Preparing to Write

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Whether you are going to write a grant proposal for a government agency or a private funder, such as a foundation or corporation, the components of the proposal are quite similar. The amount of detail required may be considerably different, but the basic elements are generally the same.

Most grantmakers have instructions on how you should develop your application for funding. You will want to follow these application guidelines very carefully, as they will tell you what elements to include, in what order, and what length each section should be. If you do not have guidelines, use the elements that seem most relevant to your project.

The assigned grant writer should work closely with others to gather the information needed to develop a grant proposal. If the person who conceived the project isn't the grant writer, he or she should be involved in developing the grant proposal, especially the objectives, plan of action, and budget. However, you want the grant request to be stylistically consistent, so limit the number of people involved in the actual writing. A basic grant writing rule of thumb is: do not write by committee.

Grant reviewers appreciate brevity and clarity. To achieve this, include section headings and sub-headings, leave space between sections, choose a readable typeface and font size, and use standard margins. Always use page numbers and identifying page headers or footers. Don't use your letterhead anywhere in the request except for the cover letter.

Here is a list of the grant proposal elements that we will be covering in this series:

- Executive Summary (Project Abstract)
- Introduction
- Organization History and Purpose (Capability)
- Statement of Need (Problem)
- Project or Program Narrative
- Goals and Objectives
- Plan of Action or Work Plan
- Evaluation and Measurable Outcomes
- Timeline
- Budget and Budget Narrative (Justification)
- Attachments and Supplemental Materials

The application process for government funding is more complicated then submitting an application to a private grantmaker. Government grant applications always require completing numerous forms and can take several months to write, whereas, an application for private funding may take a week or two to write, with no forms and few other attachments necessary.

In the next article we'll talk about how to get started writing a grant proposal, including creating an application outline, as well as establishing a work timeline for developing the full grant request.

The Approach

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Let's say that you have identified a potential grantmaker and are ready to begin writing your grant proposal. Where do you start?

I once heard a speaker refer to a grant proposal as a "series of building blocks of information." The speaker went on to say that each part supports and leads to the following part. You are simply developing layer after layer of information that eventually all fits together and convincingly presents your request.

Obviously, you want to have a fairly good grasp of what sort of information you will need to draw on in order to build a compelling grant proposal before you start writing. So, the very first step in developing a grant proposal is to organize your approach and create an outline of what the reviewer needs to know.

Sometimes the approach will be straightforward and fairly simple. For example, a private foundation may require that you submit a grant proposal incorporating these components:

Cover sheet

Narrative (maximum five pages)
- Introduction and background of organization
- Project narrative
  - Statement of need
  - Goals and objectives
  - Plan of action

Attachments
- Evaluation
- Organizational structure
- Finances
  - Financial statement (audited)
  - Current operating budget
  - Project budget
  - Fundraising plan (to sustain the project)
  - IRS tax designation letter
- Supporting materials
  - Letters of support/or commitment
  - Latest annual report
  - Board of directors

Once you have the grantmaker's application guidelines, you can build a work outline to keep you on track as you write the grant proposal.

Building the Work Outline

The work outline should be detailed. Paying attention to what needs to be accomplished in order to submit a compelling grant request is an important first step.

As an example, let's dissect the first few components in the application guidelines described above, developing a work outline as we go.

In this case, the cover sheet is actually a form that needs to be completed. Quickly review the form and make notes about any information required that may be out of the norm. For the sake of this example, let's assume the requested information includes: name of organization, contact person, address, and email, as well as a few check boxes to fill out. On the work outline your notation about the form might look like this:

Task	Due Date	Description
Cover Sheet (Form)	10/30/16	Fill out and have Board President sign

The next item in the application guidelines is the Project Narrative. For this section, you'll be doing a fair amount of writing so your notations will be more detailed:

Task	Due Date	Description
Narrative (5 pages max)	10/30/16	Introduction = ½ page
		Background = ½ page
		Project Narrative = 3 pages

Let's say that in the project narrative you will be talking about a collaborative effort between your organization and one or two other organizations. However, you haven't obtained a written commitment from these organizations, so in this section you will make the following note:

Task	Due Date	Description
Collaborative Agreement:		
Obtain org profiles	9/14/16	Call and ask for 500-word profiles

Review and edit profiles	9/22/16	Draft short description of the collaboration w/ profiles
Draft Agreement	9/22/16	Send to partners for their review
Re-write Agreement	9/27/16	Send to partners for final review
Sign Agreement	10/04/16	Prepare Collaborative Agreement document; host signing at our offices

Next we'll begin writing the grant proposal, starting with the Introduction, a section of the grant proposal that is often overlooked by the writer, but certainly not by the reviewer.

The Introduction

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

The introduction to a proposal serves as a way of communicating to the potential grantmaker the social, economic, and environmental context of your organization. It provides the reader with a brief description of your geographic and social situation, which your reader may be unfamiliar with (especially when the grantmaker is from a different region of the country or world).

The introduction is concise and contains information that captures your reader's attention and interest. It introduces the subject matter, setting, and principal players, and provides some background to the issue you will present in your proposal's project narrative and need descriptions. Sometimes the introduction and the organizational description/history are combined.

It's often beneficial to write the introduction after drafting the need statement and the goals and objectives. Once those sections are written, you'll know exactly what general information will most effectively introduce the reader to your request.

Be aware that the introduction you write for a private foundation can be significantly different from the one you write for a corporate donor or develop for a government request. Why?

A foundation's interests are going to center on your clientele and the community you serve, as well as on the problem or need you face. While these issues are important to corporate donors, they will also want to know how their company brand can reach a lot of people. So they will also be interested in the demographics of the region and the visibility of their name and logo. Basically, they want to understand the market you may help them reach.

Introductions for government grant proposals are almost always about the demographics or geography of the region you intend to serve. This description can be very straight forward and often can be developed from a community profile provided by a local or state agency.

Keep in mind that an introduction written for an in-state grantmaker is much different than one written for an out-of-state grantmaker. Grantmakers located in other regions often need to understand the geography of a place (such as a wilderness area, rural farming community, or inner-city neighborhood) and the demographic and economic profile (such as ethnicity, high unemployment rate, or lower-income population) if they are to make an informed decision.

Let's say you live in the small community of Maple Lake, MN, and you are writing a grant proposal to launch a local museum that is to be housed in the old railroad station.

You can gather information for writing your description of the area by pulling this text right off the State of Minnesota website:

> *Maple Lake is a growing community nestled among the lakes in central Minnesota. The location provides easy access to the Twin Cities and St. Cloud. The community has developed new residential areas, a new water storage facility, an updated sewage treatment facility, as well as new school facilities. The population of Maple Lake is just over 2,000.*

This page is linked to the Maple Lake township website. Reviewing this website you find a description of Maple Lake in the History section:

> *Maple Lake is situated in a part of central Minnesota once inhabited by the Chippewa Indians. In 1855 the Government revoked the treaty with the Winnebago and opened up Wright County for non-Indian settlers. The history of the city of Maple Lake begins in the mid 1850's. Early maps of Wright County illustrate a number of villages which included a city labeled "Geneva" located on the northwest shore on Maple Lake. Early pioneers came to Maple Lake to farm but, in 1857, C. H. Hackett surveyed a 200 plat and named it "Geneva". The 1857 severe depression caused a financial panic which resulted in failure of the development of the city of "Geneva". The city of "Geneva" never materialized but the town site of Maple Lake was established in 1858 with the establishment of a mail site.*
>
> *The Irish migrating from Clare County Ireland began to influx into Maple Lake in the late 1850's and early 1860's. With this early group of Irish immigrants came Patrick O'Loughlin Sr., who would become the pioneer founder of the present day village of Maple Lake. O'Loughlin saw the establishment of the village but his son-in-law, James Madigan, platted the village of Maple Lake in 1886 and began to sell lots in 1887. The first lots were sold to John Roehrenbach who opened a dry goods and groceries store on a street known as "Easy Street". Today this site is the location of the Maple Lake City Hall. The development of the city spurred the development of farming, the expansion of the "Soo Line" railroad through the city as well as the opening of an elevator in 1889.*

With these few paragraphs you have uncovered great fodder for the introduction to a grant proposal that will be requesting seed money to develop a small, local museum. You can quote from this description, lending credibility to your request.

For example:

> *Nestled among the lakes in central Minnesota, Maple Lake is a small, rural community with a population of approximately 2,000. Before 1855, the region around Maple Lake was inhabited by the Chippewa Indians, whose tribes were scattered over an area extending 1,000 miles from north to west. Their exact history in this region of Minnesota is somewhat unknown and lightly documented.*
>
> *In 1855 the Government revoked the regional treaty and opened up the area for non-Indian settlers. Early pioneers came to Maple Lake to farm and in 1857 C. H. Hackett surveyed a plat and named it "Geneva". The severe depression in 1857 caused a financial panic. Thus the city of "Geneva" never materialized but the town site of Maple Lake was established in 1858.*
>
> *The Irish migrating from Clare County Ireland began to influx into Maple Lake in the late 1850's and early 1860's. With this early group of Irish immigrants came Patrick O'Loughlin Sr., who would become the pioneer founder of the present day village of Maple Lake. The development of the town spurred the development of farming, the expansion of the "Soo Line" railroad through the community, as well as the opening of a grain elevator in 1889.*

Keep in mind that the introduction can be short (perhaps a few paragraphs).

Here is a short checklist to guide the development of the introduction:

The introduction should

__ Communicate the context of your project or program.
__ Give a brief description of your geographic and social situation.
__ Be concise.
__ Capture the reader’s attention and interest.
__ Introduce the subject matter.
__ Introduce the setting and principal players.
__ Provide some background to your issue.

In the next article we'll review the organizational description.

Organizational Description

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Most grant application guidelines require an organizational description section. This section of the grant proposal provides the grantmaker with the history of the organization applying for funding, as well as its current programs and structure.

The primary objective for including the history of your organization in a grant request is to establish the organization's credibility and its qualifications for funding. This is also an opportunity to draw the reviewer into the context of your overall grant request, to become familiar with your work. Develop two adaptations of the history. Both adaptations should refer to or quote from your organization’s mission statement.

The first version should be quite short – three or four paragraphs – and the second version should be detailed, up to two pages. You will use the short version when writing letters of inquiry, or grant requests to corporations or small private foundations. You can also use the short version when you submit a request electronically because these submissions are usually limited to a specific number of words.

The long version should be used in full grant proposals, including federal and state requests, or other proposals which require more detailed information.

You should consider beginning with a story about how the organization was founded, and why. Storytelling is a powerful tool which you can use to your advantage. It inherently provides credibility to the organization, and almost always engages the reader. Here’s an example of a short vignette that will give you some ideas about how to write your own opening.

Our Organization: Mothers of Mourning

> *In the mid-1900s four women who had each recently lost a son in WWII came together to share their grief, to provide support, and to help each other through an emotional crisis. From those first heart-wrenching yet liberating gatherings, these women instinctively knew that sharing grief was an effective way to help bear their new burdens. In 1950, shortly after WWII came to a close, these four women launched a regional program called Mothers of Mourning.*

Once you set the stage, immediately move on to a present-day description of the organization and its current programs:

> *Today, Mothers of Mourning has blossomed into a national program with over 30 staff and at least one chapter in all 50 states. These chapters, which are run by volunteer Boards of Directors, offer a variety of services in their local communities. The operating budget for the national offices for 2010 is $1,235,000, of which 45% goes to support the local chapters. Services at the national level include training in the areas of grief counseling...*

Spring 2003: U.S. leads a multi-national invasion into Iraq

> *The New York Times (March 20, 2003): "Today, at approximately 02:30 UTC, explosions were heard in Baghdad. According to The Pentagon, 36 Tomahawk missiles and two F-117 launched 27 GBU bombs in this assault."*
>
> *Since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003, Mothers in Mourning has opened 11 new chapters in the U.S., experiencing a 72% increase in demand for services. We have implemented an interim plan to address this new demand, but the current global situation requires a sustainable approach.*
>
> *In March 2010, our Board of Directors re-assessed our mission and strategic plan to embrace the increasing need for services. Our new mission statement reads: (quote)…*

This present day description should include your organization's mission, goals, programs, and activities. It might also include a two or three line summary of your current operating budget.

Once you've relayed the present circumstances of your organization, you should summarize the most recent set of critical episodes so the grantmaker knows what you are facing today. Critical episodes include organizational changes, new initiatives or innovations, or even a traumatic event such as major budget cuts. You might call this section of the history: *Our Challenge*.

Ending this section with a quote from your mission statement is an effective transition from the organizational description to the next section, which is usually the problem or need statement.

To compliment the organizational description, you should develop an organizational chart to illustrate how your organization is structured. Include the names of individuals in administrative positions, their titles, and how long each staff person has served in a particular position. This helps to build credibility for your organization. Your objective is to demonstrate, via the organizational chart, that yours is a stable organization, with strong leadership.

At the top of the organizational chart always note the population you serve or quote from your mission statement. Adding this information at the beginning of the chart conveys to the reviewer that you know whom you serve, and are aware that their needs are what drive your organization's programs.

Keep copies of this chart on your computer in two sizes: one that fits on a full page and can become an attachment to a full proposal and one that fits on half-a-page and can be inserted into the body of a proposal.

Here's a Sample Organizational Chart for a center that serves seniors in a small county *(Word)*. (/sites/default/files/2017-03/Org_Chart.docx)

Here's a short summary of what should be covered in the organizational description:

- State the organization's mission, goals, history, current programs, and activities.
- Define existing clients or constituents.
- Provide evidence of accomplishments, including quotations and endorsements. (This may be referred to in the organizational description but the full document should be an attachment.)

- Support qualifications in the area of activity for which funds are sought (e.g., research, training, service delivery, etc.).
- Include a brief overview of the board of directors and key staff. (For example: “We have 17 board members and three key staff, including the Executive Director, Housing Loan Officer, and the Vice President of Development.”)

Don’t overuse testimonials or endorsements – one embedded in the organizational description usually does the trick. These can be powerful examples of how the community supports your organization, but including too many can diminish their effectiveness.

In summary, presentation of the organizational description may vary in its length and the details you provide for different grant applications. However, one thing is always constant: It is critical to refer to your organization’s mission in this section of the grant request. Whether your organization is just starting out or celebrating its 50th anniversary you have a specific mission, and that mission is the foundation for your entire grant request.

Statement of Problem or Need

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Why should grantmakers support your request for funding? Developing a powerful problem or need statement is critical if you want your proposal to remain in the selection process, round after round, as others are eliminated.

The problem or need statement describes specific, often negative conditions of a community or a situation. This statement leads into the project narrative, which tells the potential funder what the organization intends to do to address the identified problem or need.

The problem or need statement should:

- paint a picture of the overall issue, focusing on the global, national, regional, or local scale, as appropriate;
- describe the problem in terms of clients or the community, using statistics or other documentation;
- refer to the organization's internal needs if the request is for capacity building grants or operating support; and,
- establish a clear link between the problem or need presented and the grant maker's funding priorities.

Painting the Picture

The problem or need statement should engage the reviewers, capturing their attention so they want to continue to read your proposal. One effective method you can use is to begin with an individual case history or vignette. Often a real-life story helps the reader understand the full impact of a specific problem or need. Opening with a story will demonstrate the motivating, human dimensions of the problem or need and quickly draw the reader into the proposal.

For example, let's say you are writing a request to secure grant support so your organization can provide hospice care to several remote, rural areas with a strong indigenous culture. You might begin your problem or need statement with something as simple as a list of the elders who have passed:

In Alaska today, Athabascan culture dies one elder at a time.

Jerry Smith	*89 yrs*	*1927 – 2016*
Marie Childers	*75 yrs*	*1941 – 2016*
Jamie Silver	*91 yrs*	*1925 – 2016*
Carl Salmon	*77 yrs*	*1939 – 2016*
Jeremiah Sullivan	*71 yrs*	*1945 - 2016*
Claudine Sanders	*88 yrs*	*1928 – 2016*

Fairbanks Daily News Miner December 2015 – June 2016

Each of these elders grew up in rural Alaska, but was forced to move into Fairbanks once their illnesses no longer allowed them to live at home.

Each of these people knew traditional ways to hunt, tell stories, settle disputes, dance, honor leaders, and bear grief.

Each grew old and died without traditional contact with family and friends.

As you can see, this straightforward yet moving opening begins to paint the picture for the reader. These are now real people. This is now a real problem or need that should be addressed.

Once you've developed an effective way to begin a problem or need statement, the next step is to support the picture you've painted with substantive information.

Using Statistics and Other Documentation

As you move into documenting the problem or need, clearly describe the current situation. At this point it is important to demonstrate that there is an urgent need to close the gap between "what is" and "what should be."

To establish "what is" you can cite relevant statistics or quote from reports or studies. Keep this section concise and focused. Be selective in your use of data. Use one or two clear facts or statistics, rather than many examples. For example, if you are describing the current state of homelessness in your community, you do not want to cite statistics for the county, state, or nation. Avoid quoting information that is only marginally relevant to your problem or need.

You can establish "what should be" by using experts' statements or examples of successful projects in other places.

State the facts. Let your readers come to their own conclusions. When your facts are well chosen and your logic is tight, understatement is a powerful tool.

Leave the reader asking the question, "I understand the extent of the problem or need, but what can this organization do to alleviate it?"

At this point, one option is to quote from your mission statement to demonstrate why your organization is tackling this problem. This is a compelling way to close the problem or need statement, creating a smooth transition into the next section, which is usually the project narrative.

Be Specific and Establish a Link to the Funder

Even though you may feel the pressure of space constraints, you do not want to use generalities when specific information is available. Specifics are what help your proposal rise above the competition.

For example, if a request for proposals states that the funder wants to support organizations with expertise in a certain field, you don't want to simply write, “We have much experience with these types of programs.” Be specific: “We have run five similar programs over the last decade.”

One way to assess if a word or sentence is concrete or specific enough is to decide if you can physically demonstrate the idea. I can't look around my office and point to “experience,” but I can count to five on my fingers. Similarly, I can't point to “success,” but if my office were bigger I could add up sixteen children who were placed with mentors or ninety people who shared a holiday meal.

If you feel that your experience lags behind other grantseekers, then focus on the specific success of one of your programs: “Our previous program reached self-sustainability in six months, a full year ahead of projections.”

Even in brief letters of inquiry, specifics are necessary to help your organization stand out in the crowd and move on to the next stage of consideration. For example, rather than claiming that you possess “leadership skills,” provide specific examples of those skills.

By eliminating redundancies, simplifying language choices, and using specific details in your problem or need statement, you can effectively demonstrate to the funder why your program deserves their attention, and how it connects to their own goals and objectives.

Doing Research Online

Yahoo, Google, and other search engines are fine for informal research. They may even provide you with some good leads; however, they can also be misleading. The most efficient way to conduct online research is to use bona fide online research resources.

So, how do you find these resources? Your local library (whether public or university-affiliated) is an excellent place to start your research. Many libraries purchase memberships to specialized online reference databases. Check with the reference librarian to find out if you can access these databases.

INFOMINE (http://infomine.ucr.edu) is one example of a specialized search engine. Created through the partnership of librarians at several universities, this online resource contains databases, electronic journals, books, and articles, and is organized into several categories, ranging from the hard and soft sciences, to government information and the arts.

Other specialized search engines include:

> *U.S. Census Bureau, Quick Facts - http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html) for demographic information.*
>
> *Educational World - http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/index.shtml (http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/index.shtml) for U.S. educational standards.*

Project or Program Narrative

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

The project or program narrative is a description of the approach you're taking to address the specific issue articulated in the problem or need statement.

The length and detail of this narrative section depend on the number of pages allowed, the amount of money you are requesting, and the information needed to portray your project or program accurately. A $1,000 request may require only a short description, whereas a $1,000,000 request might call for a much longer narrative. The most important thing to keep in mind is that the project or program narrative should clearly answer the challenge presented in the problem or need statement.

This narrative opens by summarizing what you intend to do, and expanding on it by adding critical details.

Deciding how much information needs to be included should directly reflect who will be considering the request. Having your request reviewed by a panel of peers allows you to add quite a bit of detail and use technical terms known in the business. If your request is being reviewed by a grantmaker's program officers or board of trustees, consider limiting such technical details to avoid overwhelming them.

The project or program narrative should:

- Describe both the vision and the practical approach of the project or program.
- Clearly connect the project or program to the mission and overall activities of your organization.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the subject matter.
- Summarize how the project or program will be implemented.
- Provide a profile of the clients you will serve (if applicable) and how you intend to connect with them.
- Summarize the plan of action and the timeline for the project or program.
- Articulate how you will staff the project, and who will be involved (including volunteers, consultants, and staff).

When developing a grant proposal, you typically write the project or program narrative after you've developed the goals, objectives, action plan, timeline, budget, outcome measurements, and method of evaluation because the narrative is really a summary of these items. The articles in this series will focus on each of these sections, providing worksheets and examples to help guide your work.

Goals and Objectives

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Establish Clear Goals and Objectives

Almost all grant application guidelines require that you state the goals and/or objectives of the proposed program or project that needs funding. It usually doesn't take a lot of time to draft an overall goal and several accompanying objectives. And though you may adjust the goals and objectives as you further develop the grant request, it is helpful to think through what you're trying to achieve, and how you intend to go about it. A proposal that clearly states a project's goals and objectives has created the groundwork for a compelling grant request.

The first step is to understand what distinguishes goals from objectives.

Goals are Visionary

Goals are the long-term vision for your project or program. They are your motivation, the part of your world view that applies to the subject area of your grant proposal. Goals define what will occur for the people you serve if the program is successful. You may have one, or several, goals.

Goals often directly reflect the size of the budget. A $10 million request, for example, can afford an ambitious goal, such as:

To affect a dynamic, fundamental reform of mathematics and science education that results in improved achievement for all K-12 students in our state.

In fact, this particular project and the size of the budget are large enough that there may be several goals. However, very few grant requests require more than one goal.

Consider this same basic project, but scaled down to benefit only one school district, and with a more modest budget request of $250,000. This goal might read:

To improve test scores for all students in the areas of mathematics and science education in the North County School District via a fundamental reform in teaching methods and curricula.

As you can see, goals are visionary, but must be potentially achievable within the context of the grant request. Tying the goals to the size of the budget helps to balance the vision with reality.

You can also think of goals as performance targets. Performance targets embrace change and often focus on the people who are being served by the project. If the grant application guidelines don't mention goals, but rather require that you articulate performance targets, just ask yourself, "How will this project change society?" Your answer should generate a performance target that will provide the grantmaker with the information required.

For example, restating the goal for the statewide K-12 project as a performance target could read:

To prepare K-12 students to excel in the areas of mathematics and science via fundamental reform of both curriculum and teaching method in schools throughout the state.

Notice how the performance target focuses on how the students will be affected, and that this project will fundamentally reform teaching methodology.

Whether the application guidelines require goals or performance targets the next step is to identify specific objectives to accompany each.

Objectives are Measurable

While goals are visionary, objectives are achievable and measurable within the scope of the proposed work.

When you're writing an objective, start with "To," followed by a verb and then give a short explanation of what you're trying to accomplish. If possible, add the time it will take to achieve the objective. Try to be realistic when establishing objectives for the grant request because the success of your project is often judged by referring to the stated objectives.

Objectives tend to get unwieldy. For example this objective is clearly stated and it's easy to tell what is going to be accomplished and when, but the scope of this objective is too broad:

To create, in cooperation with five local arts organizations, a traveling Inland Sea exhibit with accompanying curriculum for grades K-12 by fall 2017.

I would break it into several smaller objectives, such as:

To establish a coalition of up to five regional arts organizations to collaborate on developing an Inland Sea traveling exhibit by March 2017.

To develop a set of teachers guides (K-12) for the Inland Sea Exhibit by fall 2017.

An easy way to determine if your objective is too broad is to develop a set of tasks to accompany each objective. If this list of tasks goes on and on you need to narrow down your objective.

Here's a checklist that will help you write clear objectives:

- Always specify a result, not an activity.
- Describe just one result you want to accomplish.
- Tell when the result is to be accomplished.
- Emphasize what will be done and when, but don't tell why or how it will be done.
- Clearly relate each objective to one or more of the goals.
- Make sure the objectives are specific, measurable, and verifiable.
- Allow for flexibility on the part of those implementing the objective.

Once you've developed the goals and objectives, you will find that you refer to them many times as you continue to draft the grant proposal.

The Plan of Action

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

The plan of action, sometimes referred to as action steps or tasks, is a step-by-step description of what you will do to accomplish each objective you've defined in your grant request.

The plan of action can make or break your request. Incorporating details in this section of the grant request is critical. If you cannot demonstrate to the grantmaker that you have a strong, workable plan ready to implement, then it is unlikely you will receive the grant award.

It is important to tie every task to an objective, making sure that you've listed all the tasks needed to accomplish each objective. Be specific. Begin each task with a verb. For example:

> *Hire an architect*
>
> *Order 20 new computer stations*
>
> *Establish a policy review committee*

Assign a cost, time line, and responsible person for each task. An entry in your plan of action might look like this:

February 2017	Capital Campaign Exec Committee	Hire an architect	$500.00

The step-by-step plan of action will generate the project timeline and guide budget development so it is important to make it detailed.

In addition, setting forth tasks or activities in this fashion can aid program planning. Without such a plan, certain necessary steps might be overlooked—which ultimately means your budget won't reflect the full cost of the project.

These action steps and their sequence are also very helpful to the person in charge of managing the award once the request has been funded.

The Plan of Action Worksheet *(Word)* (/sites/default/files/2017-03/plan_of_action.docx) will help you create an outline of everything that needs to be accomplished under each objective. After listing every task you can think of, pass the worksheet around the office to get additional ideas about what has to happen to accomplish the objective. Getting others to participate in this process also facilitates "buy-in" from staff and volunteers for the overall project.

At this point, your plan of action will probably be too detailed for the grant proposal. You'll need to go back and summarize some of the tasks. However, you will have developed a specific plan that you can follow when it's time to implement the award, and that alone is worth the effort.

In addition, if the grant maker has questions about any of the line items in your budget you can quickly refer to this plan to answer them.
Here's a sample of a plan of action, tied directly to one objective:

Objective #1: To market a comprehensive and contemporary parent education program to 15% of the county population, or approximately 11,000 people, through a two-year outreach effort.

Action steps	Who's Responsible	When
Design contemporary outreach program	Community Educator	May-June
Expand community collaboration	Executive Director	March-on
Coordinate the new program w/ other agencies	Community Educator	May-June
Write and distribute monthly PSAs, ads and emails	Community Educator	May-on
Develop a monthly calendar of events and post on the website	Community Educator	May-on

The next step to undertake once you have completed the plan of action is to determine measurable outcomes, which we will cover in the next article.

Evaluation and Measurable Outcomes

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Including an evaluation plan in a grant proposal provides the opportunity to discuss what the program should ultimately achieve. The evaluation is essentially a technical document used by staff and board members, as well as grantmakers, to evaluate the success of a program. But evaluations can also serve many other purposes, including garnering some very good press for your program's successes and serving as the basis for follow-on funding.

The evaluation design depends on what information you need to collect in order to make major decisions as the program matures and to write solid reports for the grantmaker, your board, and others involved in the program. To start writing the evaluation section, I suggest asking a few basic questions:

1. The evaluation results will be circulated to whom and for what purpose?
    - Does the grantmaker want the information in order to decide if they will provide future funding?
    - Will your board of directors refer to the evaluation to make program decisions?
    - Will you issue a press release, or post the information on the web?

2. What kinds of information are needed to help someone decide how to proceed with this particular program?
3. What sources will provide the most credible information?
4. What is the best way to collect and document this information?
5. When do you need the information collected, and an analysis prepared to distribute?

Once you've answered these basic questions, then your next step in developing a strong evaluation plan is to select the people who will design and oversee the evaluation process. There are three possible approaches to consider:

In-house evaluation team - This could include the program director, v staff, a board member, and an on-staff, designated evaluator. This approach is the most cost effective, but it is also least objective.

An outside evaluation team - This could include a board member, a community leader, and someone in your field of work who is not directly linked with the program. Usually these individuals are offered a small honorarium ($100 to $500) for their work. You can incorporate the cost of the honoraria into your program budget. An outside evaluation team is more objective than an in-house team.

Professional evaluator - If the program is complex and the outcome measurements are important to quantify, contracting with a professional evaluator is recommended. Check with your nearest college or university for potential evaluators in your field. There are also freelance consultants in many communities whose skills include program evaluation. A professional evaluator will often prepare an evaluation plan at no cost in exchange for being written into the proposal as the evaluator. Professional evaluators can provide a relatively objective evaluation, along with a professional report.

Designing the Evaluation:
Qualitative vs. Quantitative Measurements

Keep in mind that in designing the evaluation component for the grant proposal there will be trade-offs in the breadth and depth of information you gather. The more breadth you want, usually the less depth you get (unless you have extensive resources to carry out the evaluation). On the other hand, if you want to examine a certain aspect of a program in detail, you will likely not get as much information about other parts of the program.

Qualitative evaluations are somewhat open-ended and examine a small number of cases in detail. This process often involves collecting vignettes, testimonials, and/or comments from program participants in answer to questions such as, “How did the school-to-work program affect your plans after high school?”

Quantitative evaluations are based on statistics and are more scientific in their approach. They are characterized by a large data-collection effort, coding of this data, and a standard analytical approach to conclusions.

Remember, the evaluation section of the grant request should stress that the evaluation method has been carefully planned and demonstrate that the evaluation plan can be implemented.

Here’s a checklist to make sure you’ve covered everything in the evaluation section of your grant proposal. Did you:

__ Describe specific, measurable criteria for success?

__ Describe the process to be used to collect data and monitor progress?

__ Provide detail about how you will keep records?

__ Provide a short bio of each evaluator, including their relationships to the program or your organization?

__ Outline your reporting procedure providing specific due dates, and the format and content of evaluation reports?

__ Include the evaluation timeline in the overall program timeline?

__ Include the costs to evaluate your program in your budget?

A note about outcomes-based evaluations

According to the United Way, outcomes-based evaluation looks at “impacts/benefits/changes to your clients (as a result of your program’s efforts) during and/or after their participation in your programs. Outcomes evaluation can examine these changes in the short-term, intermediate term and long-term.”

There is a great article by Carter McNamara, “Basic Guide to Outcomes-Based Evaluation for Nonprofit Organizations with Very Limited Resources,” with lots of definitions and helpful ideas for developing an outcomes-based evaluation at this website: http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcomes.htm (http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/outcomes.htm).

Program evaluation with an outcomes-based focus has become increasingly important to both grantmakers and grantees. If the grantmaker requires an outcomes-based evaluation, you should definitely read McNamara’s article.

In Summary

Accuracy, clarity, and tone are all important when writing the final evaluation as it may directly affect the future of your program and will definitely reflect on the professionalism and credibility of your organization. When developing the evaluation section of a grant proposal, you need to focus on what the grantmaker wants to hear. That means you have to understand in depth what the grantmaker is trying to achieve via a particular grantmaking program. A carefully designed evaluation section of a proposal is one of the most effective ways to connect directly with the grantmaker’s goals and objectives.

Project or Program Timeline

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Despite its tedium, the timeline is yet another section of the grant proposal to sell your project to the grantmaker. Laying out the sequence of events in a timeline will provide the reader with a visual cue to better understand the process necessary for your objectives to be met. Once someone thoroughly comprehends this process, you are halfway to getting approval for your request.

The timeline is simply a way for the reader to see the relationship between what needs to happen, when it needs to happen, why it has to happen in a particular sequence, and who needs to make it happen.

If your project is fairly simple, you'll want to add detail to the timeline to demonstrate that even though it is a small request for a straightforward project, you have considered which elements need to be attended to and in what order.

If the project is complicated, the timeline can communicate benchmarks and reflect the goals and objectives to be achieved.

In addition, the timeline can be used outside of the proposal process to communicate with clients, board members, collaborative partners, and others who need to have a definitive understanding of the project and the complexity of tasks involved.

Quality Content

A visual timeline can be a powerful tool. It can convince someone that what you intend to do can be done. To develop the timeline, refer back to the Plan of Action worksheet (which you developed last week). Summarize the action items and the time dedicated to each one. You are trying to demonstrate to the grantmaker what steps it will take (and when they will be taken) to meet your objectives.

Presentation

You can develop the timeline in a very straightforward manner by listing deadline dates and tasks. Or, you can be a bit more creative and present this information on a chart. Any sort of visual presentation helps the reader understand how the tasks fit together over time. The critical thing to keep in mind is to design a timeline that is visually appealing and easy to read.

The timeline shouldn't be too long. In fact, it can be quite brief. That's why a visual presentation can be very helpful; it will break up the narrative and provide for easy reference.

Your timeline doesn't have to be elaborate. As an example, we have developed a Sample Timeline *(Word)* (/sites/default/files/2017-03/Sample_Timeline.docx).

Here are a few tips for developing an effective timeline:

- Color code your task bars
  For example, if you're an arts organization undertaking an audience development project, you could code all of the outreach tasks yellow and all of the design tasks blue. If you are a large organization, you could color code by department tasks.
- Keep the timeline concise
  Exclude any sub-tasks. If you feel any particular task needs more detail, create a second timeline instead of putting everything into your primary timeline.
- Have different people review the timeline
  Circulate a copy of the timeline you've created to everyone involved in the project. Let them each review their own responsibilities and benchmarks. Collect their feedback and incorporate suggestions.

By developing an informative and eye-catching timeline, you can capitalize on the opportunity to make your objectives resonate with the grantmaker.

Budget and Budget Narrative/Justification

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Most grantmakers will want to see two budgets: one for the proposed project and your organization’s annual operating budget. In this article, we'll assume you already have an annual operating budget and concentrate on how to develop the project budget.

The project budget should clearly indicate both expenses and revenue. Our Budget Worksheet *(Word)* (/sites/default/files/2017-03/Budget_Worksheet.docx), will be a great help when developing your project budget.

Start preparing your project budget by taking an imaginary shopping trip: purchase whatever you need for this project and don't tie your hands by thinking too small. Have fun as you consider the possibilities.

Make a list and don’t forget to include salaries, consultant fees, office space, postage, travel, supplies, insurance, printing, and publicity. For instance, will you need to install a new phone line or lease equipment? Include administrative fees (indirect rate), usually 10-18% of the project budget. Keep this list for reference as you build the budget.

You won’t think of everything the first time you make the list. You'll need to revisit the budget several times as you continue to develop the proposal, adding, and sometimes deleting, items.

Refer to the Plan of Action worksheet you developed earlier and go through every single action step. Add budget items to support the tasks. Can you account for all the salaried time, equipment, travel, and other expenses identified in the plan of action? Almost every task has an associated cost, so going over this worksheet is a great way to make sure you’re covering all costs affiliated with the project.

If you think of a cost that you are sure to incur but that doesn’t tie in with any of the plan of action items, then you’ve missed something in your plan of action. It’s a good way to double check that everything is covered in both the plan of action and the budget.

As you build your budget, strive to show community support in the form of in-kind contributions of time, services, space, supplies, and so on. In-kind gifts refer to non-cash donations made to your organization, such as land, buildings, goods, and services. Note the estimated value of these commitments in the budget.

At this point, you will also need to consider evaluation costs. Though you have yet to design the evaluation component of the proposal, you will know by now whether it is needed to strengthen your project and make it adhere to the grantmaker’s guidelines. Evaluation costs can include consultants' fees, testing, printing, attending a conference to disseminate results, or release time for staff to be trained or interviewed.

Make sure that the budget clearly differentiates costs to be met by the grantmaker from those covered by other parties. In addition, the budget should:

- Tell the same story as the proposal narrative, but in numbers, not in language.
- Be detailed in all aspects.
- Contain no unexplained amounts for miscellaneous or contingency items.
- Include all items paid for by other sources.
- Reflect volunteers' contributions and in-kind gifts.
- Detail fringe benefits, separate from salaries.
- Include all consultants' fees.
- List all non-personnel costs separately.
- Include indirect or administrative fees when appropriate.
- Be sufficient to perform the tasks described in the narrative.

Make notes explaining who provided you with quotes or how you reached a certain figure. This will help when developing the budget narrative and it strengthens your credibility with the reader.

The budget narrative is yet another place to reinforce everything you’ve explained in the grant request. It places all of the budget line items in context. Go through the entire budget and write one or two sentences to clarify how you determined the cost for each line item.

The most important thing to remember when developing the budget is that the more information you include in this section of the grant proposal, the less likely it is that questions will come up as the review board discusses your request.

Executive Summary/Project Abstract

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

The executive summary, or abstract, is the single most important part of the grant proposal. It can be anywhere from several lines, to a full page in length. This summary should be both succinct and complete.

Develop this component of the grant proposal by summarizing the main points of all the other sections. Begin by outlining each of the proposal sections and use that outline to develop a concise and compelling summary.

Many grantmakers provide forms with explicit directions for presenting the executive summary. These forms often limit the amount of space and number of words you can use. Always carefully follow the directions on these forms.

Here's a sample executive summary that provides you with a clear idea of how this section should read:

> *The Preventer Fire Safety Project combines health promotion training for members of the AmeriCorps network with a pilot smoke detector and fire safety training project. Four communities from Bracken County, located in southwestern Alabama, will participate in the project. All communities are rural, with an average 31% of the population living below the poverty level.*
>
> *There are two primary target groups: AmeriCorps network members and children eligible for Head Start programs in the four participating communities. However, the region's demographics and the nature of the project suggest that the majority population in each community will benefit. The combined population of these communities is 4,753 people.*
>
> *The project has been formulated to address a leading problem in southern Alabama: fire-related deaths. Alabama is second in the nation for the highest rate of death per 1,000 house fires, and Bracken County has the highest mortality rate in Alabama for children ages 0-4. The Preventor Fire Safety Project will launch a region-wide smoke-detector installation campaign.*

This executive summary goes on to summarize the campaign, the coalition that has come together to launch this program, the amount requested, and how much money has already been raised.

When writing the executive summary you are trying to accomplish two things:

1. Create curiosity for the reader.
2. Establish credibility for the organization.

Why create curiosity?

Usually you can't have a face-to-face discussion with the readers, so you need to find a way to draw them into the conversation – make them curious about what you are doing and why you feel compelled to do it. Your proposed project will have a greater impact on them once they become engaged.

Here are a few ways to build curiosity in the executive summary:

- Provocative questions will draw the reader into the prose. A brief, interrogative statement, such as, "Why are there so many house-fire-related deaths?" makes people stop and wonder.
- Sharing just enough information to make the readers want to know more is always a good way to engage them in the longer, more detailed statement of need and project description.
- Provide a glimpse of how you will address and hopefully solve the problem. Don't tell them too much – just enough for them to be intrigued.
- If you can, use the fact that others are supporting this project as a way to enhance interest. For example, use language like "community momentum to address this problem" or similar powerful phrases to let the reader know there is a movement to address the issue.

Establishing your credibility doesn't need to be relegated to its own paragraph. In fact, it is better if you lace the executive summary with brief statements that reinforce that you are the right organization to be doing this project, and that you have all the resources (except the funding) to do it.

In the following few paragraphs you will see that we summarize the situation, draw in the reader (the brief question), and establish credibility.

> *Since 1947, the Greater Kanawa Historical Society has served as the guardian of our community's heritage, recording our ancestors, cataloging events – both past and present, and serving as a repository for our regional culture. But over the past decade this rich community story met an unexpected adversary.*
>
> *Who was this adversary?*
>
> *Climate. Weather. Call it what you will, but it is the one element from which our history has not been protected. This repository of letters, photos, and documents of many types is literally crumbling from the hot and humid climate of this southern community. It will take up to three-years to properly build and install all the necessary climate controls so that the history of this wonderful region of our country is not lost forever.*

Of course, the executive summary goes on to cover a number of other points, but in the opening paragraph, creating curiosity will get the readers' attention and establishing organizational credibility will make readers trust that yours is the right organization to address this particular problem.

You can use this Executive Summary Worksheet *(Word)* (/sites/default/files/2017-03/Executive_Summary_Worksheet.docx) to help you organize your approach to writing the executive summary.

One quick tip about writing the summary. I usually ask someone, not involved with the proposed project, to read the grant proposal. After they read the proposal, I take it away and ask them to write a summary of what the problem or need is that we are trying to address, and what we propose to do. This exercise often provides a perspective on whether what I wrote in the proposal is clear, and it also offers new language to describe the proposed project in the summary.

Attachments and Supplemental Materials

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation.com

Attachments and supplemental materials can provide the winning edge when your proposal is compared with others. Throughout the proposal development process, collect materials that can be included with the grant request. You may not end up using them all but at least you will have a set of possible attachments to sort through when the time comes to package the grant request.

In most cases, your grant request initially goes to a program officer, who reviews it to make sure everything they've asked for has been included and that your request fits the grantmaker's goals and objectives. After the preliminary review, the next step is to distribute the proposal to a decision-making committee or the board of directors. The decision-makers will often not have the opportunity to "see" the attachments, so make it a point to refer to any attachments/supplemental materials that should be reviewed in the body of the full proposal. For example, if you quote from one of your letters of support in the project description section, reference this letter by adding: (Please see attached Letter of Support, Superintendent of Schools, Culver School District.). Quoting from an endorsement for your proposed project can build the credibility of your organization right into the narrative. However, use such quotes sparingly, or it dilutes the impact.

Read the application guidelines thoroughly to assess what attachments you are allowed to include. If the grantmaker is very clear that they only want three attachments, such as your IRS letter, profiles of the board of directors, and one letter of support, then do not ignore these directions.

If, however, they leave you a little room for creativity, rather than using run-of-the-mill materials such as brochures or annual reports, include an attachment that enthusiastically supports your project, for example a support letter signed by a number of local organizations.

If there are more than five attachments, include a separate table of contents (on top of the attachments) so that they are easy to review.

Never include video or film, DVD, CD, books, or audio tapes unless requested to do so.

Here are some suggested attachments:

- Endorsement letters (each should make a different point or have a distinct focus)
- A profile of each board member (usually one paragraph each)
- Résumés or short bios of key staff and consultants
- Tables, graphs, and research supporting the problem or need statement
- Organizational publications, including brochures, annual reports, and newsletters
- Maps of the region, neighborhood, and community
- The organization's audited financial statement

- A copy of the IRS tax-exempt designation
- Photographs and architect's drawings (if applicable)
- A resolution or statement from the board of directors supporting the proposal
- Significant publicity reprints
- A list of foundations and corporations that have made previous grants to the organization

The Cover Letter

The cover letter, which also serves as a type of summary, might seem redundant after you have just written the executive summary or abstract. It is, in fact, somewhat repetitive as you'll be using your best quotations and phrases in each. However, don't worry about repeating yourself as the cover letter and executive summary are technically parts of two separate documents.

In the cover letter introduce yourself and your organization. Include a brief description of your proposal (your title may be enough), the amount you are requesting, and a simple but convincing explanation of why this project is important and timely.

Refer to the goals of the grantmaker as they to apply to your project. If you know what is important to them, they'll be more open to what is important to you. Offer to answer questions and indicate how the grantmaker can contact you.

If you are applying to an out-of-state grantmaker, consider mentioning the time difference for phone calls if applicable, or closing with the personal touch of a few words about the season or the quality of life where you are located.

Always submit the cover letter on your organization's letterhead as cover letters are often separated from the full proposal.

The cover letter should:

- Describe your project in one or two sentences, including the amount of money you are requesting.
- Outline the need or define the problem as you see it, and cite one or two supporting statistics.
- Show how your problem or need complements the mission and/or goals of the funding source.
- Briefly describe your solution to the problem or need.
- Remind funders of previous contact with them (if applicable), and changes you have made based on their input.

Always have a top officer or the board chair sign the letter. You may want to sign it, too, if you have been working closely with the grantmaker.

In Summary

This series of 13 articles is meant to provide a guide for the beginning grant writer. I encourage you to consider taking additional grant writing training when it is offered, whether you are a novice or a consummate professional. There have not been significant changes in this field over the past decade; however, there have been enough interesting modifications, and new ways to present information, that it is worth spending some time learning about them. Watch for announcements on the GrantStation home page about our ongoing webinars that cover the full spectrum of grants research, grant writing, and grants management.