

Appealing and Appalling Proposals

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Are the proposals you send out to funders appealing or appalling? You be the judge.

It's important to understand that the municipality receiving the grant is only the conduit from the funder to the people who will ultimately benefit from the project or services.

Keeping this in mind, the proposal, aside from the demographics and supporting documentation, needs to tell a good story.

The following checklist will guide you through the process of preparing proposals that will stand out from the rest:

APPEALING PROPOSALS:

- **Tell your story in the simplest terms so that the reader understands exactly what you are looking for.**

- **Great writing skills:**
 - Organized thoughts
 - Getting to the point
 - Short concise sentences
 - Good paragraph structure
 - Adhering to the required number of pages found in the guidelines
 - Good grammar
 - Good punctuation
 - Good format
 - Correct spelling
 - Proofread the proposal;
 - Have someone outside of your department read the document to assure that what you're asking for is clearly understood.
 - *Make your proposal attractive and easy to read*

- **Budget:**
 - Have someone double check the budget and the figures to be certain that they are accurate
 - We recommend that you always do a budget narrative describing how you have arrived at your figures
 - Make sure that the budget agrees with the project narrative and staffing requirements

- **Use preferred fonts:**
 - At least 10 to 12 point Arial or Times New Roman
 - Avoid using fancy or distracting fonts

- **Proper page set up:**
 - One inch margins on all sides so the grant reviewer has room to score the proposal
 - A header or footer identifying the organization on all the pages
 - Make it easy to read;
 - KISS - Keep it SIMPLE and SPECIFIC
 - Use double spacing; if you don't have page limitations
 - Number the pages
 - Follow the directions;
 - If the proposal is a question and answer format don't deviate.
 - Answer repetitive questions if asked; if not, DON'T be repetitive.

- **Proper packaging. Usually when funders receive proposals they separate them for different teams to review. Help them out.**
 - Don't bind it
 - Don't put it in a 3-ring binder (too bulky – funders usually don't have storage)
 - Do use a 2-hole prong fastener or a large binder clip
 - Make the appropriate number of copies that were requested in the guidelines
 - If there is a check-off list, make sure your documents are in that order
 - Use an off-white or cream colored paper, if allowed;
 - Do not use colored paper.
 - If inserting color charts, graphs or pictures into your proposal be aware that your photocopies will be in black and white. Remember to make adjustments to your copies if you want them to be legible
 - Sign the original proposal in blue ink (so that the original can be recognized when photocopying)
 - Assure that all requested attachments are included with the appropriate number of copies

- **Delivering your proposal – *To win it you need to be in it...therefore, you must be in on time!***

- Hand deliver;
 - Bring a typed receipt for recipient to sign and date indicating receipt of your proposal.
 - U.S. Mail;
 - Send proposal via Certified Mail with a return receipt requested.
 - On-line;
 - Don't wait until the last minute to submit your proposal. We have seen technology fail and proposals rejected because they were not received on time.
 - Refer to the January 2005 article, *Seven "Get Started" Tips*, located in the *Grant Seeker's Toolkit*, on how to get registered to submit Federal grants on-line
- **Always thank the funder for the opportunity to apply for their grant funds.**

APPALLING PROPOSALS:

- Are sloppy
- Have many omissions
- List unrealistic spending projections
- Have insufficient documentation
- Do not follow application guidelines
- Assume all funders operate in the same way
- Assume the reader knows the organization
- Provide no sign of a board, commissioner or community support for the project
- Do not meet the objectives of the funder
- Have goals and objectives which do not meet the documented needs
- Omit a thank you to the funder

I hope that these tips will be helpful to you. If you have additional tips, suggestions, or success stories, we want to hear from you. Please send your stories to Pat Bohse at pbohse@bohse.com.

To learn more about how to write grants, visit Bohse & Associate's Web site at http://www.bohse.com/html/grant_proposal_sites.cfm, where they have provided a listing of links to various grant writing proposal aids, or visit the *Online Proposal Writing Aids & Courses* section of the League's Grant Resource Center at <http://www.njslom.org/grants.html#proposal>.