

# NAEA Advisory

---

The National Art Education Association, 1916 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1590  
Andra L. Nyman, Editor

Fall, 1995

## KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL GRANT WRITING

Compiled by CRIZMAC Art & Cultural Education Materials, Inc.

**WHO'S IN CHARGE?** When writing a grant in collaboration with others, it is important to establish who is going to write the proposal and who will be in charge of the work. Get it settled in writing before you begin. Once you have settled who is doing what, keep each other posted so that everyone is well-informed on the project as a whole.

**SILENCE IS GOLDEN, BUT BREVITY IS BEST.** Your proposal and any correspondence with the grantor should be as brief as is humanly possible without appearing barren or incompetent. Be clear, be direct, be informative, but be brief. Imagine yourself at an agency. You have a pile of proposals to read during the day. One proposal is 200 pages, while another is only thirty. Which one are you going to read first? Or, more accurately, which one are you going to read?

**IT'S FREE ... SO, WHY NOT?** Get yourself on the mailing list for SBIR. SBIR is the central organization of the Federal Government for small grants. Every government agency must put 1.5% of their money into the SBIR program. SBIR is open to every citizen, and all public and private agencies—with one exception. College professors are not eligible. Write to SBIR at the U.S. Small Business Administration, Mail Code 6470, 409 Third Street, Washington, DC 20416. They will send you instructions on how and where to write to the different agencies.

**POSITIVE, NOT POIGNANT, WINS THE RACE.** It is important to give your funding source the sense that they are being offered an opportunity to participate in something useful and positive. Grantors want to see their money create success. Optimism instills a sense of confidence that is especially important for first-time grant seekers who have not yet established their reputation with the agency or agencies who are being solicited for funding. *Sound* like a winner and you can *create* your own credibility.

**BREAK IT UP!** A reviewer's eye is not likely to savor a document packed with type. Large, unbroken clumps of text are discouraging and often difficult to read. If your proposal looks like heavy reading, it may very well be passed up for something more visually inviting. Breaking your text will also help you to think about the organization and clarity of your proposal.

**THE BENEFICIAL BUZZ.** Sometimes it can be beneficial to make phone contact with whoever is involved at the giving end of the grant. Many times, grantors will divulge additional information over the phone that they simply can't or won't put into writing. It is also a good idea to get in touch with anyone who has attempted or completed projects similar to your own, so as to learn about the ups and downs of their experience. If they were successful, their success can be supportive to your pursuit. If they weren't, you will certainly want to take their hurdles to heart when working on your own project.

**DID SOMEBODY SAY LIBRARY?** When pursuing funding, people often overlook the most obvious of resources. If you have access to a library, use it. Many libraries are staffed with a person or people who handle grants and proposal materials, and who can assist you with finding sources for funding. Call your library to find out if they offer such a service and if necessary, make an appointment with a person who is staffed for that service. Remember to be prepared with some general ideas for consideration *before* you get to the library, i.e., minority education, visual arts, etc. Also at the library, you may find information from the **Cooperating Collections Network**. This network is operated by **The Foundation Center**, an independent national service organization established by foundations to provide authoritative information on private philanthropic giving. Cooperating Collections provide a core collection of Foundation Center publications as well as supplementary materials and services that are useful to grantseekers. To check on locations or to receive information call 1-800-424-9836.

**THE BASIC 8.** When you set out to write your grant proposal, there are eight basic components you should always include. For each of those eight basic components, there are also some basic guidelines to follow. Knowing the components and guidelines can make all the difference between a successful, well-received proposal and a disregarded one. Following are the basic components and some general guidelines to keep your proposal on track and aimed for success.

**1. The Summary.** The proposal summary is likely to be the first, and sometimes the only, section the funding agency will read. It should appear at the beginning of the proposal, but should not be prepared until the entire proposal is complete. The summary should include: identification of the applicant and reference to the applicant's credibility; statement of the issue, problem, or need requiring the grant objectives to be achieved via the funding; types of activities planned in order to accomplish the objectives; and total cost of the project, funds already committed, and the amount you are requesting in the proposal. Be as clear and concise as possible. This section is pivotal, and can truly make or break your proposal. If the reviewer feels that your summary is verbose, superfluous, or frivolous, they are not likely to read on, and your proposal could end up in the trash.

*Special Tips for Preparing your Summary:* As with the entire proposal, basics are best. Get to the point, right from the get-go. Limit your summary to about a half of a page. The longer it gets, the more tedious it will appear to the reviewer.

**2. The Introduction.** Describe your qualifications for receiving funding. In a proposal for private funding, this section is far more crucial than in a proposal with a government agency. For private funders, it is important that you establish excellent credibility, even if it takes up a good half of your proposal as a whole—within this section. Your credibility is likely to be a critical, if not the deciding factor in the selection process. Government proposals seldom ask for an introduction, but the “description of applicant” is the equivalent, and need not be emphasized to the degree that it is emphasized for private funding proposals.

*Special Tips for Preparing Your Introduction:* If you are writing a proposal for your school, think about the image that is projected by the name of your group/project. Write the name of your organization down and think about the connotations, if any, that it may have. Does it appear discriminatory? Highly informal? Pretentious? Keep the connotations in mind as you present your organization. Work against the negative, and promote the positive. The physical document—paper, color, graphics—can make a difference. Although fancy letterhead may look nicer, it may also suggest that your school has money to squander. Take into account the overall appearance of the document, including bindery, graphics, color, etc. Your document should be clean and organized, but never extravagant. Create balance. A good mixture of statistics and human interest facets, such as quotes, is a nice way to keep the document both informative and enjoyable. Strong voluntary letters of endorsement can be attached for a positive boost. Never attach a “to whom it may concern” letter. It suggests that the letter was solicited. If you refer to attached letters within your introduction, do not ask the reviewer to “see attached.” Incorporate the quotes within the text.

**3. The Needs Assessment.** The needs assessment provides the reason behind the proposal and is the most critical part of your plan. Here, you will focus on the conditions you desire to change, and provide the logic of your need.

*Special Tips For Preparing Your Needs Assessment:* It should be clearly related to the goals of your organization. It should be supported by experience, statistics from authoritative sources and/or testimony of persons knowledgeable about the situation. It should be reasonable and realistic (can you really do something about it with the help of this grant?). It should be stated in terms of the people affected by the issue, rather than the needs or problems of your organization. Avoid circular reasoning!

**4. The Objectives.** These are the desired outcomes of your activities, the end result. Do not include the activities themselves in this section. The activities should be included in the “methods” section, to follow. Program objectives address the results that are expected. They should tell *who* is going to be doing *what* and by *when*. They should also tell the *how much* and the way you intend to measure that. Think numerically, if possible.

*Special Tips For Preparing Your Objectives:* Be careful! It is very easy to confuse the objectives with methods or long-range goals. A good way to discern between objectives, methods, and goals is to think in terms of measurability. An objective must be something you can assess at the end of the project. For example, although it may be your wish to “develop positive self-confidence among students,” you do not want to mistake this desire for an objective. How would you determine whether it was accomplished or not?

**5. The Methods.** This section allows you to describe the methodology you intend to use for your project. In this portion, you should describe the steps you will take in order to achieve your objectives. The methods should follow from the objectives. Describe program activities, including sequence and rationale.

*Special Tips For Preparing Your Methods:* Be clear and logical; rationalize your methods. Sometimes it is useful to provide a time chart to organize activities visually for the proposal reviewer. Be reasonable. If your methods or timeline seem impossible, you may appear naive or incompetent.

**6. The Evaluation.** This section can cover either, or both, product and process evaluation. In other words, it may require that you (1) assess the extent to which the program achieved its stated objectives, and the extent to which the accomplishments can be attributed to the program itself, and/or (2) evaluate how closely the project has followed the plan, and the relationship of different activities to the project’s effectiveness. Be clear on what is expected before providing too much or too little evaluation information. Tell who will be performing the evaluation, as well as how and why that evaluator was selected. Describe your methods for gathering data, and any instruments or materials that will be used, i.e., questionnaires, in the process.

**7. Future/Other Funding.** This is the last narrative section of your proposal, and should address the plan for obtaining funding from other sources at the time of depletion of the current grant (if applicable) and/or any other funding necessary from other sources during the course of your project (if applicable). Perhaps you are ordering curriculum or other materials. Perhaps those curriculum or materials require related purchases or expenditures. This section is where you provide information about those additional needs.

**8. The Proposal Budget.** If you are applying for governmental funding, you will want to go into detail in this section, and possibly include budget forms. Private funders, who are less structured, usually will require less detailed information on the budget. However, a good, clear, and feasible budget will be appreciated by any funding agency, private or public.

*Special Tips For Preparing Your Proposal Budget:* Remember that it is an estimate! Do not try to account for every penny precisely. Be realistic, but keep in mind that the proposed budget is not carved in stone. There will be opportunities for varying degrees of flexibility as you encounter obstacles or unforeseen expenses. However, you should try to be as accurate as possible. Keep in mind, the less changes required along the way, the more credible you will appear to the funder. Round off to dollars or tens at most, rounding to the nearest hundred—or worse yet, the nearest thousand—is not pleasing to the eye of the reviewer, who will be expected to do a budget analysis.