Proposal Writing Tips

•  **Start early, and keep in mind the application due date!**

Keep informed of grant opportunities. Develop your project idea so that when the opportunity arises you will have a head start on developing your grant application. The time range from the release of the grant opportunity announcement to the application due date is usually four to six weeks. If you’re developing a proposal for a program that occurs annually, review the previous year’s announcement, since the changes to the guidelines are minor from year to year. Obtain copies of previously funded applications, and review them for ideas about successful strategies. Contact the assigned officer for the program to get additional information about the program guidelines. Identify members of the proposal development team, if you plan to use a team-approach in developing the proposal. Develop a plan for writing and submitting the application.

•  **Read the guidelines carefully and be sure to follow all the instructions!**

Make your proposal fits funding requirements. Program instructions include page limitations, mode of submission, (electronically or paper), inclusion of appendices, allowable costs, formatting of the application (whether the proposal should be single- or double-spaced, font type and size to use, the number of copies to be submitted, how to bind the proposal, and color of ink to use in signing form, etc.) Applicants who do not follow the basic instructions run the risk of having their proposals rejected from the pool of eligible proposals. Go over the application checklist twice and make sure each item is addressed.

•  **Be consistent and organize for clarity!**

Follow the format included in the grant application. Provide all the information using the formatting and in the order requested. Don’t make reviewers hunt for information, even if this means repeating information or referencing a previous section.

•  **Make it easy to read and check for grammatical errors!**
Review, edit and proofread your work. Paid attention to grammatical errors, reviewers get turn off when there are too many grammatical errors. Use headings, charts, and graphs to break up the narrative.

- **Communicate clearly and avoid jargon!**

Clearly describe what you plan to do and why; how you will do it and why that is the best approach; who will be involved and why they are qualified; what the institution needs to accomplish the tasks; what the timetable will be; how you will know the goals have been met. Be realistic, accurate and specific! Use language anyone will understand and avoid jargon. Do not assume the reader will understand acronyms or abbreviations.

- **Get feedback from others!**

Check the clarity of your writing. Have friends or family who are not familiar with your topic read the proposal; if they understand it, reviewers will understand it, too.

- **Justify the budget and make sure requested costs are allowable!**

Account for all budget relevant items. Do not include elements in the budget that have not been discussed in the project narrative. Remember that your budget translates to the proposed activities. Carefully review the application guidelines to learn what costs are allowable and unallowable. Stay within the funding range identified by the funding agency. Make sure your budget figures agree and review the budget for rounding errors.

- **Meet the deadline!**

Do not wait for the last minute, plan ahead and allow sufficient time for review. It is possible that the OGR will have multiple projects with the same due date. Read the guideline’s deadline information carefully. If it needs to be delivered by the deadline, do not count on overnight
delivery getting it there on time. If submitted electronically, remember that technical problems can occur at the last minute or when least expected. Give yourself enough delivery time. If the Internet is down, the proposal will not get there. If it needs to be postmarked by the deadline, it requires an official postmark from the U.S. Postal Office. If the proposal is to be mailed via Postal Office, or deliver using a carrier (DHL or FedEx) always remembered to keep proof of the date of mailing and/or delivery. In addition, a return receipt should be requested to verify that the proposal has been received by the funding agency.

Note: A copy of the original proposal must be provided to the Office of Grant Resources, who will keep a record of the application.

Sources:
Aid for Education Report, April 14, 1998
Grants and Contracts Weekly, April 6, 1992