Strategies for Effective Proposal Writing

Foreword

The Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition and The Health Communication Unit are pleased to present the online edition of **Strategies for Effective Proposal Writing**.

Whether you are nervously anticipating writing your first grant proposal or are a seasoned veteran, it is our hope that this manual will assist you in developing a coherent and effective proposal.

Based on the workshop and guide developed by the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, this online version was adapted through a partnership between The Health Communication Unit and the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition.

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Reproduction

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Introduction

Not-for-profit organizations frequently rely on outside financial support to maintain, expand, or create programs and services. Often, proposals must be written to secure this support. The good news is successful proposal writing is not complicated; it does, however, take a considerable amount of preparation and good organizational skills.

The purpose of this online course is to help nonprofit organizations plan and prepare winning proposals.

This course has six modules, one for each step in the proposal development process. They are described briefly below:

Step 1 - Developing (or Revisiting) Your Program Plan

The process required to create a solid program plan on which the proposal will be based.

Step 2 - Seeking Funding

Identifying, researching, and selecting funders for whom you will write proposals.

Step 3 - Managing the Proposal Development Process

Good project management, including: meaningful engagement of stakeholders; proper use of time, money and other resources; ensuring that adequate background information is collected; and good decision-making processes.

Step 4 - Developing Your Proposal

A component breakdown of a proposal, including checklists of the core information required for each section, and tips on how to adequately support the facts and make an emotional connection with the potential funder.

Step 5 - Producing and Packaging Your Proposal

Good writing and visual presentation techniques, followed by advice on assembling the final product.

Step 6 - Submitting and Following-up

Following submission guidelines and dealing with a win or loss.

Each module provides information on what the step entails, how-to tips for most effective implementation of the step, and links to additional supporting resources.

Step 1
Developing (or Revisiting) Your Program Plan

In the competitive environment which now exists, funders demand a credible and well-researched plan that shows evidence of being likely to succeed. Thus, it is essential that you have a very clear idea of what you want to do before describing it in a proposal. In fact, knowing what you want to do is key to selecting the right funder to approach.

There are many program planning models, most of which contain similar steps. The Health Communication Unit (THCU) at the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto recommends their six-step planning model. The model includes a situational assessment phase that includes some or all of the following data collection activities:

- Gathering and collating the perspectives of key program stakeholders.
- Conducting a literature search to find out what has already been done and determine the best way to address the issue.
- Collating and reviewing evaluation findings from the program (if it already exists), or related programs.
- Collecting new information about programming needs and desires, directly from the target audience.
- Collecting information about the mandates, agendas, policies and/or guidelines of key stakeholders (e.g. other related organizations, influential community members, other staff at your organization).
- Assessing and revising your vision and mission.
- Conducting a PEEST analysis, i.e. an assessment of political, economic, environmental, social and technological factors. A PEEST analysis can be organized into a SWOT format, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

This information is then used to identify:

- Goals
- Populations of interest
- Geographic areas of interest
- Specific, measurable outcome objectives that describe concrete changes in the populations of interest

- ❑ Broad strategies (e.g. policy development, education, skill building)
- ❑ Specific activities (e.g. a mass media campaign, a workshop, an event)
- ❑ Resources required for activities (i.e. staff, financing)
- ❑ Timelines
- ❑ Evaluation indicators

THCU also recommends the use of a logic model to provide a quick overview.

How-to Tips

- **Enlist a THCU consultant to help** with the development of a program plan. This is a free service within Ontario. Service request forms are available online at **www.thcu.ca**
- **Make sure you aren't reinventing the wheel!** Talk to others who are working on similar issues to find out how they reach their goals.
- **Gather input from all people who are interested in or would be impacted by the project.** Stakeholders should be consulted at multiple stages and included in a review of the final plan. Make them part of your ongoing communication network. This will help ensure that your estimations of resources are accurate, that you have uncovered all barriers to implementation and that you have the full support of all those who will be required to help with implementation.
- **Think broadly when considering what resources are required** for implementing a project. Consider space to implement program, insurance requirements, personnel policies, job descriptions, financial tracking mechanisms, workload implications, equipment, etc.
- **Take the time to account for resources that you already have access to**, such as partners, volunteers, students, secondments, equipment, etc. Writing grants is a time-consuming process – you want to make sure you really need the money! In addition, funders appreciate knowing you have maximized available resources before seeking additional money.
- **Put partnership agreements in writing.** If you plan to use in-kind resources from another organization, be sure to clarify your expectations in writing.
- **Summarize your plan in the Step 1 : Project Plan Worksheet**, for later comparison with funder interests (Step 2) and as an outline for writing your proposal (Step 4).

Additional resources

Introduction to Health Promotion Program Planning Workbook, The Health Communication Unit

THCU's Introduction to Program Planning Workbook provides additional detail on the program planning steps recommended above. It is available free at **www.thcu.ca**. Links to a variety of other planning models, and resources to help with each of the six steps, can be found at **www.thcu.ca**.

Program Planning Case Study Series, The Health Communication Unit

THCU has developed a series of case studies that demonstrate how various community organizations have applied all of the recommended six steps in THCU's Program Planning Model. These can be found online at **www.thcu.ca**

Logic Model Workbook

THCU has a short how-to guide on developing logic models, available online at **www.thcu.ca**. Samples are included.

Step 2
Seeking Funding

Changes in funding practices over the last decade have made this a challenging time for non-profits, charities and community organizations to raise funds. Increased competition and government cutbacks at all levels mean greater demands - from an increasing number of groups – on foundations, corporations and other funders.

Your organization must do its homework to know which funders to approach. Your success will depend on identifying, researching, and finally assessing the best fit between your project plan and potential funders. This is where the time and effort you put into Step 1 will pay off.

Identifying funding opportunities

There are many different types of funders available to organizations seeking grants.

Some important sources of grants include:

- Associations, Clubs, and Unions (e.g. Kiwanis, Rotary Club)
- Corporations and Local Businesses
- Governments
- Research agencies
- Foundations
    - **Family foundations** are founded by family members to honor the family name in perpetuity (e.g. McConnell Family Foundation).
    - **Government foundations** (e.g. Ontario Trillium Foundation).
    - **Special-purpose foundations** focus on one specific area of giving (e.g. Hospital for Sick Children Foundation).
    - **Corporate foundations** are the charitable giving arms of corporations (e.g. Royal Bank of Canada Charitable Foundation).
    - **Community foundations** raise money, usually from the local community, and then redistribute these funds (e.g. Guelph Community Foundation).
- Individuals

How-To Tips

- **Speak with local contacts.** Colleagues, board members, volunteers and others may be aware of foundations in your area.
- **Speak with government officials.** Local, provincial or federal levels may have grant and contribution programs.
- **Inquire about the source of funding** for organizations similar to yours.
- **Use the Internet** to conduct a wider search.

Additional resources

BIG online
(http://www.bigdatabase.ca/)

BIG is North America's most comprehensive source of fundraising information, opportunities and resources for charities and non-profit.

Philanthropic Foundations of Canada
(http://www.pfc.ca/)

The Philanthropic Foundations of Canada (PFC) site contains information about philanthropy, about grant making, and about the growing network of independent Canadian grant makers who are members of PFC.

Free Management Library
(http://www.managementhelp.org/fndrsng/np_raise/fndraise.htm)

This site provides an overview of nonprofit fundraising sources and approaches.

Environment Canada
(http://www.ec.gc.ca/fund_e.html)

This site provides a list of funding programs for environmental groups compiled by Environment Canada (also available in French).

Charity Village – Funding Sources
(http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/ires/fund.asp)

This page contains links to online databases and directories of funding agencies and foundations of interest to Canadian individuals and organizations, plus online tools and resources of value to those involved in prospect research and other areas of fundraising.

Imagine Canada
(http://www.imaginecanada.ca/)

Imagine Canada is an organization that focuses on supporting the organizations and businesses that have a stake in building stronger Canadian communities. This organization grew out of an alliance of the two leading voices of Canada's charitable and nonprofit sector: the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (CCP) and the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations (NVO).

Charity Village
(http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/guides/guide3.asp)

Charity Village's extensive guide of fundraising resources.

Canadian Heritage
(http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pc-cp/pubs/e/fr4gras1.htm)

Fundraising Ideas That Work for Grassroots Groups, by Ken Wyman (also available in French). Examples for where to apply for funding are provided.

Foundation Centre
(http://fdncenter.org/)

The Centre is the United States' leading authority on philanthropy, and is dedicated to serving grant-seekers, grant-makers, researchers, policymakers, the media, and the public.

Researching the opportunities

After you have identified a list of potential funders, learn more about them by collecting the following information:

- Name
- Address
- Contact person
- Previous history with your organization
- Populations of interest
- Geographic focus area
- Outcomes/topics of interest
- Strategies of interest (e.g. policy development, skill-building, education)
- Activities of interest (e.g. workshops, events, campaigns, advocacy efforts)

Resources

- Range of grants available
- Restrictions on use of money (e.g. staffing, types of organizations who can qualify)

Timelines

- Period of funding
- Proposal requirements
- Proposal deadline
- Project evaluation expectations
- Other administrative or project requirements (e.g. reporting, financial tracking system, payroll capacity)

Remember, funding research is hard work, but it pays off. The more you know about potential funders, the more likely it is that you will pursue opportunities that are well-matched to your project. In addition, you will be better able to write a proposal that engages and persuades potential funders to take an interest in your project.

How-To Tips

- **Visit the funder's web site.**
- **Check out the funder's annual report.**
- **Obtain a list of board members** to determine whether there are any people who are already familiar with you or your work.
- **Cross-check the funder's published areas of interest with the characteristics of past grant recipients.** You may find unpublished patterns or biases.
- **Make a personal connection.** If possible, contact the program officer directly for copies of the guidelines and additional information. Having an existing relationship may pay off later!
- **Keep all your research** and contact information in one place, and save it for future initiatives.

Assessing the fit

Care must be taken in selecting which funding sources to approach. No matter how good your proposal, if it is directed to the wrong agency or submitted at the wrong time, the answer will most likely be a rejection.

After your researching efforts, compare the characteristics of your project, as outlined in Step 1, with those of the funding agency as discovered through your research. This will help you reduce your potential funders to a short-list of three or four that are most likely to support your project.

How-To Tip

- **Complete the Step 2: Prospect Assessment Worksheet** to assess the fit between your project and each potential funder. Each Step Two worksheet can be placed beside the Step 1: Project Plan Worksheet to allow for a quick comparison and judgment about overall fit.

Step 3
Managing the Proposal Development Process

Now that you have decided which funders to approach, you will need good project management skills to develop the proposal. There are five key factors to consider while managing the development of your proposal:

» Meaningful participation of all people and organizations connected to the proposal process
» Time
» Money and other resources
» Information-gathering
» Decision-making

If these elements are ignored or not managed well, problems are likely to occur:

» A lack of participation can lead to decisions being overruled, delayed, challenged, or questioned by internal or external stakeholders.
» Being late can result in missed opportunities, poor impacts, and stress to relationships with partners.
» Unanticipated resource shortcomings (including staffing) or costs can create problems.
» Information that is misleading, weak, or incomplete will result in poor decisions.
» Good decisions are unlikely without proper time, creativity, and a supportive climate.

Clearly, poor project management can result in a poor proposal.

Meaningful participation of people and organizations connected to the proposal process

Much has been written about the importance of meaningful stakeholder participation in the management, health promotion and community development fields. These insights apply to the planning and implementation of your project, but also to the proposal development process. From the outset, the proposal lead must identify who should be involved with proposal development, and in what ways. Roles may include writing, providing advice, editorial assistance, and ultimately, approval. Stakeholders may be very close to the project (e.g. front line staff), or more peripheral (e.g. community partners). It is important to create a list of proposal stakeholders and their roles and ensure that all team members agree with those roles, to avoid later confusion.

How-To Tips

- **Give all people and organizations connected to the proposal process the opportunity to fairly and honestly assess the proposed project, the process by which the proposal will be developed, and the final proposal.** One way to do this is through a SWOT analysis: ask them what they perceive to be the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats.
- **Complete the Step 3: Management of People and Organizations Connected to the Proposal Process Worksheet.**

Additional resources

Stakeholder wheel

Check out THCU's stakeholder wheel to help you identify all of the people who you should consider involving in the proposal development process. The wheel shows that there are core, involved, supportive and peripheral stakeholders. See THCU's Program Planning Workbook, page 15. This is available online at **www.thcu.ca**

Information-gathering

Throughout the proposal development process, you will need to ensure that you have adequate information on which to base all decisions, and enough evidence and examples to illustrate your main points. Thus, there may be data collection tasks required as each proposal section is developed.

How-To Tips

- **Keep clear, organized records** of all project-related activity, discussions and interactions.
- **Add to the Step 3: Proposal Work Plan Worksheet** as each proposal section is assigned and drafted, noting data gaps that must be filled, and plans for filling them.

Time

The time required for each step of the proposal development process described throughout this course depends on a number of circumstances. Any number of variations exists.

As stakeholder participation is so important for community level projects, the time required for each step is often longer than for other kinds of proposal development; input-gathering and review processes can be quite time-consuming.

Thus, the work plan that you design will inevitably be a tradeoff between the ideal level of participation and the practicality of meeting the deadline.

How-To Tips

- **Plan with delays in mind**. Build a development timeline with extra time in case of delays and unexpected challenges. This will afford you some leeway should you need it.
- **Ask in advance of writing for extensions.** Some funders will consider time extensions; many, however, will not. Do not assume that your request will be granted. If you anticipate difficulty meeting the deadline, inquire as early as possible to avoid wasted effort.
- **Include dates in the Step 3: Proposal Work Plan Worksheet.**

Money, staff time and other resources

Project managers should, prior to beginning, consider the resources that are available for proposal development. Time will be required from a variety of stakeholders for writing, review processes, advice and data gathering, editing and final approval, as well as production of the final document. A budget may also be required to produce a professional final document.

How-To Tips

- **Assign a lead proposal writer.** It is always best to have one person holding the reins and others feeding into the process. This person should be the primary person responsible for resource management.

Decision-making

Decisions have to be made at every step of the proposal development process, and it is important to determine in advance how key decisions will be made. For example, is team consensus required? Does one lead person have the authority to make some decisions? Are there individuals who must approve all work and can override some decisions? Are different individuals responsible for approving content and making editorial or visual presentation decisions? Outlining a decision-making process in advance is essential to smooth progression of the proposal development process.

How-To Tips

- **Complete the Step 3: Proposal Work Plan Worksheet** before starting proposal development, and ensure that all stakeholders agree to what is proposed.
- **Develop or agree to an existing style guide.** A style guide is a reference document that includes rules and suggestions for writing and document presentation. Having a style guide for proposals and other documents can increase the quality of the final product, as well as decrease the time spent discussing such issues as the proposal is developed.

Step 4
Developing Your Proposal

Meeting basic content requirements is generally enough to keep you in the running. However, in a competitive environment, proposals must also provide adequate evidence and examples to support their claims and strike an emotional chord with readers in a way that persuades them to select you over other applicants.

In this section, we provide an overview of core content requirements, and some tips for providing adequate evidence and striking an emotional chord. Each proposal section is then discussed, in the order that it should be developed.

4.1 Core content requirements

Although proposal requirements vary, in general all proposals include the following sections:

Cover letter	Brief summary of the main points discussed in the proposal and why your organization is a good candidate for funding.	1 page
	↓	
Title page	Focus of the proposal, required contact information, signatures and date.	1 page
	↓	
Executive summary	Umbrella statement of your case and summary of the entire proposal.	1 page
	↓	
Introduction	Why this project is necessary and why you are qualified to do it.	2 pages
	↓	
Project description	Nuts and bolts of how the project will be carried out and evaluated.	3 pages
	↓	
Budget	Financial description of the project.	1-2 pages
	↓	
Organization information	History and governing structure of your organization, and its primary activities, audiences and services.	1 page
	↓	
Appendices	Required forms and additional information.	Varies

How-To Tip

- **Check whether a letter of request or quick phone call may be sufficient** for smaller amounts of money.

4.2 Providing adequate evidence and examples

As you craft your proposal, consider whether all its statements are adequately supported with evidence and examples. This will help the funder understand the point you are making and convince them that you are knowledgeable on the topic.

How-To Tips

- **Use descriptive statistics,** in ways that are understandable to the reader. [1]
- **Use charts and graphs.**
- **Cite well-researched documents,** such as surveys, reports, articles, studies and recommendations to prove your point.
- **Use local examples and case studies.**
- **Ensure all supporting material is directly linked to the proposal.** You will not get points for extraneous detail.

Additional resources

The Update: Special Issue on Risk Communication

This issue of THCU's newsletter from Fall 2000 provides an overview of risk communication along with information on planning risk communication efforts, developing messages, and evaluating. This issue continues in a special supplement that focuses on message development. Meaningful presentation of statistics and other message characteristics are discussed in detail. This is available online at **www.thcu.ca**

Making the Case Workshop Materials

Ways to access, interpret, and present information for the purpose of convincing key stakeholder groups to support health promotion and other community initiatives are outlined. Literature on effectiveness, as well as the fields of marketing, persuasion, and public speaking, is incorporated. This is available online at **www.thcu.ca**

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[1] http://www.healthpolicycoach.org/pdf/social_math.pdf

4.3 Striking an emotional chord: persuading the funder

To be persuasive, you must balance logic with emotion. Ideally, your proposal will be as interesting to read as it is informative. When the reader is engaged, wanting to know more, you will be more likely to receive funding. There are various ways to do this. For proposal writing, the key to using persuasive techniques is to be brief, and selective. Many proposals have maximum word counts.

How-To Tips

- **Tell short stories** from your personal and organizational experience.
- **Use relevant short statements** such as quotations from historical figures and folk sayings.
- **Use short anecdotes to convey a message.** They can be very effective if interesting and relevant.
- **Use highly descriptive stories and illustrations that evoke emotion.**
- **Make use of testimonials.**
- **Make all supporting material as brief and relevant as possible.** Many proposals have maximum word counts.

Additional resources

Strengthening Personal Presentations Workbook

THCU's Strengthening Personal Presentation Workbook highlights five steps to delivering an effective presentation. Many of the lessons from Step 3 - Using Support Materials Creatively, and Step 4 – Making an Effective Delivery. can be applied to written documents such as proposals, as well as oral presentations. The workbook and accompanying checklist are available online at **www.thcu.ca**.

4.4 Introduction

The introduction sets the tone of the entire proposal. It is critical that very early on, you show why your project is necessary and make a compelling case for why you should carry it out.

To show your project is necessary:

- Quickly summarize the problem in terms of the needs of humans and other life.
- Use a brief summary of available evidence and examples to show the significance of the problem, and demonstrate a precise understanding.
- Explain why this problem should be of special interest to the funder by linking your project idea with the funder's priorities.
- Briefly explain what you plan to do.
- Highlight the unique or innovative aspects to your proposal, such as continuing previous work, avoiding errors made by others, maximizing collaboration, etc.

To make a compelling case for why you should carry it out:

- Highlight relevant recent experience.
- Highlight what makes you unique (e.g., geographic location, language, expertise, partnerships)
- Link the project with your organizational goals.

How-to Tips

- **Avoid assuming that the funder already understands the problem as clearly as you.**
- **Position the funder as a "partner" in this venture**, committed to the same goals as you. Refrain from focusing on your organization's need for funds.
- **Consider borrowing credibility** by involving expert consultants in advisory roles, or securing strong letters of endorsement.

4.5 Project Description

This section of your proposal may have up to five subsections:

» **Goals and objectives**
» **Methodology**
» **Staffing and administration**
» **Evaluation**
» **Sustainability and future orientation**

Together, the project goal, its objectives and the methodology dictate staffing and administrative needs to address the project purpose. The project's sustainability flows directly from its success. Taken together, these five sections present an interlocking picture of the entire project.

4.5.1 Goals and objectives

Your goals and objectives help funders decide whether your project is properly aligned with their mandate.

Goals and objectives should be differentiated, but clearly linked. Goals are the large statements of what you hope to ultimately accomplish and are often too large to measure. Good objectives, on the other hand should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-limited. They should identify an audience of interest, and the specific change that you plan on effecting in that audience.

Indicators are also necessary, as they will clearly show whether the objectives were achieved. It is also important to provide brief evidence, supported by details in the Appendix, showing that your project will result in achieving the objectives, and that you have realistically assessed the available resources for doing so. Finally, it is important that you be clear on *when* the objectives will be met.

When outlining goals and objectives, you may choose to elaborate on the discussion started in your introduction section, noting how the objectives, including the target audience, were selected, and why they should be of interest to the funding organization.

How-to Tips

- **Limit objectives to one sentence**, if possible, and no more than two.
- **List objectives in order of importance.**
- **Use numbers, bullets or indentations** to highlight your objectives in the text.
- **Do not confuse your outcome objectives** (what you will change in the audience of interest) **with your methods or process objectives** (how you are going to do it).
- **Be realistic!** If approved, your proposal becomes your legal agreement.

Additional resources

Setting Communication Objectives Lecturette

This excerpt from THCU's Overview of Health Communication Campaign workshop slides provides guidelines for how to set good health communication objectives. The lessons are also applicable to other types of non-communication objectives. This is available online at **www.thcu.ca**

Menu of Outcome Objectives

The Health Communication Unit recommends that changes at the individual, network, organizational, and societal levels be considered when setting objectives. This resource provides sample outcome objectives for all four levels. This is available online at **www.thcu.ca**

4.5.2 Methodology

A complete methodology section should cover four main points: how, who, when and why. It should help the funder clearly visualize the complete implementation of the project.

> ***How:*** It is crucial to provide a detailed description of what activities will occur from the time the project begins until it is complete. Methods should be clearly linked to all outcome objectives and interrelationships among project activities should be explained.
>
> ***Why:*** A description of why particular methods were chosen should be included. Evidence and past experience can bolster support for your choices.
>
> ***Who:*** It is important to note who will carry out each project task, so that a match between task and expertise can be guaranteed.
>
> ***When:*** Tasks should be presented chronologically, with clear deadlines attached to critical project junctures.

How-to Tips

- **Subdivide the methodology section into manageable phases**.
- **Include a point-form table** showing key activities, personnel assigned, time required to complete the task and deadlines, along with a text version of the methodology.
- **Highlight innovative or unique aspects** of your methodology.
- **Highlight involvement of the intended audience** in the project.
- **Highlight the development of collaborative relationships.**

4.5.3 Staffing and administration

In addition to clearly outlining who will be responsible for each task, it is worthwhile to devote a few sentences to providing staff names, their unique qualifications, and the specific assignments and overall time they will devote to the project. Further details about each project team member can be included in the organizational information section and in resumes, included as Appendices.

4.5.4 Evaluation

A good evaluation will help you determine whether you have been successful. Details about the project evaluation may be highlighted within the methodology section noted above, or it may be explained in its own section. Either way, it should show the overall purpose of the evaluation as well as how it will be carried out, and why those procedures were selected.

> ***Overall purpose:*** An oft-overlooked step, an evaluation process should begin by considering who the evaluation is intended to serve, and how the results will assist them.
>
> ***How:*** Objectives, previously outlined, will form the basis of the evaluation plan. The type of evaluation that will be used to show progress toward all outcome objectives should be noted, as well as whether data collection strategies will be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination. Evaluation tool use or development should also be explained.
>
> ***Why:*** The type of evaluation, data collection methods and choice of evaluation tools should be justified with information about previous evaluations, literature, and experience, as well as the needs of the people the evaluation is intended to influence or assist.

How-to Tips

- **Ensure there is an indicator of success for every objective.**
- **Employ a mix of qualitative and quantitative data**, if possible.
- **Consider the evaluation expectations of all partners and stakeholders**, including people who participated in the program.
- **Highlight any involvement of community stakeholders and intended audience members** in the development and implementation of the evaluation plan.
- **Use an existing data collection tool**, if an appropriate one exists.
- **Focus on 'need to know' information** that will directly contribute to the overall purpose of the evaluation, rather than on 'nice to know' information.
- **Use a chart or logic model** to show the relationship between goals, objectives, strategies, activities and evaluation indicators.
- **Consider evaluating the process of implementing the project** to determine whether to apply for similar funding in the future.

Additional resources

Evaluating health promotion programs workbook, The Health Communication Unit

This workbook guides readers through THCU's ten-step evaluation process. This is available online at **www.thcu.ca**

Innovation Network Inc.
(http://www.innonet.org/)

This site provides tools and instruction for creating detailed program plans, evaluation plans and fund-raising plans.

4.5.5 Sustainability

Many funders look for evidence that the benefits gained by the program will not be lost after the grant period expires. To that end, it is a good idea to demonstrate that your project fits into one of the following three categories:

- The project meets a finite need that will be met within the clear start and end dates of the grant.
- The project builds capacity, such that your organization, or others, will be able to continue the work without outside funding.
- The project will increase the likelihood that other funders will provide support.

How-to Tips

- **Be specific about the current and projected sources of funding** for your organization in general, and for the specific project being described.
- **Make evidence and calculations used to demonstrate the sustainability of the project available**, in case a prospective funder asks for them. It is generally not necessary to include them in the proposal.

Additional resources

Overview of Sustainability Workbook, The Health Communication Unit

In this workbook, a 6 step process is presented for achieving sustainability by: keeping awareness of the issue high on the agenda of all stakeholders; sustaining behaviour changes; integrating activities into one or more existing organizations who agree to take responsibility over the long-term; and sustaining the partnership. This is available online at **www.thcu.ca**

4.6 Budget

A project budget is more than just a statement of proposed expenditures; it is a reflection of how thoroughly you have thought through your project.

The nature of your budget will depend on the requirements of the funder. However, in the current funding environment, you need to provide a high level of detail to demonstrate your organization's ability to manage money in an effective and responsible manner.

Ordinarily, a budget is divided into two broad categories: direct costs and indirect costs. Direct costs are those that can be identified with your specific proposal and include such items as personnel (salaries and benefits), equipment, services, supplies, travel, and consultants. Indirect costs refer to such items as office space, utilities, administrative services, custodial costs, and "overhead" expenses that are often taken for granted.

A typical budget contains the following categories:

Program Income

These are direct charges or fees to participants of the project. Program income must be kept in a restricted account and either returned to the granting agency or used to fund direct costs of items needed to expand the quality or quantity of services provided. With some public funding programs, it can also be carried over into the following fiscal year.

Direct costs

Personnel

Salaries and wages: Salaries and wages are defined as fixed payments at regular intervals to professional and clerical staff, and hourly-based payments to part-time and intermittent employees, for services performed. List each staff position with titles, monthly or weekly salary ranges, number of persons per position, number of months or weeks to be devoted to the project, percentage of time devoted to the project and total salaries per position.

Fringe benefits: This line item represents payments other than salaries and wages made to staff, or paid on their account, as in the form of a pension, vacation, insurance, etc. List fringe benefits for project staff, including FICA, unemployment and workers' compensation, and hospitalization. Include computation and rate details.

Travel

This line item represents payments for transportation, meals, and lodging of staff in accordance with the funder's policy. Check with the funding source for allowable rates for in-state travel. Check with the funding agency beforehand about out-of-state travel. Project the total local mileage of each staff person and also specify the purpose of such travel for each position listed. If out-of-state travel is an allowable expense, specify the purpose of such travel (e.g. program-related activities, training, conferences).

Consultants and contracts

This is a list of fees for all legal, accounting and professional services. Provide specific cost breakouts for each item listed.

Services, supplies, and materials

These items include office and program supplies such as paper, pens, typing ribbon, folders, postage, training materials, printing and reproduction, and legal fees. It is important to itemize all expenses.

Equipment purchase and rental

Indirect costs

Overhead and administration

Overhead or indirect costs are those additional costs which will be incurred by an organization that operates multiple programs as a result of taking on this new project. These costs are typically determined by charging a fixed percentage, such as 10 to 15 percent, of the total grant request, to cover such expenses as general and unit personnel and non-personnel costs. Some public and private funding sources may disallow these charges, so check with the funding source before including this category. These costs are not to duplicate any costs charged to the other cost line items in this section.

Facilities and utilities

This line item represents payments for building and space rent, utilities, janitorial service, general maintenance and repairs, necessary re-arrangements and alterations of facilities which do not materially increase the value or useful life of the facility, and other related costs necessary to provide adequate space. In some instances, this could be included under *Overhead and administration.*

A cost analysis study may have to be conducted to determine the amount of rent to be charged to the project if the project is housed within the organization's own facility. The most important thing to show is the amount of space cost per month by the number of project months to determine total cost or cost per square footage.

Utilities: The costs for electricity and gas are sometimes recorded separately from space costs. If no specific budget format is provided, you may opt to place these items in a separate budget category.

Telecommunications: Included in this line item category are costs associated with installation and monthly charges for telephone lines, computer phone lines, fax machines, cellular telephones, pagers, and the like.

Other Costs

Included in this budget category are such items that have not been captured in the preceding categories. This may include repair and maintenance charges for rental equipment, meeting costs, subscription dues, and insurance and bonding costs. Remember to provide specific cost breakouts for each item listed.

How-to Tips

- **Check your funder's required budget categories.**
- **Review funder guidelines on the use of their grants.** Restrictions often exist.
- **Subtotal budget amounts for different phases**, or pieces (e.g. evaluation) of the methodology to allow for a greater understanding about project resources and possible negotiation about whether certain activities are necessary.
- **Consider providing different options (e.g. Cadillac vs. Ford) for carrying out the project.**
- **Clearly outline the total cost** of the initiative.
- **Base figures on sound research.**
- **Get three quotes** from subcontractors or service providers to ensure you are getting the best value.
- **Show or explain your calculations.** Clearly state any assumptions.
- **Double-check all calculations.**
- **Ensure that budget numbers are exactly the same throughout the proposal.**
- **Indicate your intention to follow accepted accounting procedures** and provide a financial report (if required).
- **Ensure that your bookkeeping procedures are compatible with funder requirements.**

4.7 Organization Information

You may be tempted to display information about the experience of your organization close to the beginning of a proposal. However, it is generally better to focus on selling the project ideas in the early sections; a detailed case for why your agency should carry out the work can be saved until the end of your proposal.

In two pages or less, organizational details that should be included are:

- Mission
- Relationship between the mission and this project
- Audience served, including its characteristics and size
- Organization's structure
- Activities, programs, and special expertise
- Board details, including its size, method of recruitment, level of participation, and membership (possibly as an appendix)
- Role of volunteers
- Staff details, including the number of full- and part-time staff, and their levels of expertise
- Specific relevant experience
- When your organization came into existence.

How-to Tips

- **Limit examples of relevant experience to the past two to three years.**
- **Do not overwhelm the reader with facts about your organization.** This information can be conveyed easily by attaching a brochure or other prepared statement.

4.8 Appendices

Appendices contain information peripheral to your proposal, such as reprints of articles, definitions of terms, subcontract data, consortia agreements, tabular data, certifications, lists of board members and officers with titles, recent annual reports, organizational fiscal reports, organizational charts, resumes, past success stories, significant case histories, agency publication, publicity, and letters of support and commitment. Some funders will not circulate copies of appendices when transmitting proposals to reviewers. Nevertheless, the use of appendices is recommended, especially when page limits are imposed.

Your Appendices section should:

- Provide strong letters of support and commitment.
- Include assurances of cooperation in instances of inter-agency support.
- Include resumes for all key project personnel and consultants.

4.9 Executive Summary

The executive summary is usually the last substantial piece of a proposal to be written. However, it is the first and most important page your prospective funder will see. It should provide the reader with a snapshot of what is to follow by summarizing all the key information. It should be considered a "sales" document designed to convince the reader that this project should be considered for support. Be certain to include:

Problem: A brief statement of the problem or need.

Solution: A short description of the project, including what will take place and what outcomes are expected.

Funding requirements: An explanation of the amount of grant money required for the project.

Sustainability expectations: Your plans for funding the project in the future.

Organization and its expertise: A brief statement of the name, history, purpose, and activities of your agency, emphasizing its capacity to carry out this proposal.

How-to Tips

- **Use headings and subheadings to highlight proposal sections.**
- **Highlight innovative aspects of your project.**
- **Use at least one technique to make an emotional connection with the readers.** Ideas are presented in the section Striking an emotional chord: persuading the funder. <link>
- **Link the project to the funder's priorities.**

4.10 Title Page

A title page typically includes:

- Project title that clearly indicates the focus of the proposal
- Name of applicant
- Name of agency submitted to
- Typed name
- Contact information
- Title of authorized personnel approving submission
- Signature of authorized personnel
- Date of approval
- Date of submission

If your proposal is lengthy, keep in mind that some funders like to see a Table of Contents page following the Title Page.

How-to Tips

- **Check the funder's title page specifications.**
- **Include the names of collaborating agencies.**
- **Do not waste time and money using fancy report covers and expensive binding.** Your cover should look simple, professional, neat.
- **Make certain your title paints a quick picture of the project.**
- **Make sure the most important words in the title come first.**
- **Limit the title to one sentence.**

4.11 Cover Letter

Your cover letter is usually written on organization letterhead and contains an even briefer version of what appears in the executive summary. In addition, it should:

- Contain a comment showing your excitement for the project.
- Identify the significant benefits to be gained by the project.
- Include a few sentences demonstrating fit with the funder's goals and interests.

The letter should, according to proper protocol, be signed by your board chairman. The executive director should only sign the letter as an "agent" of the board, with a declaration as such under the director's signature, e.g. "Jean Jones, Executive Director, for the Board."

Step 5
Producing and Packaging Your Proposal

Step 4 was about providing the right information to create a successful case for funding. Step 5 is about delivery: writing and displaying the information in a way that can be quickly absorbed. Ideally, your reader will not have to work too hard to understand your main points. This can be done with good technical writing skills, use of good visual presentation principles, and production of an attractive, complete final copy. Each of these elements is discussed below.

5.1 Technical writing skills

Good writing means being consistent, clear, concise, logical, relevant and grammatically correct. As proposals are often pulled together by a number of different people, accomplishing these things can be challenging; thus, good technical writing ideally also involves a skilled editor! If you used a style guide, as discussed in Step 3, you will be well on your way to achieving these things. If you did not, the following advice will improve your proposal.

Consistency: Consistency applies to ideas, word use and format.

Ideas: It is important that you do not contradict yourself within your proposal.

Word use: Always use terms in the same way, especially words that may have unique meaning in the context of your field or this project. For example, if you are writing about outcome objectives, avoid referring to them as outcomes, goals, or intentions in other sections. Although variety can be nice, when used improperly, it can also be confusing.

When attempting to establish consistency with word use, also consider consider spelling (e.g. American or Canadian), preferred word choice (e.g. “second hand smoke”, or “second-hand smoke”), words to avoid (e.g. factor, operationalize) and the verb tense used throughout the document.

Format: Consistent format refers to overall visual layout, discussed in the next section, and also to the actual text. For example, determine how and when you want to apply italics, bold, underlines, quotation marks and capital letters, as well as headings, subheadings, references and footnotes.

Clarity and concision: Being clear and concise are closely related. A proposal with sentences that are clear and to the point is much easier and more appealing to read.

How-to Tips

- **Ask for help** from someone who has solid writing skills.
- **Use the active voice** instead of the passive voice.
  e.g. "The dog bit the man" (active) instead of "The man was bitten by the dog." (passive)
- **Put the action in the verb.**
  e.g. "We need to evaluate the procedures" instead of "The procedures need to be evaluated."
- **Reduce wordy phrases.**
  e.g. "because" instead of "in light of the fact that"
- **Reduce wordy verbs.**
  e.g. "indicate" instead of "are indications of"
- **Reduce prepositional phrases.**
  e.g. "the manager's opinion" instead of "the opinion of the manager".
- **Reduce expletive constructions.**
  e.g. "The tulips will inevitably flower" instead of "It is inevitable that the tulips will flower."
- **Avoid using vague nouns** such as factor, area, aspect, situation etc.
- **Avoid unnecessarily inflated words.**
  e.g. "after" instead of "subsequent to"
- **Avoid consecutive nouns.**
  e.g. "OHCC has a program to improve relations among employees" instead of "OHCC has a workplace employee relations improvement program."
- **Avoid unnecessary technical jargon.**
- **Limit excessive detail.**
- **Avoid use of acronyms.** If they must be used, clearly define them.
- **Avoid overuse of transitional words or phrases** (e.g. *moreover, in addition, on the other hand,* etc.).
- **Have a person who is not involved in the project review your proposal.**

Logic: When you are close to a subject, it is easy to make leaps in logic when writing about it, as you may have come to think of many concepts as 'common sense'. Unfortunately, there is no such thing as common sense! Each main point should flow in a logical sequence in which one point builds on the one that came previously. There should be no surprising jumps in subject.

How-to Tip

- **Start your proposal by making a list of the main points that you want to make.**

Relevance: The most readable proposals contain a minimum of irrelevant (or only loosely relevant) information. Stay on topic and make sure all supporting material is linked to your proposal. Avoid digressing into a side subject that will distract readers from your main objectives.

Grammatical correctness: There are too many grammatical principles to discuss in this course – that is why we recommend involving a skilled editor! However, two basic things to make sure of are complete sentences and the proper use of pronouns.

Complete sentences: Make sure each subject has a verb. If the sentence starts with *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so,* or *which*, it isn't a complete sentence. If it starts with *because*, it probably isn't a complete sentence. Be on the lookout for misplaced or absent commas that result in run-on sentences.

Use of pronouns: Draw a small square around each pronoun. Draw an arrow to the pronoun's referent. Check for clarity (does the reader know who *they* are? what do you mean by *it*?) and singular/plural consistency (*someone* did *his* or *her* homework, not *their* homework).

How-to Tip

- **Read your proposal out loud.** This can help identify grammatical problems such as run-on sentences.

Thorough editing: Successful grant seekers estimate they spend 25 percent of their time writing the first draft of their proposal and 75 percent of their time editing it.

How-to Tips

- **Edit for only one feature at a time.** Editing is a multistage process: Multiple editing loops through the proposal ensure that all elements are presented in the best possible way.
- **Find an editor, friend or colleague to review your proposal.** If you can't find someone to review your proposal, try putting it aside for a day and then coming back to it with a fresh set of eyes.
- **Avoid putting all of your faith in your word processor's automatic spellchecker.** Many errors can result because the computer cannot understand the context.
- **Leave enough time for at least one thorough edit prior to the final formatting of the document.** Professional editors usually estimate about 15 minutes per page.

Additional resources

The Writing Center at the University of Madison-Wisconsin
This web site provides information and instructional materials to help people write more clearly and concisely.
(http://www.emcf.org/pdf/badwordsforgood.pdf)

5.2 Visual presentation

The look of your proposal is important. In the eyes of a funder, the appearance of the proposal may be a reflection of the quality of the program and materials you would produce. When formatting the final document, consider your font, headings, page numbering, list format, and white space.

Font use. It is important to select a font style and size that make your proposal easy to read.

How-to Tip

- **Tighten sentences and edit wordy phrases**, rather than reducing type size to make all your ideas fit.
- **Avoid font sizes smaller than 12-point.**
- **Use bold type to emphasize key words and ideas**, but avoid overuse. Bold type is easier to read than underlining, italics, or all capital letters as a means of creating emphasis.
- **Do not use too many typefaces and fonts** or the text will become lost in the stylization.

Headings Headings and subheadings should reveal the main ideas and the organization of your proposal to the reader.

How-to Tip

- **Consider using serif typefaces for the text of your proposal and sans serif typefaces for titles and headings** if a type style is not specified in the application guidelines. Serif type styles such as Times Roman and Courier have small strokes that finish off the main stroke of a letter and make it easier to read. Sans serif type styles such as Universal and Arial, which do not have the small finishing strokes, are ideal for titles and headings because they stand off from the body of the text.

Page numbering. It is easy to forget to add page numbers to your proposal. Normally, that is one of the last things done before submitting the proposal, and many people forget, but page numbers are very important. They provide reference points that allow a reviewer to make notes, and they facilitate group discussion about a proposal. Absence of page numbers can be very frustrating to a reader.

How-to Tips

- **Place page numbers in the top right or bottom center of the pages of your proposal.** Do not number the first page.
- **Ensure your tables of content match the proposal page numbers.**

List format. Lists help to get the message to the reader with a sense of immediacy without being wordy. Because lists are easy for readers to skim, they convey chunks of information quickly.

How-to Tips

- **Use a numbered list** when items need to be examined in a specific sequence.
- **Use a bulleted list** when items are all equally important.

White space. Ample white space makes your proposal appear inviting and user-friendly. White space can indicate that one section is ending and another is beginning, or that an idea is so central to the proposal that it needs its own space. Judicious use of white space breaks your proposal into smaller, manageable chunks of information. Even a simple use of white space between paragraphs helps the mind to see the information in that paragraph as a unit. Lists are one good use of white space.

5.3 Printing and packaging

Pulling together your final proposal into a nicely presented package is the last step before submitting your proposal.

Your proposal should look clean and professional. However, do not waste time or money on fancy paper, report covers, or expensive binding. A professional look and feel can be achieved with a small budget.

How-to Tips

- **Use a neutral tone of paper**
- **Use a low bond weight of paper** (20lbs should be fine)
- **Use coil binding** should you decide binding is required. It is the least expensive option.
- **Place your proposal and accompanying documents in a folder or binder** to keep it all together.

Step 6
Submitting and Following-up

After packaging and printing your proposal, closely follow the submission requirements outlined in the funder's guidelines. It is important to follow these directions precisely and get your proposal in ***on time.***

Submitting your proposal is not the end of your involvement in the grant-making process. Grant review procedures vary widely, and the decision-making process can take anywhere from a few weeks to six months or more. Invariably, this is a difficult time for the grant-seeker, in which you need to be patient but persistent. Some grant-makers outline their review procedures in annual reports or application guidelines. If you are unclear about the process, don't hesitate to ask.

6.1 Requests for more information

During the review process, the funder may ask for additional information either directly from you or from outside consultants or professional references. Reply to any requests in a timely manner.

6.2 Dealing with a win

If your hard work results in funding, take a few moments to acknowledge the funder's support with a letter of thanks. You also need to find out whether the funder has specific forms, procedures, and deadlines for reporting the progress of your project.

How-to Tip

- **Clarify your responsibilities as a grantee at the outset,** particularly with respect to financial reporting. It will prevent misunderstandings and more serious problems later.

6.3 Dealing with a loss

Receiving word of rejection isn't necessarily the end of the process. If you're unsure why your proposal was rejected, ask. Requesting a call or meeting to go over your proposal is always a good idea.

Consider the following questions:

- Did the funder need additional information?
- Would they be interested in considering the proposal at a future date?
- What did your organization do well?
- What could your organization do better?

How-to Tip

- **Always be cultivating prospective funders.** Put them on your mailing list so that they can become further acquainted with your organization. Remember, there's always next year.

Conclusion

As we have shown here, with equal parts good program planning, thorough funder research, detailed project management and good writing skills you too can write successful proposals. By following the proven process and tips described here, you are likely to receive funding. Good luck!