.com/corp/philanthropy/>

AT&T Foundation-<http://www.att.com/foundation/>

Barbara Bush Family Literacy -<http://www.barbarabushfoundation.com/nga.html>

Beaumont Foundation of America - <http://www.bmtfoundation.com/bfa/us/public/en/grants/>

Bell South Foundation-<http://www.bellsouthfoundation.com/>

Best Buy Foundation -<http://communications.bestbuy.com/communityrelations/>Bill & Melinda

Gates Foundation -<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/>

The Captain Planet Foundation-<http://www.turner.com/cpf/>

The Chronicle of Philanthropy-<http://philanthropy.com/>

Cisco Foundation-

http://www.cisco.com/en/US/about/ac48/about_cisco_grants_and_donations.html

Dell Foundation - <http://www1.us.dell.com/content/topics/global.aspx/corp/foundation/en/index>

Earthwatch Global Classroom-<http://www.earthwatch.org/grants/educators.html>

ED Grants Forecast-<http://www.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html>

Environmental Protection Agency Grants and Fellowships-

<http://www.epa.gov/epahome/grants.htm>

eSchoolNews.com-<http://www.eschoolnews.org/funding/>

Federal Register-<http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/>

Foundation Center-<http://www.fdncenter.org/>

Government Printing Office Federal Grants Access-

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/topics/grants.html>

Hewlett-Packard Philanthropy - <http://grants.hp.com/>

HUD Funds Available-<http://www.hud.gov/grants/index.cfm>

Juvenile Justice OJJDP Grants and Funding-<http://www.ojdp.ncjrs.org/funding/funding.html>

Kathy Schrock's Grant Sources - <http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/business/grants.html>

Mississippi Power Education Foundation -
<http://www.southerncompany.com/mspower/edufound/>

Mississippi DOE Grant and Funding Web Site - <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Grants.htm>

Microsoft Unlimited Potential - <http://www.microsoft.com/mscorp/citizenship/giving/overview/>

Mott Foundation-<http://www.mott.org/programs/programs.asp>

NASA Learning Technologies Project - <http://learn.arc.nasa.gov/grants/>

National Endowment for the Humanities-<http://www.neh.gov/grants/index.html>

National Science Foundation-<http://www.nsf.gov/home/grants.htm>

National Science Teachers of America-<http://www.nsta.org/programs/>

National Telecommunications & Information
Administration<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/otiahome/otiahome.html>

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics -<http://www.nctm.org/about/met/>

NEA Foundation-<http://nfie.org/grants.htm> News for Educators Online Now (NEON) -
<http://www.itrc.ucf.edu/neon/>

SAMHSA (mental health) Grants page-<http://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grants.html>

SchoolGrants Grants and Opportunities for K-12-<http://www.schoolgrants.org/>

Scholastic Funding Connection - <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/fundingconnection/>

Southeastern Council of Foundations-<http://www.secf.org>

Sra international.org (Grants Web) -
<http://www.srainternational.org/newweb/grantsweb/index.cfm>

Target Education Grants -
http://target.com/target_group/community_giving/index.ihtml?content=target%5ffc%5findex

Technology Grant News - <http://www.technologygrantnews.com/>

Technology & Learning-<http://techlearning.com/resources/grants.ihtml>

TGCI- The Grantsmanship Center -<http://www.tgci.com/>

US Department of Energy-
http://www.doe.gov/engine/content.do?BT_CODE=TEACHERSSTUDENTS

US Department of Education-<http://www.ed.gov/fund/landing.ihtml?src=rt>

Wallace Foundation - <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/WF/GrantsPrograms/>

Wal-Mart Good Works-<http://www.walmartfoundation.org/>

Youth Garden Grants-<http://www.kidsgardening.com/grants.asp>

Terminology

Actions, Activities, Strategies - a description of a task to be completed, an event to be implemented, or function to be accomplished that will one component in accomplishing a stated objective of the project.

Cooperative Agreement - a type of federal assistance; essentially, a variation on a discretionary grant, awarded by a Department when it anticipates having substantial involvement with the recipient during the performance of a funded project.

Discretionary Grant - an award of financial assistance in the form of money, or property in lieu of money, from the federal government or a foundation to an eligible recipient, usually made on the basis of a competitive review process.

Goal - a desired outcome of a project or program.

Grants Officer - a representative of the Grants and Contracts (GCS) unit of the federal government, which has authority for overseeing grants and contracts processes. The grants officer is generally responsible for financial aspects of a project, such as the establishment of indirect cost rates.

Logic Map/Model - a graphic that describes a program, project, or organization for planning and evaluation. It lays out the activities and outcomes using boxes or graphic designs, and, using arrows to connect the boxes/graphics, shows how the activities and outcomes connect with one another.

Means - ways we do things such as processes, methods, and resources. Techniques used to deliver results.

Needs - the gap or discrepancy between a present state (what is) and a desired end state (what should be). Identified needs provide the rationale for the project.

Needs Assessment - a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about program or organizational improvement and allocation of resources.

Objective - description of what the project will accomplish in order to meet the goals

Project Officer - a representative of the federal program or foundation that funds specific projects. Project officers often have content area expertise and therefore have authority for overseeing programmatic aspects of grants and contracts, such as the successful completion of project objectives.

Proposal - an application for funding to carry out a specific body of work. Proposals usually include a narrative, a budget, and forms required by the funding agency.

R.F.P. - Request for Proposals - an announcement of the availability of funding and requirements for applying.

Wants - an item or service that is desired and is not based on an identified discrepancy between what is and what should be.