OFFICE FOR GRANTS

WRITING AND FORMATTING THE PROPOSAL

Make your proposal interesting to read, but adhere to the guidelines and requirements of the funding source.

- Answer the question that is asked, and leave out information that is not asked for.
- Use the same words/phrases that appear in the questions you are answering.
- Follow the directions. If it asks for one sentence, give only one sentence.
- Spell out abbreviations.
- Write in active voice.
- Remember your audience- a possibly tired reviewer who can use only the information you provide in your application. Don't assume the reviewer knows anything about your program, NWACC, Bentonville, Northwest Arkansas, or Arkansas.

Proposal writing requires communication, cooperation, review, and revision. Most importantly it requires planning and adherence to timelines in order to be successful. The following writing and formatting suggestions may be helpful but they do not represent a standard format. Each funding source's writing and formatting guidelines must be followed explicitly.

Proposal Summary: Outline of Project Goals

The proposal summary outlines the proposed project and should appear at the beginning of the proposal. It may in the form of a cover letter or a separate page, but should definitely be brief—no longer than two or three paragraphs. Prepare the summary after the proposal has been developed in order to encompass all the key points necessary to communicate the objectives of the project. The summary may be the first part of the proposal package seen by agency officials. The initial impression it gives will be critical to the success of the proposal.

- Describe the project in view of the local need.
- Explain the influence of the project both during and after the project period.
- Highlight the consequences of the project as a result of funding.

Introduction: Presenting NWACC as a Credible Organization

Most proposals require a description of the applying organization's past and present operations. Regard the introduction of NWACC's organizational resume. Demographic data are available from the Office for Institutional Research (contact Kim Purdy). Fiscal year budget information is available from the Finance Office. Some features to consider are:

- NWACC's goals, philosophy, and success stories.
- Data relevant to the goals of the funding agency (explain where the data came from)
- Total annual budget
- Where money comes from (percentages)

- Where money goes (percentages)
- Staff, volunteers, community relationships
- How are we a leader? How would the community be different without us?
- Brief biographies of key project staff members.

Problem Statement: Stating the Purpose at Hand

The problem statement (or needs assessment) makes a clear, concise, and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed. The best way to collect information about the problem is to conduct and document needs assessments for the target or service area. Provide factual information directly related to the problem addressed by the proposal. Areas to document are:

- The purpose for developing the proposal.
- The beneficiaries—who are they and how will they benefit.
- The social and economic costs to be affected.
- The nature of the problem. Include historical, geographic, quantitative, factual, statistical, and philosophical information, as well as studies and literature searches from public or university libraries.
- How we came to realize the problem exists, and what is currently being done about the problem.

Project Objectives: Goals and Desired Outcome

Program objectives refer to specific activities in a proposal. The figures used should be verifiable. The Statement and Objectives together should paint a picture of "what is" and "what should be."

- Identify all objectives related to the goals to be reached, and the methods to be employed to achieve the stated objectives.
- Consider quantities or things measurable and refer to a problem statement and the outcome of proposed activities when developing the objective.
- Be realistic. If the proposal is funded, the stated objectives will probably be used to evaluate program progress.

Program Methods and Program Design: A Plan of Action

The program design refers to how the project is expected to work and solve the stated problem. Sketch out the following:

- The activities to occur along with the related resources and staff needed to operate the project.
- Who will be served and who will participate.
- A flow chart of the project. Describe how the parts interrelate, where personnel will be needed, and what they are expected to do. Identify the kinds of facilities, equipment, and support services required.
- A plan for measurable results. Project staff may be required to produce evidence of program performance through an examination of stated objectives during either a site visit or grant reviews.
- A diagram of the program design. Use tables or bullets whenever possible to display information in a clear format. Demonstrate both the scope and detail of the project.

- Justification of the course of action taken. Use the most economical method that does not compromise or sacrifice project quality. Financial expenses associated with performance of the project may become points of negotiation. Carefully consider the time and money needed to perform each part of the plan.
- Features of the proposal that could be considered innovative or distinct from other proposals under consideration.
- If allowed by funding source guidelines, use appendices to provide details, supplementary data, references, and information requiring in-depth analysis. These types of data could detract from the proposal's readability if included in the body of the narrative. Time tables, work plans, schedules, activities, methodologies, legal papers, personal vitae, letters of support, and endorsements are examples of appendices.

Project Evaluation: Product and Process Analysis

The evaluation component is two-fold:

(1) Product evaluation, which addresses results that can be attributed to the project, as well as the extent to which the project has satisfied its desired objectives; and
(2) Process evaluation, which addresses how the project was conducted, in terms of consistency with the stated plan of action and the effectiveness of the various activities within the plan.

Explore the requirements of the proposed project. Evaluations may be conducted by an internal staff member, an external evaluator, or both. State the amount of time needed to evaluate, how the feedback will be distributed, and a schedule for review and comment. Evaluation designs may start at the beginning, middle or end of a project, but specify a start-up time.

Future Funding: Long-Term Project Planning

If this is an on-going project, the funding source will want to see a plan for continuation beyond the grant period.

- Describe the availability of other resources necessary to implement the grant.
- Discuss maintenance and future program funding if program is for construction activity.
- Account for other needed expenditures if program includes purchase of equipment.

The Proposal Budget: Planning the Budget

Never anticipate that the income from the grant will be the sole support for the project. Consider overall budget requirements, and in particular, the budget line items most subject to inflationary pressures. Avoid padding budget line items, but attempt to anticipate possible future increases. Refer to Developing a Budget for information about budget areas and how to handle direct and indirect costs.

Make sure the budget justifies all expenses and is consistent with the proposal narrative. Pay attention to:

- The salaries in the proposal,
- Additional space and equipment; any equipment purchases allowed by the funding source,

- Contributions to the matching fund, if matching funds are required,
- The in-kind contributions NWACC makes to the program,
- Local matching funds, even small gifts, and be sure to document them in the proposal, and
- Volunteer commitments—be sure to document them in the proposal.

Formatting the Proposal

A neat, organized, and attractive proposal can give the reviewer a positive first impression. In addition to using tables and bulleted lists, provide white space to give the reviewer a "visual break" and allow for note taking. Unless the guidelines request specific margins, use 1" margins on all sides. Place page numbers in the center bottom of the page. Do not create page headers unless requested.

The section headings come directly from the instructions in the proposal. Often they'll be lettered or numbered, and if they are, then use the same lettering/numbering scheme. Whenever possible, start each new section at the top of a page. If there are page limitations, skip a few lines and start the next section on the same page.

Unless the instructions tell what line spacing to use (single or double) use 1 ½ spaces per line. It slightly reduces the amount of information on each page, but it is easier to read.

Don't be creative in font selection – use the required font if there is one. If there isn't one, develop a similar scheme for fonts and sizes and stick with it throughout the entire proposal.