

Grant Proposals

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In writing a grant proposal, your main goal is to clearly convey the objectives and needs of your research project in order to secure funds to complete your study. The best way to ensure your message is being communicated effectively is to follow the exact directions of the grantmaker (the organization offering the funds). To complete a project, you will need careful attention to detail to ensure accuracy of results, so following directions in your proposal will demonstrate that you can competently produce sound research.

There are a few sections that most grantmakers look for, although many have overlapping purposes. Stick to your grantmaker's instructions only including sections that are requirements, and do not include extra information unless the instructions give you permission to include supplementary sections.

1. **Cover Letter:** A cover letter will often not be necessary because the information will be covered elsewhere in the proposal, but if your grantmaker calls for this component, you want to make sure you include a concise, balanced view of your project and your credentials to conduct it. You want to explain how your goals in conducting this research can be used to further the grantmaker's mission.
2. **Title Page:** A title page will begin with a strong title that briefly describes the project. It will continue with the names of the principle investigator(s) who are the people conducting the research. Next will be the name and address of the grantmaker, the project dates, and the amount of funding you are requesting. Finally, you will include the signatures of those who must sign off on the research (i.e., university personnel and/or project advisors).
3. **Abstract:** The abstract is a summary of the project that will give the grantmaker a quick idea of what you aim to study. You should write this section in the future tense, and include the general purpose, specific goals, experiment design, methods, and significance or rationale of the project in what it will contribute to the scholarly community.
4. **Introduction:** An introduction is similar to an abstract, but it may go into more detail to explicitly cover the general purpose and significance of the project. Ask yourself these questions and incorporate your responses in the introduction section: *What makes your project different from previously conducted research? Are there any methodologies that significantly differ from other research and cover areas not previously explored by traditional methods? How do your goals and objectives align with your anticipated findings?*
5. **Executive Summary:** If a grantmaker asks for an executive summary, it will typically come at the beginning of the report, and it will be a one-page statement of the problem you will be researching and the purpose of communicating the message to the scholarly community. It will include a summary of your results, concluding thoughts, and recommendations for future research. Some grant makers will call for an abstract in place of an executive summary.
6. **Literature Review:** A literature review compiles previously published research on a topic. It identifies common threads found throughout a variety of relevant sources already circulated in the scholarly community. To create a literature review, you can 1) include a summary and synthesis of the current available information, 2) cover a history of the topic, 3) reorganize the information into subsections, or 4) display a new outlook on old interpretations. Your literature review demonstrates that you understand the current state of the field. Your later sections will show how your project will contribute to scholarly research.
7. **Problem Statement/Description of Need:** A problem statement or description of need situates the proposal in a concise 1-2 sentence summary presenting the issue being studied. It can be a thesis statement or a short explanation of how your findings could impact the reader. Before writing this section, make sure you consider what the reader already knows and what you will need to explain so they will see the value of your research.

8. **Project Narrative:** The project narrative will be the largest section of your proposal. You can break it up into sections to show the different aspects of the project. The problem statement/description of need will be included in this section. This section will go into detail about the research objectives, hypotheses, methods, procedures, outcomes, discussion of findings, and aims to disseminate those findings. Make sure you predict and answer all questions your reader may have. Don't only explain what will occur in your study but provide a rationale for why this decision was made.
9. **Personnel/Qualifications:** Describe who will be conducting each part of the research. Provide detailed descriptions of how each person's skill set is valuable to the project. Many grantmakers will also ask for a resume or CV for each staff member. Be sure you are only utilizing personnel whose contributions are imperative. This will ensure the grantmaker that you will be using their funds wisely.
10. **Budget:** The budget describes the costs you will incur throughout the project. Many budgets are displayed graphically through charts, tables, and spreadsheets. You may include a budget justification explaining the need for each expense. If your budget is outside of the available funding limit for this particular grant, explain that you are seeking additional funding from other sources to complete the rest of the research. Check whether your university requires you to include overhead (indirect costs such as IT support, accounting, legal expenses, etc.) in your budget, and check whether the grantmakers will cover overhead.
11. **Timeframe:** Determine how long it will take to complete your experiment and analysis, and describe the timeframe for each step. You might display this timeframe as a narrative, or it may be useful to create a table or other visual display to showcase your timeline.
12. **Conclusion:** A conclusion wraps up your proposal with a summary of everything discussed. You will want to restate your topic, its importance to the field, and your thesis/problem statement. Conclude with an overview of what the research aims to find.
13. **Appendices:** Appendices include supplementary information that may be helpful but not vital to the reader's understanding of your project. These come at the end of the proposal and are display information that would distract from the flow of the proposal if they were included in the body of the text. Many appendices include visual representations of data, or they include preliminary sketches of designs, survey questions, etc.

Final Tips:

- Follow the instructions. Stick to the word count. Don't assume that more information is better. It may distract your reader and could demonstrate that you are disorganized and can't extract the most relevant information, which will hinder your analysis of the project.
- Be clear, concise, cohesive, and careful. You want the reader to get a brief but straightforward picture of your project. Make sure your proposal shows your commitment to detail and accuracy and has a logical flow.
- Give yourself enough time to thoroughly complete your proposal. Rushing through a proposal as the deadline rapidly approaches will be evident to the grantmakers, and you want to give a professional first impression.
- Tailor the grant to the organization's mission statement or their reason for funding projects. If your vision is aligned with their own, they are more likely to finance your project.
- Heavily revise your grant proposal. Get feedback from experienced proposal writers and other readers who can offer insight into ways to better communicate your goals and plans.
- Ask yourself and your readers to answer these questions when reviewing the proposal: *Have you presented a convincing argument and clearly expressed your hypotheses? Is your project too ambitious? Have you explained what deliverables will prove the success of your project?*

Works Consulted:

UNC-Chapel Hill Writing Center (writingcenter.unc.edu); Purdue University Online Writing Lab (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl); Conference on College Composition and Communication Research Initiative Guidelines (2016)