

Proposal Format

Many funding agencies supply standard application forms or have a detailed format for proposal preparation. Most also have page limitations, especially on the narrative portion. It is crucial to follow the instructions *exactly*. Some agencies will also specify formatting issues such as margins, spacing and type size. ***Failure to follow the instructions usually results in an immediate rejection of the proposal prior to agency review.*** For sponsors that do not have specified formats, a suggested organization of the proposal is as follows:

1. Introductory Letter

Briefly explains the reason for and the basic elements of the proposal. The letter can also be used to describe the significance and context of the proposed project.

Tips:

1. Be concise
2. Identify the key individual(s) and department(s) that will conduct the project
3. Describe the University's
 - Purposes and goals related to the project
 - Programs and activities related to the project
 - Clients or constituents
4. Provide the University's accomplishments related to the project
5. Lead logically to the problem/need statement

Title Page

If a standard form is not required, the title page includes:

- Project Title
- Identification of the sponsor's program (RFP or program number)
- Name and address of sponsor
- Name and department of the principal investigator
- Name and address of the University
- Signatures of the principal investigator and University authorizing officials along with dates, titles, offices, and phone numbers

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3. Abstract

The abstract is a condensed version of the proposal, usually about 250 words. It should state concisely the significance of the project, what will be accomplished, how it will be accomplished, and the proposed period of performance. The abstract is vital for many reasons and must be written so that individuals not familiar with the topic can understand and evaluate the idea.

Tips:

1. Identify the applicant. The applicant is always "Minnesota State University, Mankato" when the proposals are submitted through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Departments or individuals are never listed as the applicant on proposals.
2. Address each of the following:
 - Credibility--The university's ability to carry out the project
 - Define the problem
 - State your objectives
 - State the methods you will use
 - Explain the project and the amount requested

4. Project Description

This is a description of the proposed project detailing precisely what is being proposed, and response to the funding agency's Request for Proposals (RFP) or guidelines. The description should answer basic questions about the project: What problem/need is addressed? What other research has been done on the project and what were those results? What are the plans? Why is this work important? Is there any preliminary data or work? Can the project be completed in the proposed timeframe? What makes the project unique? This section is reviewed thoroughly by experts in the field. Objectives should match the needs statement and procedures should describe how every objective will be accomplished. If the project requires an evaluation component, this usually follows the project description section. Many sponsors also require discussion of how project results will be disseminated: conferences, journal articles, newsletters, travel to meetings, or exhibition of creative works. Many also want to know how the project will continue and be sustained after the proposed funding period has ended. Provide a Work Plan or Methodology.

Tips:

1. Prepare this section in a concise and compelling manner...why should they fund your project instead of other projects?
2. Address the literature review thoroughly, focusing on need and originality
3. Support every claim with data/statistics/quotes
4. State objectives in measurable terms
5. Describe the population that will benefit from this project

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6. Align the work plan with the time and resources of the proposal
7. Describe the project activities
8. Explain rationale for activities
9. Provide timeline for activities
10. Assign responsibilities to Principal Investigator, staff, and collaborators for each activity

5. Personnel

Identify staff members, describe their project duties, and emphasize their experience as it is related to the project. Include current curriculum vitae (resume) for all professional staff and consultants. Some sponsors provide explicit instructions concerning the information and format of the vitae.

Tips:

1. Describe the Principal Investigator's education and experience as it relates to the proposal
2. Describe others' education and experience as it relates to the grant project

6. Current and Pending Support

Many sponsors require a listing of the project staffs currently existing proposals and awards including levels of activity and time commitments to other projects.

7. Facilities and Equipment

Describe equipment items or resources currently at the University that will be available for the project. Explain why the physical facilities, resources, and equipment available at MSU make this an advantageous location for the project.

8. Budget

Developing the budget requires detailed knowledge of the project. Since a proposal budget may become an award budget, careful “*front end*” preparation is important. It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to accurately formulate the budget. The RASP staff can assist in interpreting guidelines and completing budget forms. Many sponsors provide standard budget

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forms. **It is important to note that the total costs of the project are equal to the sum of the direct costs AND indirect costs.**

Tips:

1. Provide a detailed breakdown of all project costs. Refer to the RASP website for examples.
2. Include matching funds only if required by the funding agency. Obtain written commitments from the department(s) that will provide matching funds.
3. Detail fringe benefits, separate from salaries
4. Include all consultants and/or subcontractors
5. Include appropriate indirect costs and rate, if applicable
6. Obtain budgetary feedback from RASP

9. Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan should include the following elements: Who is evaluating the project, how is each objective going to be measured, where are you going to get your data, what is the timeline for evaluating each objective, how will you use the evaluation results, how will you share the results with the funder, will you share the evaluation results with anyone else and finally, how will the project be sustained after the grant funding ends?

Tips:

1. Present a plan for evaluating the project's accomplishments
2. Outline who will conduct the evaluation and their experience
3. Select criteria for success
4. Explain how data will be collected and analyzed
5. Explain any test instruments or questionnaires to be used
6. Discuss how you will prepare the evaluation reports
7. Discuss how project results will be disseminated to others via such mechanisms as websites, conference presentations, journal articles, etc.

10. Appendices (if allowed)

This would include related data, articles, brochures, curriculum vita, biosketches, list of publications, etc.