Creating a General Grant Proposal Template

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By: Alyssa Hanada
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As grant writers, it would be quite inefficient if we started from scratch every time we developed a new proposal. Creating a general template for each program that you’ll be applying for saves both time and resources.

If you start with a specific funder’s application process in mind, you can shape your template with that proposal in mind. Alternatively, you can create a template with the common elements of many grant applications. Regardless of which you do, I like to start out with as much information as possible and edit it down when tailoring an application for a specific funder.

Elements to include in a general template

- **Executive Summary**: Some funders may want a page; others may just want a few sentences that sum up the program. It makes sense to write this last and then highlight the important points from each section of the proposal by including a brief description of the program, needs, goals/objectives, and evaluation.
- **Organizational Background**: The mission and history of your organization, recent accomplishments, organizational structure and brief summary of programs should be developed for easy replication.
- **Needs Statement**: Include a description of the community that is in need and the gap(s) in service that exists. Document the needs of the target population with local data and anecdotes.
- **Program Description**: Explain how this program will address the issues and problems described in the needs statement. Who will be impacted (both directly and indirectly)? How will the program operate and what are the significant dates and timeline? How is this program aligned with your mission? If this is a new program or enhancement, why is it necessary at this time? Who are the key staff and what are their qualifications? Are you collaborating with other agencies?
- **Goals, objectives and outcomes**: Explain what the program will broadly accomplish and the measurable activities that will take place to facilitate goal attainment. This can often best be illustrated succinctly in a table. See the example below.
## Table 1 – Goals, Objectives & Outcomes

**For the Early Childhood Education Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Goal:</strong></th>
<th>Prepare 50 low-income children for success in school and engage their parents in interactive family literacy that will strengthen learning beyond the classroom.</th>
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</table>
| **Objectives:** | Children  
  - will develop early literacy skills to prepare them for kindergarten through evidence-based curricula, imaginary play and 1:5 teacher student ratios.  
  - Parents will participate in interactive family literacy activities once per week in their child’s preschool class.  
  - Parents will receive monthly home visits to reinforce classroom learning with their children.  
  - Parents and children will participate in a weekly rotating book bag program at the library. |
| **Outcomes:** | Program will achieve 80%  
  - attendance among children in classroom.  
  - 90% of parents will report gains in their child’s progress in socio-emotional, physical and cognitive areas by the end of the year.  
  - 90% of children will meet state and federal benchmarks of improving four skilled points on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (which measures receptive vocabulary and screens verbal ability). |

- **Evaluation:** Explain how the success of the program will be measured. List the kinds of quantitative/qualitative data that will be tracked. Provide details about how the data will be collected and when. Describe how the evaluative results will be used to positively impact the future of the program.
- **Sustainability:** Always a fun one! Explain why the program expenses may be incurred only one time. If this is a new program, describe how your agency plans to continue operating the program after the requested grant expired. For example, describe how any part of the program might earn income, attract in-kind donations, or expand fundraising efforts by adding to your list of potential donors. If this is an ongoing program or it will become part of operating costs, explain what your fundraising strategy will be. Explain who else currently or might support the program in the future.
- **Budget:** Make sure the expenses listed in the budget match the activities described in the program description (e.g. if you mention an Early Childhood Education Coordinator in the proposal, make sure this position is itemized in the budget).
It’s important to note that after you have developed your template, it’s never a good idea to blast submit the same proposal to several funders without a strategy in mind. You will need to tailor each application packet to meet the requirements and criteria for each individual potential funder.

Thus, you will need to follow the instructions on page limits and list the sections in the order that the funder specifies (even if it seems completely illogical).

Additionally, you will want to take the time to emphasize those points that the potential funders are most interested in (if you want your proposal to stand out from the hundreds of others received by the funding organization). For example, if the funder is interested in young children ages 0-3 and your proposal includes children of all ages, you will want to highlight the specific and positive impacts the program will have on the younger crowd.

When you’re finished creating your program’s template, you will be ready to tweak, do some cut and paste magic, and save yourself a lot of time!