The Parts of the Proposal Writing

Learning Lab - A Proposal Writing Short Course (Acquiring peer-reviewed research funding)

1. The Executive Summary (umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal) - 1 page

- the first page of the proposal is the most important section of the entire document; here we provide the reader with a snapshot of what is to follow;
  - it summarises all of the key information and is a sales document designed to convince the reader that this project should be considered for support;
    - A. Problem (a brief statement of the problem or need) - 1 or 2 paragraphs
    - B. Solution (a short description of the project, including what will take place and how many people will benefit from the research, how and where it will operate, for how long, and who will staff it) - 1 or 2 paragraphs
    - C. Funding Requirements (an explanation of the amount of grant money required for the project and what your plans are for funding it in the future) - 1 paragraph
    - D. Organisation and its expertise (a brief statement of the history, purpose, and activities of your agency, emphasizing its capacity to carry out this proposal) - 1 paragraph

2. The Statement of Need (why this project is necessary) - 2 pages

- the next task is to build on the initial interest in the project by enabling the funder to understand the problem that the project will remedy
  - the statement of need will enable the reader to learn more about the issues; like a good debater you must assemble all the arguments and present them in a logical sequence:
    - A. First, decide which facts or statistics best support the project
      - be sure that your data are accurate and correct; information that is too generic or broad do not help; information should be relevant; there should be a balance between the information presented and the scale of the program
    - B. Second, give the reader hope
      - the picture you paint should not be so grim that the solution appears hopeless; avoid overstatement and overly emotional appeals
    - C. Third, decide if you want to put your project forward as a model
      - this approach could expand the base of potential funders; but serving as model works only for certain types of projects; dont try to make this argument if it doesnt really fit;
    - D. Fourth, determine whether it is reasonable to portray the need as acute
      - you should present a balanced weighty statement; you are asking the funder to pay more attention to your proposal and select you among others;
    - E. Fifth, decide whether you can demonstrate that your program addresses the need differently or better than other projects that preceded it
      - it is often difficult to describe the need for your project without being critical of the competition; but you must be careful to do so;
        - if possible, you should make it clear that you are cognizant of others doing work in your field; keep in mind that today's funders are very interested in collaboration; therefore you need to describe how your work complements but does not duplicate th work of others
    - F. Sixth, avoid circular reasoning
      - in circular reasoning, you present the absence of your solution as the actual problem;

3. Project Description (nuts and bolts of how the project will be implemented and evaluated) - 3 pages

- the project description present an interlocking picture of the total project
  - A. Objectives (are the measurable outcomes of the program; they define the methods; should be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable and achievable in a specified time period; be certain to present the objectives very clearly;)
    - there are at least four types of objectives (behavioural/ performance/ process/ product
      - make sure that they do not become lost in verbiage and that they stand out on the page; be realistic while setting objectives;
  - B. Methods (describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve the objectives); it might be helpful to divide methods into the following: how, when and why
    - how: detailed description of what will occur from the time the project begins until it is completed; your methods should match the previously stated objectives;
      - when: should present the order and timing of the tasks; it might make sense to provide a timetable;
        - why: you may need to defend your chosen methods, especially if they are new or unorthodox; why will the planned work most effectively 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;
    - Methods section enables the reader to visualise the implementation of the project; it should convince the reader and establish credibility;
  - C. Staffing/Administration (staffing may refer to volunteers or to consultants as well as paid staff); describe tasks that each member will undertake; salary and project costs are affected by qualifications of the staff;
    - describe for the reader your plans for administering the project; needs to be crystal clear who is responsible for financial management, project outcomes and reporting;
  - D. Evaluation
    - an evaluation plan should not be considered only after the project is over; including an evaluation plan demonstrates that you take seriously your objectives; evaluation is a sound management tool;
      - types of formal evaluation: one measures the product; other analyses the process/strategies you have adopted; measure the impact on the audience the project serves;
      - most sound evaluation plans include both qualitative and quantitative data
        - the cost of evaluation is included as part of the project budget;
  - E. Sustainability
    - it is expected to demonstrate in very concrete ways the long-term financial viability of the project to be funded;
      - funders will want you to prove either that your project is finite (with start-up and ending dates); or that is capacity-building (prove that your service might generate revenue);
        - evidence of fiscal sustainability is a highly sought-after characteristic

4. Budget (financial description of the project plus explanatory roles) - 1 page

- Expense Budget
  - make a list of personnel and non-personnel items related to the operation of the project; include not only new costs but also any ongoing expenses for items that will be allocated to the project;
    - costs should be grouped into subcategories selected to reflect the critical areas of expense;
- Support and Revenue and Statement
  - if you expect project activities to generate income, a support and revenue statement is the place to provide this information
- Budget Narrative
  - a narrative portion of the budget is used to explain any unusual line items in the budget;

5. Organisation Information (history and governing structure of the non-profit; its primary activities, audiences and services) - 1 page

- normally a resume of your non-profit organisation

6. Conclusion (summary of the proposal's main points) - 2 paragraphs

- is the place to make a final appeal for your project; call attention for the future, after the grant is completed; should outline some of the follow-up activities;

Gathering Background Information

- 1. Preparation
  - the first thing you will need to do in writing your proposal is to gather the documentation for it
    - you will require background documentation in three areas:
      - concept
      - program
      - expenses
    - the data gathering process makes the actual writing much easier
      - by involving other stakeholders in the process, it also makes people to consider seriously the project's value
- 2. Concept
  - it is important to have a good sense on how the project fits with the philosophy and the mission of the fund you are addressing your proposal
    - these concepts should be well-articulated
    - you have to clearly understand the need that the proposal is addressing and this should be also documented
      - funders want to know that the project reinforces the overall direction of the organisation and they need to be convinced that the case for the project is compelling
- 3. Program
  - this is a checklist of the program information you require:
    - the nature of the project and how it will be conducted
      - the timetable for the project
        - the anticipated outcomes and how best to evaluate the results
          - staffing and volunteer needs, including deployment of existing staff and new hires
- 4. Expenses
  - you will not be able to pin down all the expenses associated with the project until the program details and timing have been worked out
    - at this stage you do need to sketch out the broad outlines of the budget to be sure that the costs are in reasonable proportion to the outcomes you anticipate
      - if it appears that the costs will be prohibitive, even with a foundation grant, you should then scale back your plans or adjust them to remove the least cost-effective expenditures