

Project Proposal Writing

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1. What is a Proposal?

The purpose of a proposal is to persuade the reader to do something, in most cases to a sponsor to grant or to provide some funds.

A proposal is a written document to a sponsor

The sponsor may be public or private

Public sponsors in the US are: the National Science Foundation (NSF), in Europe the EU Programs under Framework 6, and the National Research Councils in many countries (e.g. NRC Canada, DFG Germany, British Council, etc.)

1. What is a Proposal?

Private Sponsors are mainly Foundations:

In the US there are 43 000 Private Foundations, awarding 8B\$ annually. These are established by about 1/3 of the 2.5M US Corporations.

There is a US Federal Law, that 5% of the market value assets or interest income, whichever is higher must be turned over to non-profit organizations.

The conditions for a grant are of course up to the sponsor under the legal constraints

2. Types of Proposals:

The sponsor determines the type of the purpose of funding

- Fundamental research (returns expected in 25 years – outcome uncertain)
- Applied research (returns expected in 15 years – outcome predictable)
- Development (returns expected in 5 years – outcome expected)
- Practical execution of a task (returns expected on project completion)

Fundamental Research is mostly funded as a grant with no obligations („NSF provides funds on merit, not on need“)

2. Types of Proposals:

Applied Research, Development Projects and Practical Implementations are usually funded as a contract with delivery obligations

Public Grants or Contracts are more regulated in form or purpose; applications usually require prescribed forms. The proposals should be between 15 and 100 pages long

Private Grants (or Contracts) are usually satisfied with a shorter „letter proposal“.

2. Types of Proposals:

The Internet contains many references for writing project proposals, most of which are from the US, which even start at fund raising or the finding of a sponsor.

Of interest is a school library project in the US States, for which grant applications must be made by school districts, and their success is based in the quality of the application: (www.schoollibraryjournal.com)

New York	obtained 1\$ per student
California	37\$ per student
Oklahoma	70\$ per student
Alaska	132\$ per student

3. Contents of a Proposal:

Internet references from the US are:

www.foundationcenter.org

www.mtsu.edu

<http://research.microsoft.com>

www.research.umich.edu

www.nsf.gov

www.tgci.com

www.wpi.edu

www.wpi.edu

www.mcf.org

www.cs.uiowa.edu

www.scn.org

<http://grants.library.wisc.edu>

www.professionalpractice.asme.org

www.gsa.gov/fdac/queryfdac.htm

www.jmu.edu

3. Contents of a Proposal:

Non-US Internet References:

<http://scottish-enterprise.com>

http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp6/index_en.cmf?p=0_doc

www.funding.aau.dk/eufund.htm

www.mdx.ac.uk

www.education.monash.au

www.biu.ac.il

3. Contents of a Proposal:

The web recommendations all have a similar recommendation for the preparations for and the contents of a proposal for a governmental grant or contract:

Preparation:

Step 1: write for application forms and guidelines if not available on the Internet

Step 2: call a past grantee

Step 3: call a past reviewer

Step 4: contact the program officer

3. Contents of a Proposal:

Proposal Writing:

- 3.1. Introduction**
- who are you
 - goals
 - prove your credibility
 - state the problem

- 3.2. Problem Statement and Need**
- demonstrate your understanding
 - focus on project
 - relation to larger problems
 - importance of project
 - feasibility to solve the problem
 - aim to be reached

3. Contents of a Proposal:

Proposal Writing:

3.3. Objectives - specify the end product (specific, measurable, practical, logical)

3.4. Methods - data collection, use

3.5. Evaluation - to improve project

3.6. Budget

3.7. Abstract

3. Contents of a Proposal:

A letter proposal for a private sponsor may not need any forms. It should contain a similar (shorter outline):

Part 1 Summary

- self identification
- uniqueness
- sponsor expectations
- budget

Part 2 Sponsor Appeal

- why to approach this sponsor

Part 3 Problem

Part 4 Solution

Part 5 Capabilities

- demonstrate credibility

Part 6 Budget

Part 7 Conclusion

sign by „heavy weight person“, multiple application is expected, but notify

4. Evaluation Process:

As a rule all applications are reviewed by a group of experts.

Why are proposals rejected?

- Problem Statement 58%**
- problem not important
 - problem too complex
 - only of local significance
 - premature
- Approach 75%**
- methods unsuited
 - description too nebulous
 - not thought out
- Investigator 55%**
- not sufficient experience
 - unfamiliar with literature
 - poor publication record
- Other 16%**
- resource assessment unrealistic

5. Do's and Dont's:

- Do:**
- add interesting technology components to proven ideas
 - know how to fit into past and current projects
 - involve a team
 - proofread the submission thoroughly

- Don't**
- say little is known or done
 - think you know everything
 - confuse objectives with actions
 - define objectives you do not wish to achieve
 - use abbreviations
 - focus on the „cutting edge“
 - reuest funding for basic operations