



Writing an Effective Grant Proposal: hints and tips

All funding bodies have unique and varied interests, meaning that no two funding proposals should ever be the same. However, there are some widely accepted principles to preparing and writing an effective proposal, and these are highlighted below.

This document is targeted particularly at proposals submitted in letter or email format, but many of the same principles apply when completing funding application forms.

Preparation

Project plan

- Agree your project plan and budget before you start seeking funding, and be clear about your aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes.
- For example, aim: to deliver sound analysis training to new volunteers. Objectives: 1) to recruit 20 new volunteers for sound analysis by March; and 2) to run a training workshop for 15 new volunteers in April. Output: 15 new volunteers trained in sonogram analysis. Outcome: improved capacity to survey local bat populations, which will help to deliver on local biodiversity action targets.

Research donors

- Fundraising is often about who you know, rather what you know. Furthermore, searching directives can be time expensive, so use existing contacts and links with organisations where possible.
- If you're seeking funding from a new contact, make sure you know what their organisation's aims are, what kind of projects they fund, and how much they fund.
- If the funder provides an application form, use it, and read any guidance documents given. You may get an instant negative response if you send the wrong information in the wrong format.

Structuring your application

Opening paragraph (executive summary)

- Provide a succinct overview of your group's mission/purpose; the problem; the project; the anticipated result; what you are requesting; and a 'hook' for the donor, i.e. how your proposal matches their interests/motivations.
- Whether writing an email, letter or a supporting statement within an application form, it's important to get your point across in this first paragraph. A donor's initial reaction to a funding proposal will often be 'no' (think about everything you get through the post and don't look twice at), so you must grab their interest from the outset.

About you

- Briefly introduce your group by stating your mission, objectives and relationship with other relevant organisations.

Statement of the problem or issue

- Use facts to demonstrate why there is a need for your project overall rather than talking about your specific needs, or your group's needs. For example, members may want training or new equipment, but you need to demonstrate why this is necessary to deliver bat conservation/biodiversity/education within the community etc. Always tie this into the funder's own aims and interests.
- Include endorsements and statements from others, such as local NGOs and/or community groups. These can further confirm the importance of your project.
- Explain why your group is ideally positioned to address the identified need.
- Remember, there is a big difference between stating what you wish to do, and why it is important and worth supporting.

Goals and objectives (your outputs)

- State your project goals and objectives. These must be linked to the needs you identified above.
- Remember, goals are general, broad and long-term; your objectives should be specific, measurable and finite.

Beneficiaries

- Describe your target audience and relevant secondary benefactors.
- Tailor your description of your target group to match the funder's own interests. i.e. don't focus on how the project will benefit local wildlife if you're applying to a community-focussed funder, and vice versa.

Methods

- Describe your methods/intended activities in a logical order, quantified where possible.
- State how you will monitor progress and evaluate success.
- Include how the funder would be acknowledged during and/or after the project, and your plans for communicating outcomes (e.g. local media, article submission to publications such as Bat News).
- Be time-specific with all of the above.

Budget, funding plan and your request

- Provide a transparent breakdown of the project's overall costs, including details of any match-funding being sought or already secured. You may wish to consider including an estimate for volunteer time as match-funding.
- Clearly state how much money you are seeking from the funder and specify exactly what this will be used for.

Concluding statement

- Confirm who to contact for more information.

Writing Style Dos and Don'ts

Do

- Use simple English
- Use headings to break up block text
- Let the facts speak for themselves
- Check your grammar and spelling, or have someone else proof read
- Use active rather than passive voice
- Be positive and assertive**

Don't

- Don't use jargon
- Don't use an acronym without first writing out the name/term in full
- Don't use lots of adjectives and over dramatic language
- Don't overstate your claims
- Don't sound negative

Remember you are asking to spend someone else's money that has been set aside to achieve certain goals. You need to show the grant givers you are the right people to give it to because you are going to deliver what the funders want in the most effective way.