PROPOSAL WRITING

Overview

Public sponsors usually require full proposals that range from 3 to 100 pages and contain such sections as a cover letter, title page, abstract, introduction, need/problem, objectives, methods, evaluation, dissemination, budget, and appendices. In contrast, private sponsors often require a letter proposal, a brief two- to five-page document in letter form that concentrates on the problem and solution portions. The remaining section of this Guide offers suggestions and tips on the major components of public and private proposals. For more details and examples of successful proposals, refer to Proposal Planning and Writing (3rd ed., 2003), and the sample letter proposal following this article. For an extensive critique of winning proposals funded by public and private sponsors, see the Greenwood publication, Models of Proposal Planning and Writing (2005), by Jeremy T. Miner and Lynn E. Miner. It walks you step-by-step, from beginning to end, through an integrated process of planning and writing persuasive proposals. You will read actual proposals, including paragraph-by-paragraph analyses of the key features that made them persuasive, as well as verbatim reviewer comments and grant award letters.

Introduction

Purpose of Introduction Statement. The introduction is a credibility statement that describes your professional and organizational qualifications and establishes the significance of your idea. Your qualifications, or credibility, may have more to do with your being funded than anything else. In a government proposal, the application guidelines may or may not ask for an introductory section.

The introduction section establishes the tone of the whole proposal. Novice proposal writers focus on their own need for funds instead of using the introductory section to link their project with the sponsor's priorities. Successful grant seekers capitalize on the partnerships they build with sponsors during their pre-proposal contact and cast their projects in ways that mesh with sponsors' values. For novice writers, the psychological orientation is "I-I, Me-Me" while successful writers take a "You-You" perspective.

Key Questions to Answer. As you write the introduction, answer these questions. Does your introductory section

1. Clearly establish who you are?
2. Describe your organizational goals?
3. Establish your credibility in the project topic area?
4. Lead logically to the problem statement?

Writing Tips for Introduction Section. The introduction section of a proposal represents a credibility statement about you and your environment. While your resume is an important credibility statement, particularly in government proposals, it may not communicate the fact that you work in an environment that will support your project.
Weave this point into your introduction. Tell the reviewer about your track record in projects of this kind and how this project fits into your overall organizational goals. If you don't have a strong track record in your proposed project area, borrow credibility from other field experts through the use of project consultants, letters of endorsement, and supporting statistics.

**Statement of Problem or Need**

**Purpose of Problem Statement.** Your statement of the problem--your need--represents the reason behind your proposal. Experienced grantseekers know it is the single most important part of the proposal that influences funding success. The problem statement specifies the conditions you wish to change. It should be supported by evidence drawn from your experience, from statistics provided by authoritative sources, and from appropriate literature reviews. Your need statement should quickly summarize the problem, show your familiarity with prior research or work on the topic, reinforce your credibility for investigating the problem, and justify why this problem should be investigated. Do not assume that everyone sees the problem as clearly as you do. Even if the problem is obvious, your reviewers want to know how clearly you can state it.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write your statement of problem or need, answer these questions. Does your problem statement

1. Demonstrate a precise understanding of the problem or need that you are attempting to solve?
2. Clearly convey the focus of your project early in the narrative?
3. Indicate the relationship of your project to a larger set of problems or issues and justify why your particular focus has been chosen?
4. Establish the importance and significance of the problem?
5. Justify why your problem should be of special interest to the sponsor?
6. Demonstrate that your problem is feasible to solve?
7. Make the reviewer want to read further?
8. Indicate how the problem relates to your organizational goals?
9. State the problem and outputs in terms of human needs and societal benefits?

**Writing Tips for the Problem Section.** A common error is to paint the problem in grand or general terms. Don't say "little is known about...", "there is a lack of information about...", or "no research has dealt with..." this problem. Arguing for something that isn't makes for a weak need statement. Instead, go one step further. Explain the consequences of the information void. Describe the need in human terms. For example, if you want to buy computers for your school, talk about the happy, computer-literate students who will benefit in the future. Beyond discussing the importance of the project's topic, demonstrate the need for your methodology; the reviewers should be able to anticipate your solution based upon your analysis of the problem. This important transition paragraph is frequently left out of proposals written by beginning proposal writers.
Objectives

Purpose of Objectives Statement. Your objectives specify the outcome of your project, the end product(s). When sponsors fund your projects, they are literally "buying" your objectives. That's why it is extremely important to state your objectives clearly. When you write your objectives, follow the acronymic advice: "Keep them S-I-M-P-L-E." Your objectives should be

Specific--indicate precisely what you intend to change through your project.
Immediate--indicate the time frame during which a current problem will be addressed.
Measurable--indicate what you would accept as proof of project success.
Practical--indicate how each objective is a real solution to a real problem.
Logical--indicate how each objective systematically contributes to achieving your overall goal(s).
Evaluable--indicate how much change has to occur for the project to be effective.

Although these categories are not mutually exclusive, each of your objectives should meet at least two or three of these six criteria.

For instance, given the goal of "improving the quality of life for homeless individuals in our city," a proposal objective might be for the "Midwest Home Shelter Agency to reduce the number of homeless [Specific] [Practical] [Logical] during the next 24 months [Immediate] by 15 percent [Evaluable] as noted in the Department of Social Welfare Homeless Survey Report [Measurable]."

Your objectives section indicates precisely what you intend to change through your project and what you would accept as proof of project success for your target population. Your objectives provide the yardstick you use to conduct your evaluation section; that is, if you write your objectives in precise, measurable terms, it is easy to write your proposal evaluation section because you know exactly what will be evaluated.

Key Questions to Answer. As you write the objectives section, answer these questions.

Does the section

1. Clearly describe your project's objectives, hypotheses, and/or research questions?
2. Signal the project's objectives without burying them in a morass of narrative?
3. Demonstrate that your objectives are important, significant, and timely?
4. Include objectives that comprehensively describe the intended outcomes of the project?
5. State your objectives, hypotheses, or questions in a way that they can be evaluated or tested later?
6. Demonstrate why your project's outcome is appropriate and important to the sponsor?
Writing Tips for Objectives Section. List your specific objectives in no more than one or two sentences each in approximate order of importance. Don't confuse your objectives (ends) with your methods (means). A good objective emphasizes what will be done and when it will be done, whereas a method will explain why or how it will be done. Include goals (ultimate) and objectives (immediate) statements.

Methods

Purpose of Methods Section. The methods section describes your project activities in detail, indicating how your objectives will be accomplished. The description should include the sequence, flow, and interrelationship of activities as well as planned staffing for the project. It should present a clear picture of the client population, if any. It should discuss the risks of your method, and indicate why your success is probable. Finally, tell what is unique about your approach.

Key Questions to Answer. Here are some key question to answer. Does your proposal

1. Explain why you chose one methodological approach and not another?
2. Describe major activities for reaching each objective?
3. Indicate the key project personnel who will carry out each activity?
4. Show the interrelationship among project activities?
5. Identify all project data that will be collected for use in evaluating proposal outcomes?

Data Collection. You will probably need to collect some data as a part of your project. Common data collection methods include achievement tests; psychological tests; role-playing exercises; clinical examinations; personal diaries; ratings by program staff, management participants, or experts; interviews; observations by program staff or evaluators; daily program records (telephone logs, tracking slips, referral forms); historical program records and archives; government records; searches of news media; questionnaires; and surveys.

You can either make up your own data-gathering instruments or use existing ones. To find out if an appropriate instrument already exists (and avoid reinventing the wheel), consider looking through Buros' Yearbook of Mental Measurements, a two-volume listing of available tests in many different fields. The Buros' volumes review the various attitude, behavior, and motor tests that exist. Each review includes a description by the test author(s) and critiques by several experts in the field. The descriptions include the purpose, statistical characteristics, and, when available, the test norms. The Buros' Web site address is http://www.unl.edu/buros. You can also try the ETS Collection Catalog, a six-volume set of standardized tests and research instruments ranging from vocational tests to personality tests; it is available from the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, NJ: http://www.ets.org.
Writing Tips for Methods Section. Begin with your objectives. Describe what precise steps you will follow to carry out each objective, including what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be done. If you have trouble writing this section, assume the sponsor's check just arrived in the mail. What is the first thing you will do? Hire additional staff? Order equipment? What will you do next? Keep asking and answering the "What's next?" question and you will lead yourself through the methodology section (sometimes called procedures in other proposal guidelines).

Once you have determined the sequence of events you will follow in completing your project, cast the major milestones into a time-and-task chart. In graphic form, it segments your total project into manageable steps and lets your reviewers know exactly what you will be doing--and when. It says to the reviewers that you are organized and have thought out the major steps of your project. It lets them know you have done significant planning and are not just proposing on a whim. It gives them a road map of the territory you plan to cover. Finally, the time-and-task chart represents a clear, one-page, visual summary of the entire methodology section.

Evaluation

Purpose of Evaluation. Evaluations pinpoint what is really happening in your project so you can improve your project efficiency. Based on evaluation information, you can better allocate resources, improve your services, and strengthen your overall project performance. Beyond these immediate benefits, a project evaluation can uncover needs to be served in your next proposal and make it easier to get and sustain funding.

If you want to include an evaluation component in your proposal but know nothing about the subject, consider borrowing ideas from the evaluation plans developed for similar programs or ask a colleague or consultant to review the rest of the proposal and develop an appropriate evaluation strategy. Too frequently, proposals don't explain how the project will be evaluated. At best, they mention some vague process, such as holding a discussion meeting or assigning the evaluation to an expert, with no specifics on how the evaluation will be conducted or what will be learned from the evaluation.

Key Questions to Answer. As you write the evaluation section, answer these questions. Does your evaluation section

1. Describe why evaluation is needed in the project?
2. Provide a definition of what is meant by evaluation?
3. Clearly identify the purpose of your evaluation and the audiences to be served by its results?
4. Demonstrate that an appropriate evaluation procedure is included for every project objective?
5. Provide a general organizational plan or model for your evaluation?
6. Demonstrate that the scope of the evaluation is appropriate to the project?
   Demonstrate the extent to which the project is practical, relevant, and generalizable?
7. Describe what information will be needed to complete the evaluation, the potential sources for this information, and the instruments that will be used for its collection?
8. Clearly summarize any reports to be provided to the funding source based on the evaluation, and generally describe their content and timing?

**Using Evaluators Effectively.** Whether you use an internal or an external evaluator, or both, be sure to include them in the proposal development process. A common proposal-writing mistake is to budget an amount for evaluation costs and worry later about the evaluation procedure. Instead, involve evaluators in the proposal writing. Be sure to give them a copy of your project objectives. Remember that pointed objectives will simplify the evaluation process.

An evaluator should provide you with important proposal information. Specifically, ask your evaluators to identify precisely what will be evaluated, what information they will need to conduct the evaluation, where that information will be obtained, how often data will be collected, what data collection instruments will be used to get that information, what evaluation design will be used, what analyses will be completed, and what questions you will be able to answer as a result of the evaluation.

**How to Evaluate.** Evaluation is essentially a four-step process. As you will see, if the objectives and methodology sections of your proposal are precise, you are well on your way to completing the evaluation protocol.

1. Identify precisely what will be evaluated. If you wrote measurable objectives, you already know what to evaluate.
2. Determine the methods you will use to evaluate each objective. More precisely, you will need to describe the information you will need and how you propose to collect it.
3. Complete your evaluation design. Specify the analyses you plan to make and then carry out your evaluation by collecting and interpreting the data needed for each objective. Your evaluation design may be simply to observe the behavior of a particular population or something more complex like a rigorous experimental and multiple control group design.
4. Summarize the resulting data analyses and indicate its use. Consider including mock data tables that show what your resulting data might look like.

Note that of these four steps, the first two are completed as you write the objectives and methods sections of your proposal. In other words, you are half-done with the evaluation section before you start it.

**Writing Tips for Evaluation Section.** Include a separate evaluation component for each project objective. Strengthen your evaluation section by including examples of surveys, questionnaires, data collection instruments, data analysis forms, and other evaluation methodologies in order to demonstrate the credibility of your evaluation section. If you use outside evaluators, identify costs, credentials, and experience. Evaluation sections are
less likely to be included in basic research than training grants. Replicability is the primary evaluation criterion in most basic science research proposals.

**Dissemination**

**Purpose of Dissemination.** Dissemination is the means by which you let others know about your project: its purpose, methods, and accomplishments. Among other things, it generates publicity for your sponsor and you. As grants become more competitive, dissemination of results is increasingly important. No longer is it sufficient to say you will submit a journal article or present a paper at a professional society meeting. Instead, specify the tentative titles, target journals, and submission dates. Likewise, indicate which meetings will be attended, including dates and locations for presenting papers.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you write the dissemination section, answer these questions. Does your dissemination section

1. Indicate why dissemination activities are important to your project?
2. Clearly identify the intended outcome of the dissemination effort?
3. Include a feasible and appropriate plan for dissemination?
4. Succinctly describe any products resulting from the dissemination effort?
5. Demonstrate that you are well grounded in theory and research on the dissemination and utilization of knowledge?
6. Provide sufficient detail on proposed dissemination procedures to justify the budget request?
7. Specify clearly who will be responsible for dissemination and why they are capable?
8. Indicate why the dissemination will get the necessary information to the appropriate audiences in a form they can use when needed?

**Writing Tips for Dissemination Section.** Project results can be disseminated verbally or visually. The visual/verbal distinction emphasizes how you - as project director - choose to communicate your project results to your target audiences. Additionally, your project dissemination strategies can be active or passive. The active/passive distinction refers to your target audiences and the role they play in processing the visual or verbal information you present. If you choose to write up a report of your project results, you have chosen a visual channel of communication to which the reader responds passively, since reading is a passive process. On the other hand, you may involve the target audience in a hands-on demonstration of project results. In this illustration, the results are presented verbally and the target audience is actively involved. While the visual/verbal and active/passive distinctions are not wholly discrete, the following table illustrates how the more common dissemination strategies might be classified.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Visual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Conferences and Seminars, Demonstrations, Site Visits, Web Casts+Chat Rooms, Teleconferences</td>
<td>Courses/Seminars, Displays/Poster Sessions, Commercial Distributors, Instructional Materials, Web Sites, Video Conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In most proposals, you will want to use an appropriate mix of active/passive and verbal/visual dissemination strategies.

**Budgets**

**Purpose of the Budget.** A project budget is more than just a statement of proposed expenditures; it is an alternate way of expressing your project. Programs officers will look at your budget to see how well it fits your proposed activities. Incomplete budgets are examples of sloppy preparation. Inflated budgets are signals of waste. Budgets that are too low cast doubt on your planning ability. In essence, your budget is as much a credibility statement as your project narrative.

**Key Questions to Answer.** As you prepare your budget, answer these questions. Does your budget

1. Provide sufficient resources to carry out your project?
2. Include a budget narrative that justifies major budget categories?
3. Present the budget in the format desired by the sponsor?
4. Provide sufficient detail so the reviewer can understand how various budget items were calculated?
5. Separate direct costs from indirect costs and describe what is covered in the latter?
6. Relate budget items to project objectives?
7. Include any attachments or special appendices to justify unusual requests?
8. Identify evaluation and dissemination costs?
**Allowable Budget Categories.** Unless the sponsor guidelines dictate otherwise, you can include in your budget request such things as accounting, advertising, animals, audiovisual instruction, auditing, binding, books, computer time, consultants, dues, equipment, fringe benefits, indirect costs, instruments, insurance, legal services, maintenance, periodicals, postage, publication, recruitment, registration fees, relocation, renovation, rent, repairs, salaries and wages, security, subcontracts, supplies, telephone, travel, and tuition.

**Direct Costs.** Those costs that are line items listed in the budget as an explicit project expenditure are called direct costs. The direct costs are usually categorized into personnel (people) and nonpersonnel (things) components. Personnel costs include such items as salaries, wages, consultant fees, and fringe benefits. Nonpersonnel costs include such items as equipment, supplies, travel, and publication charges. Space and utilities may be reflected as direct costs or included as a part of your indirect cost rate.

**Indirect Costs.** Also called Facilities and Administration (F&A) Costs. These are regulated by the Department of Health and Human Services and implemented in grants at SJSU through the SJSU Foundation. A detailed Indirect Cost policy for SJSU can be found at [www.sjsufoundation.org](http://www.sjsufoundation.org).

Those costs that are not directly listed in the budget and yet are costs incurred in the project are called indirect costs. Indirect costs are real costs that, such as payroll and accounting, library usage, space and equipment, and general project administration. Do you include in your proposal budget the costs associated with preparing payrolls or the time your boss spends talking with you about the project? While you could cost out those factors, and others, they become more difficult to quantify. At the same time, they are real project costs—someone has to write your payroll checks. Rather than calculating a strict cost accounting of these nebulous factors, many sponsors allow you to calculate a percentage of your direct costs and add it to your budget request.

Semantically, the federal government uses the term indirect costs to refer to these extra project operating costs. These costs are usually figured as a percentage of the grant, either of the total direct costs or the total project salaries and wages. Organizations regularly receiving federal grants have an approved federal indirect cost rate that is included in the budgets of federal proposals. If you plan to submit federal proposals periodically but do not have a federal indirect cost rate, ask your federal program officer to refer you to the appropriate federal agency so you can negotiate a federal indirect cost rate for your organization. SJSU has more than one Indirect Cost rate, which can be found at [www.sjsufoundation.org](http://www.sjsufoundation.org).

Foundations usually use the term administrative costs rather than indirect costs when referring to extra project operating costs, though the terms are interchangeable. Foundations vary considerably in their policies regarding the allowability of administrative costs. Some will pay administrative costs on grants, and their application guidelines specify the allowable percentage of total direct costs. Others say explicitly in their application materials that they do not allow administrative costs.
In contrast to governments and foundations, corporations use the term *overhead* to mean administrative or indirect costs. As business professionals, they are accustomed to the concept of overhead and are apt to have a fairly high overhead rate. In most instances, corporate application materials do not specify a policy regarding the payment of overhead, though many do. You should explicitly as a foundation or corporation what allowable Indirect Costs are permitted with each grant, if any.

**Cost Sharing.** Those costs that your organization will contribute to the total project costs are called shared costs. You may contribute partial personnel costs, space, volunteer time, or other costs towards the total project expenses. Your cost sharing may be in the form of "hard" dollars (cash) or "soft" dollars (in-kind contributions). In-kind contributions do not require a cash outlay from your organization yet would cost real dollars if you had to pay for services rendered. Volunteer time is one example of in-kind cost sharing. For a detailed policy of SJSU Cost Sharing Policy, please refer to the SJSU Foundation: [www.sjsufoundation.org](http://www.sjsufoundation.org)

Cost sharing may be mandatory or voluntary. Mandatory cost sharing is often referred to as "matching funds;" it is required whereas voluntary cost sharing is optional. Your promise of cost sharing in a proposal budget may be a key factor in a sponsor's funding decision.

- **Mandatory**—as one of the eligibility requirements of the grant, the sponsor requires you to share a certain percent of the total project costs. For example, "Local organizations are required to provide a local match totaling 75 percent of the requested grant funds." In this case, if a sponsor provides $20,000, you must provide an additional $15,000 toward the total project cost of $35,000.

- **Voluntary**—you offer cost sharing in your proposal as an incentive to get the grant award. For instance, a sponsor may indicate, "Consideration will be given to organizations with in-kind contributions." In response, you may offer 20 percent cost sharing of personnel time toward the total project cost of $150,000. This means the sponsor would contribute $125,000 and you would provide $25,000 of the total project costs. However, you can cost share too much: for some agencies, higher levels of cost sharing require more administrative monitoring on their part, something program officers may wish to avoid. Accordingly, check with your project officers to see if they have a "preferred level" of voluntary cost sharing.

Assuming you've decided to cost share on your proposed budget, the funds may come either from internal or external sources—or both.

- **Internally**—you may allocate a portion of your direct or indirect costs to your proposed project. These shared costs may take on the form of cash or in-kind contributions. Consider this internal cost sharing example: assume you decide to cost share 20 percent of the project director's salary towards your proposed project. This means that instead of your project director receiving 100 percent of her salary from your agency personnel budget, she will now receive 80 percent
from that source and the remaining 20 percent from the cost sharing account on the grant; you merely reallocate a portion of her salary; her income remains the same; the source(s) of income are changed on the bookkeeping records.

- **Externally**—you may allocate extramural dollars from other sources to the project. For instance: (a) you have a matching grant from another sponsor; (b) a wealthy philanthropist has given you unrestricted dollars that can be earmarked to this project; or, (c) revenue is generated from another fund raising activity, e.g., golf outing income, can be directed to this project. In each case, you can redirect dollars from those sources to help support the total costs of your proposed project, thereby showing your sponsor you are financially committed to supporting your proposal.

**Writing Tips for Budget Section.** Here are some tips for planning your budget. Make sure your calculations are as clear as possible. Show the basis of your calculations. Fuzzy: travel = $324. Specific: local mileage for project director, 100 mi/mo @ .27/mi x 12 mo = $324. Indicate name, location, and date of travel. Estimate office supplies (pens, pencils, paper clips, and so forth) at an average of $300/year per key person. List the components of your fringe benefit rate; indicate whether they include FICA, health, life, retirement, dental, and disability insurance, and other benefits. In multiyear budgets, allow for yearly increases; indicate annual percent increases. (Ask your program officer what percentage increases are currently being approved in multiyear budgets.) If the project is to occur in phases, identify the costs associated with each phase. Don't overlook budget support for such things as service or maintenance contracts, insurance, shipping, or installation. If you anticipate training costs associated with the purchase of new equipment, include those costs in your budget as well. Include a budget narrative immediately following your budget to explain or justify any unusual expenditure items, even if one is not required by the sponsor.

Some sponsors expect you to continue funding your project after the grant expires. If you have a financing plan for future funding, briefly outline it. Other fund-raising options include membership fees, user charges, local organizations, other granting agencies, wealthy individuals, product sales, publications, service fees, direct mail, bequests, memorial gifts, phone-a-thons, and capital campaigns.
Abstract

Purpose of Abstract. The abstract is usually the last written and first read section of your proposal. It should be carefully written, providing a cogent summary of your proposed project. It should provide a quick overview of what you propose to do and clear understanding of the project's significance, generalizability, and potential contribution. Project end-products should be clearly identified. Often, proposal reviewers must write up a summary of your project for presentation to a larger review panel. If you write a quality abstract, you make your reviewer's job easier. If the abstract is poorly written, the reviewer's job is more difficult and your funding chances diminish.

Key Questions to Answer. As you write your abstract section, consider these questions.

1. Does my abstract effectively summarize the project?
2. Does it place appropriate emphasis on the various proposal components?
3. Does it enumerate project outcomes?
4. Does it comply with length or word requirements of the sponsor?
5. Does it use key headings and subheadings to highlight proposal sections?

Writing Tips for Proposal Abstracts. Don't write the abstract until you have completed the proposal. Generally, the abstract section contains 250 to 500 words. Include at least one sentence each on problem, objectives, and methods, using the major headings and subheadings you used in the proposal.

Appendices

Purpose of Appendices. Appendices contain information peripheral to your proposal, such as reprints of articles, definitions of terms, subcontract data, consortia agreements, tabular data, certifications, lists of board members and officers with titles, recent annual reports, organizational fiscal reports, organizational charts, resumes, past success stories, significant case histories, agency publications, publicity, and letters of support and commitment. Some grantmaking agencies do not circulate copies of appendices when transmitting proposals to reviewers. (Ask your program officer about this, and if materials are not circulated, include essential proposal information in the narrative.) Nevertheless, the use of appendices is recommended, especially when page limits are sponsor-imposed.
**Key Questions to Answer.** Ask yourself these key questions as you plan your appendixes.

1. Could reviewers evaluate the proposal without any appendix information?
2. Have strong letters of support and commitment been included?
3. Are assurances of cooperation provided in instances of inter-agency support?
4. Are the resumes included for all key project personnel and consultants?

**Writing Tips for Appendices.** After your proposal is written, reread it to make sure your reviewers could make an informed funding decision without any appendix information. Include strong letters of support and endorsement. Attach assurances of cooperation in instances of interagency proposals. Be sure to include the resumes of all key project personnel, including consultants.

**PROPOSAL APPEARANCE**

While you will obviously spend much time working on the content of your proposal, you should also pay attention to the appearance or design of your proposal. Just as clothing is important in the business world for establishing initial impressions, so, too, is the appearance of your proposal as it reaches the reviewer's hands. The proposal should "look" familiar to the reader. A familiar proposal is a friendly proposal. Look at the printed materials issued by the sponsor. Note their use of type size and style, white space, and headings. Structure your proposals to match the private foundation's publication preferences; when appropriate, use the same type size, style, layout, and headings as they do in their publications. Your proposal will look more credible when you consider these factors.

As you learn about your audience and consider proposal appearance, try to anticipate which reading styles the reviewers are likely to use: skim reading, search reading, or critical reading. Recall that your earlier prospect research from a past reviewer or program officer identified the likely manner in which your proposal would be reviewed. Reviewers skim proposals when they have many pages to read in a very short time. Reviewers search proposals when they are following an evaluation sheet that assigns points to specific proposal sections. Reviewers always critically read proposals, especially when the reading occurs in the time luxury of a mail review. The following writing and editing tips are particularly appropriate for all three reading styles.

**Proposal Writing Tips**

Read and reread proposal guidelines--and believe them! Use the guidelines and the reviewer's evaluation form, if available, as a basis for creating your proposal outline. Strengthen your proposal by following the format tips that experienced proposal writers use.
**Bold Type.** Bold type is easier to read than underlining, italics, or all capital letters as a means of creating emphasis. Use bold type to emphasize key words and ideas, but avoid overemphasis.

**Lists.** Lists help to get the message to the reader with a sense of immediacy, without being wordy. Furthermore, because lists are easy for readers to skim, they convey chunks of information quickly. Use a numbered list when items need to be examined in a specific sequence. Use a bulleted list when items are all equally important.

**Ragged Right Margins.** A ragged right margin is easier to read than one that is right justified because the proportional spacing slows readability. It is easier for the reader's eye to track from the end of one line to the beginning of the next line when the right-hand margins are jagged.

**Type Size.** Adjust your word processing program for a 12-point type style. Text smaller than 12-point becomes difficult to read and makes the reviewer's job harder. Rather than reducing type size to make all your ideas fit on the page, try tightening sentences and editing wordy phrases.

**Type Style.** If a type style is not specified in the application guidelines, consider using serif typefaces for the text of your proposal and sans serif typefaces for titles and headings. Serif type styles such as Times Roman and Courier have small strokes that finish off the main stroke of a letter and make it easier to read. Sans serif type styles such as Universal and Arial, which do not have the small finishing strokes, are ideal for titles and headings because they stand off from the body of the text. Avoid using ornate type styles, such as Cloister Black and Freestyle Script, which are hard to read and distract from the content of the proposal.

**Proposal Editing Tips**

Successful grant seekers estimate they spend 25 percent of their time writing the first draft of their proposal and 75 percent of their time editing it. Editing is a multistage process: edit for only one feature at a time. The multiple editing loops through the proposal ensure that all elements are presented with punch and persuasion.

**Headings.** Headings and subheadings act like a table of contents placed directly in your proposal text; that is, at a glance they reveal the main ideas and the organization of your proposal to the reader. Ask your program officer for a copy of the reviewer's evaluation form, and use those same headings and subheadings in your proposal. If a reviewer's evaluation form is not available, use headings and subheadings that are specific to your proposal.

**Page Numbering.** Place page numbers in the top right or bottom center of the pages of your proposal. Do not number the first page.
**Proofreading.** Proofread and proofread your proposal. Proofread your proposals in multiple readings, looking for different features on each reading. As you proofread, look at

1. Content and Organization: Does your proposal have enough substance? Are your ideas complete? Is your organization logical?
2. Clarity: Have you included appropriate transitions? Are ideas expressed clearly? Are all acronyms defined?
3. Mechanics: Are words spelled correctly, especially proper names? Are all numbers and computations accurate? Are sentences grammatically correct, including subject-verb agreement? Are sentences punctuated properly?
4. Design: Is the proposal design visually appealing? Did you include ample white space? Are headings specific to your project?

**Transitions.** Transitional expressions are words and phrases that signal connections among ideas; these connectors can help you achieve coherence in your writing. Common transitional words can indicate: *addition* (also, and then, further, moreover), *example* (as an illustration, for instance, in fact, that is), *result* (accordingly, consequently, hence, in short), and *summary* (finally, in conclusion, on the whole, to sum up).

**White Space.** Use white space to break up long copy. Ample white space makes your proposal appear inviting and user-friendly. White space can indicate that one section is ending and another is beginning, or that an idea is so central to the proposal that it needs to be set off by itself. Judicious use of white space breaks your proposal into smaller, manageable chunks of information. Even a simple use of white space between paragraphs helps the mind to see the information in that paragraph as a unit. One creative use of white space is the making of lists.

**LETTER PROPOSAL**

A letter proposal is a short grant proposal, usually two to four pages long. Written in letter form, it is primarily targeted to private sponsors, such as foundations and corporations, though it can be used as a pre-proposal for federal sponsors. Most federal program officers like to receive a letter proposal because it presents them with a "concept paper," or a "conceptual shell" of what you propose. With many private sponsors, the letter proposal is all that is required; they make funding decisions on the basis of your brief letter, whether you are asking for $100 or $1 million. However, some private sponsors use the letter proposal as a screening device and request an expanded proposal if your idea captures their interest. In either case, you face the challenge of clear, concise writing.

In certain respects, a short proposal is more challenging to write than a long proposal. In seven brief sections, you must anticipate and answer the major questions that the sponsor will be asking as your letter proposal is read. Each sentence must carry a heavy load of information. To aid in the writing process, the components of a letter proposal are identified and discussed below.
Part One: Summary. Your objective is to summarize the entire proposal in one sentence. The critical elements of the sentence include: (1) self-identification (your organizational name); (2) uniqueness (your claim to fame); (3) sponsor expectation (what you want them to do); (4) budget request (how much money you want); and (5) project benefit (major project outcomes).

Part Two: Sponsor Appeal. Your objective is to explain why you are approaching this sponsor. Conduct background research on the sponsor to determine prior funding patterns, usually available in annual reports and tax records. Identify values that the sponsor seems to cherish as evidenced by their funding patterns, e.g., high-risk projects not normally funded by the government, cutting-edge research, demonstration projects with a national impact, or low cost/high benefit projects.

Part Three: Problem. Your objective is to briefly summarize the current problem. Focus the problem or need statement from the sponsor's perspective, not yours. Funding your project is not their end goal. You must show how funding your project can be a means for them to reach their end goal--their mission. Remember that a need is really a gap between what is and what ought to be. Document that gap with statistics, quotations, reasoning, or surveys and express it in human terms. Limit your documentation to brief but clear statements. Beware of the excessive use of statistics, which only confuses the reader.

Part Four: Solution. Your objective is to describe your approach to the problem. Summarize the objectives that you will meet with your approach. Convey confidence that you can close the gap between what is and what ought to be. You can detail your precise methodology in a one-page attachment by use of a time-and-task chart. This visual device lets reviewers know exactly who will be doing what and when. Do not include extensive methodological detail in the letter proposal.

Part Five: Capabilities. Your objective is to establish your credentials to do the project. More precisely, your job is to establish three types of credibility: you have a (1) credible organization proposing a (2) credible idea to be directed by a (3) credible project director. You must demonstrate what is unique about your group in order to show that you can solve this problem.

Part Six: Budget. Your objective is to request a specific dollar amount in the proposal. Ask for a precise amount. Base your request on the review of tax records or other giving references so you are asking for a reasonable amount as viewed by the sponsor. Express your request in meaningful units, e.g., hours of instruction, numbers of students or healthy patients. If you plan to submit this or a similar proposal to other sponsors as well, mention this.

Part Seven: Conclusion. Your objective is to identify the desired action you wish the sponsor to take. Avoid the hackneyed "We'd be happy to talk with you further about this. Please call if you want more information." Identify a contact person for more details if requested. Have a "heavyweight" sign the letter.
Once your proposal is submitted, it will undergo review. Whether your proposal is funded or declined, you should plan to deal with either outcome option. Further, since your proposal represents a valuable piece of intellectual property, consider submitting it to other sponsors as well while you are awaiting a funding decision.

Review Criteria. Proposal review usually covers five basic areas: scope of work, personnel, facilities, track record, and budget information. Experienced proposal writers often conduct proposal review sessions within their organizations prior to formal submission using the same evaluation form that their actual reviewers will use.

Dealing with Grant Decisions. Planned reactions become planned options. How do you plan to behave if your proposal is funded? Rejected? What are your options? When you have a powerful itch, it is almost unbearable waiting to get it scratched! Having to wait to get what you want demands patience and tolerance—unless you have planned options. Patient people turn to other activities to meet other needs while they are waiting for grant decisions. This keeps them strong and in control. Strong people wait a lot. It may take many months before the decision on your proposal is made.

At some point, you will find out if your proposal was successful, and besides getting started, there are certain things you should do. For example, if you were successful, request a copy of the reviewer comments, if allowed by the sponsor. Ask the program officer about common mistakes other grantees make so you don't fall into the same trap. Ask how you can be a good steward of their money. Clarify the submission deadlines for technical and financial reports. You can keep your program officer very happy if you submit your reports on time. Invite your program officer to come and visit you. Add your program officer to your organizational public relations list for information about your agency.

If you were turned down by the sponsor, thank the source for considering the proposal. Ask what can be done to improve the proposal. If it is their policy, request reviewer comments, particularly verbatim comments; otherwise you may only receive summary comments, which are less specific. Ask if you should reapply next year. Use this as an opportunity to build a relationship with the sponsor for the next submission cycle. Periodically send a photocopy of articles or publicity with a note: "Thought you might be interested in this." Invite them to your agency to get to know you better. Avoid making them feel as if you only need them at submission time.

Multiple Submissions. One of the things you should do while waiting to hear from your first sponsor is submit your proposal to other sponsors. This is commonly done and, indeed, expected by sponsors. However, you are ethically obligated to tell a sponsor that you have submitted a similar proposal to a different sponsor. This will not jeopardize the likelihood of getting your proposal funded. In fact, it could help as there is a close communications network among sponsors with similar interests. Cofunding is not uncommon in some cases; that is, several sponsors may contribute to the total project.
cost. Finally, engaging in multiple submissions communicates to sponsors that you are seriously committed to your project and are willing to exert considerable effort to secure funding.
Example of Letter Proposal

An example follows of a letter proposal to a private foundation that seeks support for a project to improve police-community relations.

Today's Date

Mr. Hubert Williams, President
Law Enforcement Foundation
1001 23rd Street, N.W., Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20037

Dear Mr. Williams:

The Center for Urban Problems (CUP), as Washington's largest organization dealing with police-community relations, invites your investment in a $66,240 special project to improve community relations with minorities.

We are encouraged that the Law Enforcement Foundation supports innovative projects that improve the delivery of police services. Over 85 percent of your grant dollars during the past three years have been invested at the local community level. Clearly, your support fills a valuable niche in light of the more conservative funding offered by the federal government. This strong commitment to unique projects is shared by the researchers and evaluation specialists at CUP.

The Problem: Spiraling Tensions. Despite proactive community relations programs, an unchecked tension exists between municipal police and minority community members. Relationships between law enforcement officers and minorities--Chicano, African American, Puerto Rican--are at a critical stage. One out of every three arrests in Washington, DC, currently involves a member of a minority community; the incidence is even higher in such cities as San Antonio, Kansas City, and Los Angeles.

Many factors contribute to the growing minority community-police tensions: increasing complexity of urban life, unemployment discrimination, and housing problems. Although these nationwide social problems were not created by the police, the police must cope with the consequences of these problems. This vast social dislocation spawns minority attitudes of prejudice and contempt. To counterbalance these problems, many police communities have adopted public relations programs to "sell" their departments to the minority communities without the concomitant need to be ready to work with those communities. As a result, there is an ever-widening gap between present and potential minority community acceptance of police behavior.
The Solution: Evaluating Police-Community Relations Bureaus. Successful claims regarding the effectiveness of police-community relations bureaus remain undocumented. Police departments are latching on to a new fad without understanding the key components of a police-community relations program. Some features of the bureau approach work; others don't. The goal of this project is to identify the successful features of existing bureaus, so that success can be delivered more quickly to police departments serving substantial numbers of minority citizens. The CUP research staff will follow standard social science research techniques as detailed in our time-and-task chart, Attachment A.

CUP Credentials: National Experience and Networks. CUP is uniquely suited to conduct this evaluation project on police-community relations bureaus. As a nonpolice-linked organization, it can objectively and independently assess current practices. This project represents a systematic continuation of prior CUP efforts in this area with state and municipal organizations as well as private police-related associations. Its staff has a cumulative 100 years of experience in evaluating police-related projects. Finally, local and national networking with 28 regional offices make it well postured to effectively conduct this assessment.

Budget Request: $66,240 Payable Over Six Months. With the demonstrated concern that you've shown in the delivery of police services to minorities, I am requesting a grant of $66,240. Quite frankly, the project extends beyond the financial boundaries of CUP. Accordingly, we must now reach out to the community for assistance in what surely is a vital service to the police community. The outcome of this project will touch the operations of over 6,000 law enforcement groups nationwide, resulting in a $13 investment in each existing municipal and state police organization, or a cost of seven cents (7¢) per police official.

In making this investment, the Law Enforcement Foundation will be supporting a cost-effective approach to the delivery of police services for the minority communities where major problems exist. Mr. Lloyd Solomon, National Program Director for CUP, can be reached at (202) 123-4567 to answer questions or give further information.

Sincerely,

Organizational Heavyweight
President

P.S. Please come visit us and see this important project for yourself.

Enclosures:
Attachment A: Time-and-Task Chart
Attachment B: IRS Nonprofit Certification