

# Do's and Don'ts of Writing a Competitive Grant Proposal

## PRE-WRITING



Don't begin to write until you have a plan that follows the funder's guidelines.

Content  
Organization  
Cross references



Develop a map or outline for your narrative.

## WRITING

Allow adequate time to write a rough draft, read it aloud, have 1 or 2 other people read it, and make revisions. Don't fall in love with your own writing. Revision is a necessary component of effective writing.

Don't assume that the reader will understand your community, organization, program, etc. Be clear and concise.



Tailor your proposal to the specific funder. Don't use the shotgun approach.

Be honest. Be specific. Experienced grant readers will detect when your descriptions are vague or exaggerated. If you use qualifiers such as "significant," "excellent," or "extremely," justify them with examples.

Use active voice.

Passive: The meals will be served by volunteers from the community.

Active: Community volunteers will serve the meals.



Passive: Over 200 youth have been enrolled in the program in the past year.

Active: The program enrolled over 200 youth in the past year.

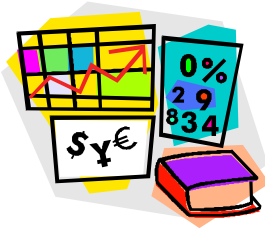
Passive: All objectives will have been met by December 31.

Active: We will meet all objectives by December 31.

Use the thesaurus. (In MS Word, highlight the word you want to replace and type Shift + F7.)

Don't rely solely on spell-check. Find someone with good language skills to proofread your work.

Write the Abstract or Executive Summary **last**.



Use charts, tables, and graphs to organize information and to support your points.

Use comparison data when describing the need or problem that you are addressing.

- Compare local data to countywide or statewide data.
- Compare local data to other similar areas.
- Compare current data with previous data.

Check your proposal for consistency from section to section, including the budget. This is especially important if more than one person is completing the proposal or if you have written the proposal over a period of time.

## FORMATTING

Follow the funder's guidelines **exactly**.



If no formatting guidelines are provided, make it easy for your reader

- use 11- or 12-point serif fonts like Times New Roman
- use 1-inch margins
- double space
- use ALL CAP and bold headings
- insert page numbers
- provide a table of contents

Never exceed the number of pages allowed.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Develop boilerplate sections for information that is commonly requested by funders:

- Mission and history of your organization
- Geography or service area
- Population you serve
- Description of programs or activities
- Personnel qualifications and job descriptions

Have these documents on hand:

- IRS determination letter
- Most recent audit report
- Organizational budget for current fiscal year
- List of board members, addresses, affiliations

Create a checklist for each grant proposal if one is not provided.

Provide a list of talking points for individuals who will write letters of support for your proposal.

Determine what equipment, supplies, and software you need such as a scanner, heavy duty stapler, binder clips of various sizes, CD burner, blank CD-ROMs, and a PDF converter.