



# Preparing to Write a Winning Proposal

Writing strong grant applications takes planning and hard work. Start planning and contacting collaborators early, especially if you need input from school staff who may be hard to reach in the summer months. And remember the three keys to success:

1. Read the proposal instructions!
2. Read the proposal instructions!
3. Read the proposal instructions!

## **Getting Started**

- Review the proposal and create an outline of your plan.
- Fill in the areas you can.
- Seek additional information as needed. Use: Other staff and colleagues; Internet Research; and Other program research; etc.

## **Be Responsive**

- Understand the vision of the funding agency.
- Understand the vision of your agency.
- Understand the needs of the community you serve and be able to back that up with data or other credible evidence.

## **Good Advice**

- Craft your response so that a win-win collaboration is clear.
- Do as much thinking and planning as possible before the bidders conference so you can ASK QUESTIONS!!!!
- Have realistic expectations.
- Develop a reasonable Scope of Work.
- Do NOT promise more than you can deliver.

## **Planning**

- Create a timeline.
- Establish and confirm benchmarks. Who has to look at this document? Have they got it scheduled?
- Identify section author(s).

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*Adapted From: The ABCs of Writing Winning Proposals, Shanna Holland, MSW, MPH, California Kids' Plates Program, 2009*



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- Identify who *must* review.
- Identify who you *would like* to have review.
- Get what you need, early in the game.
- Get approvals early. If this has to be “run up the flagpole”, don’t wait until the last minute.
- Get letters of commitment early. If what you are proposing commits other groups or individuals in some way, get a letter of commitment early. Be sure each one is specific about what it is committing to. Don’t use a form letter. Most reviewers do not find them credible.
- Recruit content readers.
- Recruit your most skilled grammar and punctuation expert.
- Recruit budget and budget justification reviewers.
- Confirm and follow-up on assignments and timelines.

## **Uh...who’s on 1st...?**

- It is not that unusual for one person or group to write a proposal and another person or group to implement it.
- When putting together a proposal, make sure that discussion between the writer/s and the implementer/s happens early.
- Maintain dialog throughout.

## **Rambling Not Welcome Here**

- Get to the point! It’s okay to ramble as you develop your thoughts and create your working proposal outline and content pieces. Consider it “controlled brainstorming.” But...when sitting down to write the actual content for the proposal, be brief but descriptive. If you can’t do that, expect to rewrite the proposal a few times so it appears clean, neat and most importantly.... FOCUSED!

## **Make It Easy to Read**

- No matter how many people contribute to the proposal, be sure it is edited for flow and clarity by one person and one person only.
- The proposal needs to sound as if it is coming from “one voice”.

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- Acronyms. Always... always... always define acronyms. Then use them sparingly. Never assume the reader knows what you are talking about. Even if it seems like it should be common sense.

## **Do's and Don'ts**

- Do...Be direct.
- Do...Promote your cause.
- Do...Be honest. Experienced reviewers can see right through the “BS” ... AND it chips away at your overall credibility.... Just don't do it.
- Don't...take credit for something you didn't do.
- Do...Shine! It's okay to proudly display your accomplishments and strengths. Just remember that resting of past laurels alone won't cut it.
- Do...Use anecdotes (sparingly) to illustrate needs or prior successes. Just don't use them in place of hard data or other objective information.
- Do...remember your application reviewers may have little knowledge about this type of work. Make it clear and concise.
- Do... use photos to illustrate the problems, if applicable.
- Don't...Use a form letter when obtaining Letters of Commitment. Most reviewers find them intolerable and nearly worthless. It makes the proposal submitters seem “lazy”.

## **For more tips, visit:**

- Hints for Grant Applications, <http://www.cipp.org/pubs/fundhints.htm>
- Barb's Tips, <http://www.kidsplates.org/materials.asp#grantee>

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Prepared by California SRTS Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC)  
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