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Step-By-Step Guide to Writing a Grant Proposal

Writing a grant proposal is incredibly time-consuming.

No joke. It's one of the most complicated documents you could write in your entire life.

There are different requirements, expectations, and formats—not to mention all the prep work you need to do, like market research and clarifying your project timeline.

Depending on the type of company or organization you represent and which grants you're applying for, your grant could run anywhere from a dozen to a hundred pages. It's a lot of work, and we're here to help.

In this guide to grant proposals, we offer writing steps and examples, as well as resources and templates to help you start applying for funding right away.

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BUSINESS   PROPOSALS

Types of grant proposals

Grant proposals typically fall into one of these main categories:

- **Research grant proposals** - Research grant proposals are usually sent by university professors or private research organizations in order to fund research into medical, technological, engineering, and other advancements.

- **Nonprofit grant proposals** - Nonprofits send grant proposals to philanthropic organizations and government agencies to acquire funds for community development, health, education, and similar projects.

Proposify

Technology grant proposals - Grant proposals can also be sent by technology companies (software, hardware, solar, recycling, environmental, manufacturing, health, and other types of tech companies). These proposals are often sent to large government organizations looking for solutions to current and future problems, as well as VC firms looking to invest in smart startups.

- **Small business grant proposals** - Local governments often give grant awards to small businesses to help them kickstart, market, or expand.

- **Arts grants** - Grants allow artists that would otherwise lack the financial resources to devote extended periods of time to their art. They might need to complete an installation that can be enjoyed by the community as part of the grant.

- **Grant RFP proposals** - There can also be a request for proposals (RFP) for just about anything. From multinational organizations like the UN to family philanthropic grants, you can find RFPs for a variety of projects.

How to prep before you write

Before you can sit down to write your grant proposal, you'll need to have a deep understanding of:

- Existing scientific literature (for research grants) or relevant reports and statistics

- Market and competitor landscape

- Current available solutions and technologies (and why they're not good enough)

- Expected positive impact of your project

- The methods and strategies you'll employ to complete your project

- Project phases and timelines

- Project budget (broken down into expense categories)

With these things all buttoned down, you'll have a much easier time writing the sections that cover those details, as well as the sections that highlight their meaning and importance (such as your statement of need and objectives).

Create a document where you can play around. Take notes, write down ideas, link out to your research, jot down different potential budgets, etc.

Then, when you're ready to write, create a fresh document for your actual grant proposal and start pulling from your notes as needed.

How to write a grant proposal (ideal format)

Now, let's get writing.

The ideal outline for a grant proposal is:

- Cover Letter

- Executive Summary

- Table of Contents

- Statement of Need

- Project Description

- Objectives

- Methods and Strategies

- Execution Plan and Timeline

- Evaluation and Expected Impact

- Organization Bio and Qualifications

If you're not writing a super formal grant proposal, you might be able to cut or combine some of these sections. When in doubt, check with the funding agency to learn their expectations for your proposal. They might have an RFP or other guidelines that specify the exact outline they want you to follow.

Note: In business proposals, the cover letter and executive summary are the same, and those phrases are used interchangeably. But for grant proposals, the cover letter is a short and simple letter, while the executive summary offers a description of key aspects of the proposal.

Cover Letter

In your cover letter, you'll write a formal introduction that explains why you are sending the proposal and briefly introduces the project.

What to include:

- The title of the RFP you are responding to (if any)

- The name of your proposed project (if any)

- Your business or nonprofit organization name

- A description of your business or organization, 1-2 sentences

- Why you are submitting the proposal, in 1-2 sentences

- What you plan to do with the funds, in 2-4 sentences

Example:

> *Dear [Name],*
>
> *The Rockville Community Garden is responding to the city of Rockville's request for proposals for nonprofit community improvement projects.*

The Rockville Community Garden is a space for relaxation, healthy eating, exercise, and coming together.

We are submitting a proposal to request funding for Summer at the Garden. Every summer, parents are tasked with finding childcare for their children, and we have received countless requests to host a summer camp. We're requesting funding to cover tuition for 100 low-income children ages 5 to 12.

The funds will make our summer camp accessible to those who need it most.

Thank you for your consideration,

[Signature]

[Title]

Executive Summary

The executive summary of a grant proposal goes into far more detail than the cover letter. Here, you'll give

What to include:

- Statement of Need overview, in 2 - 5 sentences

- Company Bio and Qualifications, in 2 - 5 sentences

- Objectives, in 2 - 5 sentences

- Evaluation and Expected Impact, in 2 - 5 sentences

Example:

> *Roman architecture stands the test of time until it doesn't. Roman building techniques can last thousands of years but will crumble to dust instantaneously when earthquakes strike. Meanwhile, our own building techniques of reinforced concrete and steel last only a couple of centuries.*
>
> *Ancient Architecture Research firm is dedicated to modernizing roman building techniques to create new structures that are earthquake safe and sustainable. Our principle investigators hold PhDs from renowned architecture universities and have published in numerous journals.*
>
> *Our objectives for the research grant are to create a prototype structure using Roman building techniques and test it on a*

> *shake table to simulate an earthquake. The prototype will pave the way for our application for an amendment to the California building code to permit unreinforced masonry construction. With the success of the prototype, we will prove the safety and viability of this technique.*
>
> *This project will have an enormous potential impact on several crises plaguing the state of California now and in the future: disaster relief, affordable housing, homelessness, and climate migration. Unreinforced masonry construction can be taught and learned by amateur builders, allowing volunteers to quickly deploy temporary or permanent structures.*

Table of Contents

Next up, you need your Table of Contents! Make sure it matches the names of each of your following sections exactly. After you've written, edited, and finalized your grant proposal, you should then enter accurate page numbers to your TOC.

Statement of Need

Next up is the statement of need. This is where you sell *why* you're submitting your grant request and why it matters.

What to include:

- A description of who will benefit from your proposal

- ~~Market and competitive analysis~~

- Statistics that paint a picture of the problem you're solving

- Scientific research into how the problem is expected to worsen in the future

- Reasons why your small business deserves funding (founder story, BIPOC founder, female founder, etc.)

Example:

> *While women hold 30% of entry-level jobs in tech, they only make up 10% of C-suite positions. The Female Leadership Initiative seeks to develop women tech leaders for the benefit of all genders. Female leaders have been proven to positively impact work-life balance, fairer pay, creativity, innovation, teamwork, and mentorship.*

Project Description

In this section, you'll describe the basics of your research project, art project, or small business plan. This section can be kept fairly short (1 - 3 paragraphs), because you'll be clarifying the details in the next 5 paragraphs.

What to include:

- The name of your project (if any)

- Who will benefit from your project

- How your project will get done

- Where your project will take place

- Who will do the project

Example:

> *The Fair Labor Project will seek to engage farm workers in the fields to identify poor working conditions and give back to those who ensure food security in our communities. Trained Spanish-speaking volunteers will visit local farms and speak with workers about their pay and work conditions, helping to uncover any instances of abuse or unfair pay. Volunteers will also pass out new work gloves and canned food. Volunteers will also place orders for work boots and ensure that boots are later delivered to workers that need them.*

Objectives

You should also write out clear goals and objectives for your grant proposal. No matter the type of agency, funding sources always want to see that there is a purpose behind your work.

What to include:

- Measurable objectives tied directly to your proposed project

- Why these objectives matter

Example:

> *We seek to boost volunteer turnout for our voter registration efforts by 400%, allowing us to reach an additional 25,000 potential voters and five additional neighborhoods.*

Methods and Strategies

Now it's time to clarify how you'll implement your project. For science and technology grants, this section is especially important. You might do a full literature review of current methods and which you plan to use, change, and adapt. Artists might instead describe their materials or process, while small business grant writers can likely skip this section.

What to include:

- The names of the methods and strategies you will use

- Accurate attribution for these methods and strategies

- A literature review featuring the effectiveness of these methods and strategies

- Why you are choosing these methods and strategies over others

- What other methods and strategies were explored and why they were ultimately not chosen

Example:

> *"We plan to develop our mobile app using React Native. This framework is widely regarded as the future of mobile development because of the shared codebase that allows developers to focus on features rather than create everything from scratch. With a high workload capacity, react native also provides user scalability, which is essential for our plan to offer the app for free to residents and visitors of Sunny County."*

Execution Plan and Timeline

You'll also need to cover how you plan to implement your proposal. Check the RFP or type or grant application guidelines for any special requirements.

What to include:

- Project phases

- The reasoning behind these phases

- Deadlines

- Project deliverables

- Collaborators

Example:

> *In our experience and based on the literature,11,31-33 program sustainability can be improved through training and technical assistance. Therefore, systematic methods are needed to empirically develop and test sustainability training to improve institutionalization of evidence-based programs. This will be accomplished in three phases. In Phase 1, (yr. 1, months 1-6) we will refine and finalize our Program Sustainability Action*

Planning Model and Training Curricula. As part of this refinement, we will incorporate experiential learning methods3-6 and define learning objectives. The Program Sustainability Action Planning Training will include action planning workshops, development of action plans with measurable objectives to foster institutional changes, and technical assistance. We will also deliver our workshops in Phase 1 (yrs. 1 and 2, months 6-15) to 12 state TC programs. Phase 2 (yrs. 1, 2, and 3) uses a quasi-experimental effectiveness trial to assess the Program Sustainability Action Planning Training in 24 states (12 intervention, 12 comparison). Evaluation of our training program is based on the theory of change that allows for study on how a change (intervention) has influenced the design, implementation, and institutionalization of a program.7,8,11,28 We will collect data on programmatic and organizational factors that have been established as predictors of sustainability9,11 using state level programmatic record abstraction and the Program Sustainability Assessment Tool (PSAT)43 to assess level of institutionalization across intervention and comparison states at three time points. Data will be used to establish the efficacy of the Program Sustainability Action Planning Model and Training Curricula. In Phase 3 (yr. 4, months 36-48), we will adapt our training based on results and disseminate Program Sustainability Action

Planning Model and Training materials. - From Establishing
The Program Sustainability Action Planning Training Model

Budget

What to include:

- A budget table with various expense categories

- An explanation of what each category entails

- Expenses broken down by month or year (if this fits your proposal)

Example:

Here's an **example budget table** with expense categories:

Category	Activities	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Year 1 Budgeted Cost	Projected Three Year Cost
Personnel	Salaries	X	X	X	$ 150,000.00	$ 450,000.00
	Benefits	X	X	X	$ 75,000.00	$ 225,000.00
Other Direct Costs	Communication/Marketing	X			$ 3,000.00	$ 3,000.00
	Supplies	X	X	X	$ 10,000.00	$ 30,000.00
	Materials	X			$ 30,000.00	$ 30,000.00
	Food	X	X	X	$ 1,000.00	$ 3,000.00
	Travel		X	X	$ -	$ 8,000.00
Total Direct Costs					$ 269,000.00	$ 749,000.00
Indirect Costs	Indirect costs not to exceed 5%	X			$ 13,450.00	$ 37,450.00
Total Grant Request					$ 282,450.00	$ 786,450.00

You can then include a brief description of each category and the expenses you expect within them.

Evaluation and Expected Impact

A great grant proposal should clarify how you will measure positive outcomes and impact.

What to include:

- Details on the expected impact of your project

- Who will benefit from your project and how

- Your plan for evaluating project success

- How you will measure project success

Example:

> *We will measure the success of the project by monitoring the school district's math scores. We are expecting an 8% increase in state testing scores from the fall to the spring across grades 1 through 3.*

Organization Bio and Qualifications

And lastly, finish up your grant proposal with a bio of your organization, your company, or yourself.

What to include:

- Your name

- Company name

- The names of people on your team

- Professional bios for everyone on your team

- Your educational background

- Any relevant awards, qualifications, or certifications

Example:

> *Jane Doe received her masters in fine arts specializing in ceramics from Alfred University. She has received the Kala Fellowship and the Eliza Moore Fellowship for Artistic Excellence.*

Successful grant proposal examples

Want to write winning grant applications?

We've rounded up examples of successful, awarded grants to help you learn from the best.

Check out these real examples across science, art, humanities, agriculture, and more:

- **Funded arts and research grants from the University of Northern Colorado**

- **Samples of awarded proposals from the Women's Impact Network**

- **National Cancer Institute examples of funded grants**

- **Institute of Museum and Library Services sample applications**

- **Specialty Crop Block Grant Program awarded grants examples**

Grant application and funding resources

To help you get started writing and sending grant proposals, we've found some great application resources.

Research grants:

- **United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants**

- **William T. Grant Foundation grants on reducing inequality**

- **Russel Sage Foundation research grants**

Nonprofit grants:

- **Walmart's Local Community Grants**

- **Bank of America's Grant Funding for Nonprofits**

- **Canada GrantWatch's database of nonprofit grants**

Technology grants:

- **Google Impact Challenges**

- **UN Sustainable Development Goals Fund**

- **US Department of Energy Funding**

Small business grants:

- **US Chamber of Commerce Small Business grants**

- **Canada Small Business Benefits Finder**

- **US Small Business Administration (SBA) grants**

Arts grants:

- **National Endowment for the Arts grants**

- **Art Prof Artist Grants**

- **Canada Council for the Arts grants**

Get started with our proposal writing templates

The best way to start any proposal is with a template. A template informs your writing, while drastically speeding up the time it takes to design an attractive proposal.
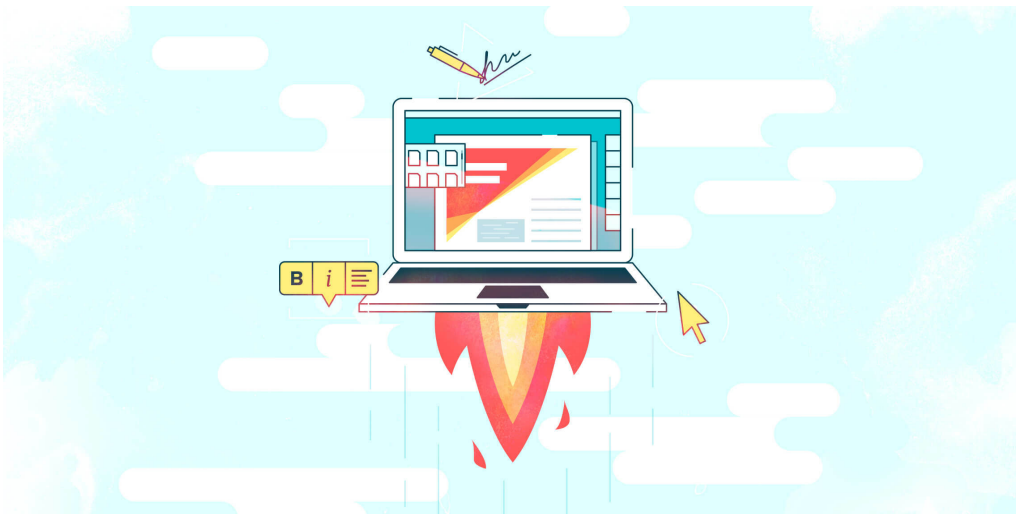
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About Dayana

Dayana Mayfield is a B2B SaaS copywriter who believes in the power of content marketing and a good smoothie. She lives in Northern California. Connect with her on LinkedIn here: linkedin.com/in/dayanamayfield/

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