

Writing Effectively



General Tips for Writing a Strong Proposal



Style and Voice

When writing a grant proposal, always try to speak in an active - rather than a passive – voice.

Which example demonstrates an active voice?:

“Our organization provides a better life for runaway children”.

“Runaway children associated with our organization can experience a better life”.

Style and Voice

Active Voice:

“Our organization provides a better life for runaway children”.

Passive Voice:

“Runaway children associated with our organization can experience a better life”.

Style and Voice

- Keep your message positive
- Don't get wrapped up explaining all the challenges your organization faces
- Focus more on describing the good your organization does
- Describe the human element of your project

Style and Voice

When writing your proposal keep in mind that:

- Foundation executives want to know that people will benefit and your work will strengthen their community

Style and Voice

Try to avoid industry terms or other kinds of jargon whenever possible.

- Even if a foundation reviewer is already an expert in the field, it's unlikely that other members on the board have the same level of experience or expertise

Style and Voice

It's important to be enthusiastic about your organization and its goals, but you should try to guard against overselling your message.

- Foundation boards want to know that your feet are planted firmly on the ground
- They are considering an investment to your organization and are constantly scrutinizing your professional credibility

Style and Voice

Don't leave the reader to assume anything.

- A strong proposal communicates your purpose to everyone and should include any and all information that is relevant to your cause

First Draft

Getting past that first draft is often the most difficult and challenging aspect of writing a proposal.

- Try to put together a complete first draft before you begin editing
- Don't worry too much about sentence structure, spelling or grammar at the outset
- Clean it up in later drafts

First Draft

- In this early stage, it's more important that the structure of your proposal is sound and all your key messages are included
- When writing your first draft get to the point as early as possible

First Draft

- It is difficult for foundation directors to give a thorough read of all the proposals that land on their desk
- They want to determine your needs as early as possible
- Develop a strong Executive Summary that contains all your key points and can stand alone

Statistics and Examples

Whenever possible, try using concrete examples to illustrate your arguments.

- A strong technique for including real world examples is to reference a recently publicized issue or event
- Using a current public debate as an example will drive your message home to readers and provide a way for them to personally identify with your message

Statistics and Examples

- Facts and figures also help to support your argument, while developing awareness of the extent and severity of your cause
- Don't just provide a whole bunch of data – provide an interpretation and analyze those facts for the reader

Editing

Make sure to proofread your proposal thoroughly before sending it out!

- Every punctuation or grammatical error detracts from your overall message and damages your credibility
- If you don't have solid proof reading and editing skills, find someone that does!

Consistency

If you want to build a more coherent and cohesive proposal, let one person take charge of the entire project, rather than writing it by committee.

- This way you will achieve a consistent style and tone

Length

Although the length of a proposal can vary significantly, most foundation boards prefer to see short, succinct proposals six to eight pages in length.

- The size of a proposal speaks volumes about your organization's clarity of thought and purpose

Objectives

Be certain you can achieve the project objectives you made in your proposal.

- If approved, your proposal becomes a legal agreement
- An honest approach is always best
- Be frank about your organization's strengths and weaknesses and make sure you can deliver on your promises

Writing Effectively

Writing a formal grant proposal is no easy task. It requires time and dedication. When you begin writing remember to:

- Keep your message positive
- Whenever possible have more than one person proofread the final version of your proposal before sending it out

Questions about Writing Effectively?

