



CHAPTER TWO

Other Important Features



In Chapter 1, we dealt with the core of a grant proposal, the conceptual base, and how to develop a logical case that holds the whole document together. We built a framework that can be used in virtually any grant-seeking situation.

In this chapter, we will look at features we can add to that framework to enhance the proposal, make it even clearer, easier to read and, as a result, stronger. These sections—the abstract, introduction, appendices, table of contents, and dissemination and continuation plans—grow out of the conceptual base we have built for our proposal and support it.

ABSTRACT (OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

The abstract is usually at most a one-page (or less) summary of the core concepts presented in the proposal. It appears before the narrative and gives the reader a clear idea of what is coming. An abstract must be clear, concise, and compelling. The abstract identifies the applicant organization and gives a sense of its ability to implement the project.

The abstract should explain the needs the project will address and the objectives it will work to meet. (Need and objectives statements can be copied directly from the body of the proposal.) The abstract should also offer a summary of the project's proposed activities. Finally, it should state the cost of the project, including the amount requested from the funder, and briefly explain how funds will be used. Here is the abstract from an actual proposal developed by the Boston Public Schools and funded by the U.S. Education Department's Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program.

Example:

Beyond Curriculum: Intensive Intervention Program

According to the final report of the National Commission on Drug-Free Schools, local public schools are responsible for keeping students drug free. Comprehensive drug prevention

programs should, the report states, provide a prevention curriculum supported by policies, programs, and services that consider needs for prevention both in and out of school.¹

The Boston Public Schools accepted this responsibility several years ago. The public schools in Boston have a comprehensive drug and alcohol prevention program with the elements recommended by the U.S. Department of Education: means of assessment and monitoring; clear, specific rules against use and strong corrective actions; consistent enforcement; a K–12 curriculum that teaches that drugs are wrong and harmful; a program that involves uniformed police in classrooms (DARE and SPECDA), that trains teachers to identify and refer students for treatment, and a network of 85 community health and social agencies linked to our 116 schools for treatment and that makes extensive use of peer mentoring and tutoring related to this critical issue.²

Nevertheless, there is a significant need for additional assistance in order to combat drug and alcohol abuse. The school system is large and the poverty rates are high.³ Many students are drawn in by the lure of big money in the drug trade; others are pulled in by chemically dependent family members or peers or pushed in by hopelessness, ignorance or apparent lack of better alternatives. Rising levels of crime and violence in the city spill over into the schools. This proposal seeks \$1.1 million dollars to underwrite two parts of our comprehensive program: an expansion of an intensive intervention for most at-risk middle schoolers and startup for an innovative birth to 18 program that provides for intensive services for the most at risk.

¹Part III RESPONSIBILITIES, of the Final Report of the National Commission on Drug Free Schools.

²See Appendix for Code of Discipline; Curriculum Outline; Procedures relating to the control of drugs and alcohol use/abuse in and around schools.

³Boston, Massachusetts, with a population of about 459,500 overall and 387,700 excluding college students, is the inner city for a metropolitan area of 2.5 million. Fewer than 20% of Boston's households include children under 18 years of age, and almost one-third of those households send their children to parochial or private schools or out of the inner city to suburban public schools. The result of these patterns is that the public schools serve a predominantly low income, predominantly minority group of students and families. The single largest group of students is African American (48%); Hispanic students, at 21% of the system, will soon outnumber white students (22%). The rest of the students are Asian (9%) and Native American (1%). As of December, 1990, a total of 116 public schools served 56,414 students. The Boston Public Schools have all the demographics and most of the problems characteristic of large, inner city school districts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The proposal should include a brief (no more than one page) table of contents, following the abstract, which outlines its sections and cites page numbers for each.

Remember to number each page of the proposal, starting with the introduction and running sequentially through the appendices, unless you are given other instructions regarding page numbers in the RFP. (In that case, be sure to follow those instructions!) It is impossible for multiple reviewers to discuss a proposal without having page numbers to refer to. Also, if the proposal

is unbound and pages fall out, it may be impossible to put the document back together in the proper order.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction should provide background information the reader needs to understand the proposal and lead directly into the need statement, taking the reader from the general to the specific.

The introduction serves to acquaint the reader with the applicant. Some proposal writers make the assumption that readers “know” the circumstances of an inner city agency in New York City, or of a school in a rural area in North Dakota, and do not provide details. Make no assumptions about the readers, and use the introduction to “paint a picture” for them, including history and current status.

The introduction should outline the applicant’s goals, service area, and major accomplishments. This information should be supported by data and references, such as endorsements of the organization and awards and citations that verify its accomplishments. This is the point at which a rapport must be established with the reader, putting him or her in a sympathetic frame of mind before presenting the proposal.

To be most effective, the introduction should be brief so it doesn’t wear the reader out too early; to the point so it doesn’t lose the reader in miscellaneous, unnecessary facts; and interesting so it captures the reader’s imagination.

Here is part of the introduction to an actual proposal developed by the Cleveland Mississippi School District for submission to several funders. It attempts to give the reader an understanding of the culture and economic status of the area in which the project will be conducted.

Example:

Bolivar County (population 45,965) lies at the geographic center of the Mississippi Delta, approximately 110 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee. Bolivar County is a microcosm of the entire Delta. We are a people who, by virtue of place, are surrounded by thousands of square miles of some of the country’s richest natural resources and physical assets. We have used this sense of place to develop a cultural and historical heritage that is both rich and unique. And yet, we are the people who by statistics are the poorest in the United States. Ours is a region where jobs are scarce and job training is almost unknown; where infant mortality rates rival those of the Third World; where dropping out of school and teenage pregnancy are commonplace; where illiteracy reigns as a supreme piece of irony: the Delta has produced some of the best writers and the worst readers in America. However, it is a region whose people prefer hope to despair. Given the right tools and knowledge, it can become a full partner in the American Dream and can help the nation as a whole strike a new balance of competitiveness in a global economy. Being in the vanguard of change need not be a distinction limited to the freedom-hungry citizens of Eastern Europe or the aggressive business people of Asia. The people in the Delta belong in that vanguard. This is a land where the right actions can spell a new day.

Bolivar County has historically been regarded as an agricultural area. As in any typical Delta county, the principal crop was cotton for many years. Soybeans and rice have now become major crops, with additional diversification into catfish farming. Manufacturing plants employ over 3,300 people in the county. Principal products include:

- *ceramic wall tile*
- *stapled aluminum automotive trim*
- *nails and staples*
- *intravenous solutions*
- *sterile disposable hospital devices*
- *metal kitchen and sink cabinets*
- *marine construction*
- *aluminum die castings*

Recently, Brandywine Corporation moved into the area to process Chicken Nuggets. Think of us the next time you go to McDonalds!!

APPENDIX

If the RFP allows an appendix, keep it brief and remember that it should support the rationale and logic of the entire proposal. Keep in mind that readers have limited time to review and score proposals and do not have time to read every item that is included in the appendix.

Read every piece of paper to be included in the appendix. If it doesn't support your proposal's statements, do not include it! The appendix should also contain any additional documents or information requested in the RFP. Appendices could include the following:

Job Descriptions

In the appendix, you can list the specific duties and responsibilities of each position involved in the project.

Resumes

The proposal narrative should highlight the qualifications and experience of key personnel, but the appendix should offer their full resumes. Update and rewrite all resumes so they are appropriate for the project. In other words, highlight all education and experience relevant to the project and eliminate any information that is not. Retype the resumes so they all have the same format and match the style of the rest of the proposal. Try to keep resumes to one page in length.

Letters of Commitment

Any letters included with the proposal should commit collaborators to some specific action in support of the project. Include only letters from those who will provide funds, staff, equipment, or expertise to help achieve project objectives.

For the most part, letters of support—in which officials, experts, or others pay only lip service to the project—are not helpful. But sometimes it is necessary to include such letters for political reasons. Letters of support might not impress a funder, but having documentation from individuals or organizations that are important to reaching consensus about the problem and the proposed solution can help ease the process when you implement the project.

In some situations, letters of support might be included as a courtesy. For instance, requesting letters from congressional representatives for federal applications keeps them up to date on what's going on in their districts.

Newspaper Articles

An appendix of newspaper articles that support the proposal's case can be very valuable. Articles can support the need for the program, back up the project's proposed methods and activities, and strengthen the applicant's credibility. But read each article carefully to be sure it is accurate and supports the proposal. Try to steer clear of general articles that are not specific to the proposed project. Remember: readers have limited time to score proposals and even less time to read articles!

Board of Directors or Advisory Committee Information

If the RFP does not ask for detailed information in the narrative, list the board or committee members and their affiliations in an appendix. Provide minutes of meetings and formal resolutions and reports that support the proposal, if requested.

If not asked for in specific sections of the narrative, an appendix can include research results relevant to the project; an annotated bibliography that surveys the relevant research in the field; a complete, detailed evaluation design, including instruments; copies of contracts and/or agreements described in the narrative and budget; and any other documents specifically required in the RFP.

DISSEMINATION PLAN

Occasionally, funders require grantees to develop plans for disseminating project results so the project can be replicated in other locations. There are many ways to disseminate the results of a project, including: (1) creating a website, (2) creating a DVD, (3) developing and distributing

brochures, (4) publishing articles in professional publications, (5) presenting workshops at conferences, and (6) sending information via email and/or U.S. mail to interested people. Whichever dissemination method is used, make sure all the details are presented in your proposal. Check the budget section of the RFP to see what, if any, dissemination costs are allowable.

SUSTAINABILITY

Often, funders want to know how a grantee will continue a project after grant funding runs out. Funders are not interested in best intentions and dreams for the future; they want a specific, credible plan that shows where funding and resources will come from after they are out of the picture.

The sustainability plan can cite other grants that will be considered if they are identifiable and can fund your type of project. However, do not rely solely on grants as a planned source of ongoing support! Because there are no guarantees that future grants will be secured, using only grants to continue a project weakens the sustainability plan. In addition to grants, explain the fundraising process that will be used in the future.

Consider adding staff to the agency budget at the end of the grant award period, making grant-funded training an ongoing part of staff development, or turning services provided during the grant period into a sliding scale or fee-for-service arrangement.

Example:

It will require \$75,000 a year to maintain the project after the three years of grant funding. The agency will have an annual banquet to raise \$25,000 and will apply for an additional \$25,000 to the Hawkins Community Fund, a local community foundation that supports successful projects after they have been pilot-tested. The remaining \$25,000 will come from local and national foundation grants. The agency employs a talented grantseeker who has an outstanding record in securing funds. In the final year of the original grant, the agency will research foundation sources and prepare grant proposals for three new funders. The Anytown Chamber of Commerce has agreed to provide clerical support after the grant funding ends. The Speedy Printing Company will print materials free of charge.

Another way to continue the project is to use it to replace other, less efficient activities currently conducted by the organization. Whatever method you choose, be specific and show your commitment to it. Funding sources are justifiably skeptical about sustainability plans because too many applicants throw them together just to get the grant and never intend to carry them out. Remember, the funder doesn't want to provide support forever.

