

Grant Proposals



Grants allow students and professionals to receive funding for projects. While the specifics of each grant proposal vary widely according to audience and discipline, this handout aims to provide general guidelines for creating a successful proposal.

Getting Started

- Find a current and relevant research problem that you are passionate about.
- Find the right potential sponsor. On-campus, ORCA is a great resource for undergraduates interested in pursuing grant-funded research.
- Carefully read and follow the application guidelines specific to each grant.
- Start early. Plan, consult with mentors and funding agencies, and revise your proposal.

Organizing Sections

Grant proposal requirements and formats can vary across fields, but key elements usually include the following:

Title Page: The funding agency will usually stipulate a specific format for the title page, so follow these requirements closely. Make sure your title is appropriate, clear, and concise.

Executive Summary: It is often best to write this section last. In the course of writing the rest of your proposal, identify the most essential aspects of your project. Your executive summary (sometimes referred to as the project abstract) should be a concise overview of these aspects, including the elements of a proposal listed below. You may even reuse original language from your proposal as you write this section. Remember, this brief section will give funders a first impression of your project, so make sure it is clear, succinct, and complete.

Introduction or Need Statement: This section gives an overview of the direction of your future research and defines the problem and purpose of the research. It needs to be concise and to the point while providing context. Do not overcomplicate this section since you have the rest of your proposal to add further detail about the project.

Project Narrative: This section will outline your plans for completing the project. This may include schedules, calendars, and time frames, as well as a marketing or management plan that describes daily operations within the project.

Personnel: In funding your proposal, grant donors are investing not just in the project, but in those carrying out the work. Establish trust and credibility by identifying who your team members are, including

the skills, education, and experience you and your team members have that will enable the project to be successful.

Literature Review or Guiding Research: In this section, you want to give evidence (through scholarly, peer-reviewed articles) that there is currently a place for your proposed research within the field of study. Format each paragraph, critiquing a particular article by highlighting the article's main points and by including any limitations or gaps you see in the research. If you are writing a literature review, you will also describe how each article interacts with the others you select. Include logical transitions between each paragraph, and spend the most time emphasizing the research most relevant to your proposal.

Budget: Let the grant provider know how you intend to use the money they are giving you. A budget typically consists of a spreadsheet that breaks down the expected costs of your project and a one- to two-page explanation of your cost allotments. Keep your proposed budget realistic (within the funder's proposed allotment).

Time Frame: Establish a clear time line for your project. Explain how long each step of your project will take, and set a projected completion date.

Writing Tips

- Know your audience. What are the goals of your chosen funding agency? How does your proposal help them achieve those goals?
- Highlight the relevance and potential impact of your proposal, but be realistic. All of your aims should be obtainable and within your skill level.
- Use clear, concise language. Do not overuse technical jargon or fail to clearly explain the problem and solution.
- Use clear titles and subtitles, brief paragraphs, reasonable formatting and page margins, and a standard font to make the proposal easier to read.
- Do not leave sponsors guessing. Anticipate potential questions and provide answers. It may be helpful to have other readers give you their input and pose any questions they have after reading your proposal.
- Present your research confidently and convincingly, but avoid an attitude of entitlement or desperation.
- Again, follow application guidelines. Even if the content of your proposal is without fault, you run the risk of being rejected immediately if you fail to follow the funding agency's specific requirement.
- Seek feedback. Discuss and review your proposal with peers, friends, and (perhaps most importantly) mentors.