

**A Guide to
Proposal Writing**

**Prepared by the
Indian Studies
Support Program
(ISSP)**

This Guide to Proposal Writing was prepared by the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) Committee. It is intended to be used by anyone who is preparing a proposal, either for ISSP funding or for any other funding agency.

We cannot guarantee that your use of this guide will ensure approval of your proposal for funding. However, we hope that you find the suggestions included in this Guide useful and that they help you to create effective and successful proposals.

Table of Contents

Proposal Titles	p. 2
The Title Page	p. 2
Proposal Summary	p. 2
Table of Contents	p. 3
Introduction	p. 3
Statement of Need	p. 3
Goals and Objectives	p. 4
Methodology	p. 5
Outcomes	p. 7
Legal Status	p. 7
Detailed Budget	p. 7
Dissemination of Results	p. 8
General Remarks	p. 8

note: page numbers correspond to printed version.

1. Proposal Titles

A proposal title should be both concise and clear, and should indicate the nature of the work to be done. The proposal title should relate to the funding source, and it should focus on the outcomes to be achieved, not on the methods that will be used.

It is best to avoid words that are unimportant, including words such as “Studies on...,” “Research on the Problem of...,” or “A Proposal for...” In addition, “cute” titles and the use of acronyms and/or jargon in titles is not recommended.

It is not always necessary to list the project’s location in title.

2. The Title Page

Some funding sources will have specific requirements for what is to be included on the proposal title page. If this is the case, follow those requirements exactly. If the funding source does not have strict requirements, it is good to practice to include

- a. the title of the project;
- b. the name of organization submitting the proposal;
- c. the name of the organization to which the proposal is being submitted;
- d. start and end dates of the project;
- e. the total funds requested (optional);

- f. names, addresses, and signatures of project directors and/or officials approving submission; and
- g. the date of the proposal submission.

3. Proposal Summary

Every proposal, even a brief one, should have a well-written summary. This summary is sometimes referred to as an Executive Summary or an abstract.

Some proposal reviewers read only the summary, and many others rely on the summary to provide an overview of the project. Since the summary often provides a first and last impression, it is one of the most important elements of the proposal.

The summary should be included first in the proposal. However, it is usually best to write the summary last, when it is easiest to summarize the points made in the proposal itself.

The summary highlights the information which follows in each major section of the proposal, and describes (1) the problem or need; (2) the purposes and goals of the project; (3) who will be served; (4) methods, procedures, and program activities; (5) who will carry out the project; (6) where the project will take place; (7) the time frame for the project; (8) the background and qualifications of your staff and organization; (9) the cost of the

project (optional); and (10) the benefits of the project.

Why should a funding agency give you funding? This question should be answered in your proposal summary.

4. Table of Contents

The Table of Contents identifies the major sections of the proposal. Lengthy or detailed proposals may also include a list of tables, list of figures, or list of appendices.

In the Table of Contents list the titles of all major sections and subsections, along with the page numbers on which they begin.

5. Introduction

The introduction to the proposal begins with a statement of what is being proposed. Do not assume that your reader is familiar with the subject about which you are writing. Instead, provide sufficient detail so that the project would be clear to an uninformed person.

In the introduction, provide enough information for the reader to place your proposed project in a context. Show how your project will make a significant contribution to your community and/or address an important need. While it is important to not exaggerate, be sure to

clearly articulate the importance of your project.

It is useful to briefly describe your organizational history or project team's background, explaining why you are qualified to undertake the proposed project. This may include a discussion of the achievements and prior research, training and project implementation experience of your organization.

The introduction should conclude with an outline of the content and arrangement of the sections that follow. This conveys a sense of order and helps the reader better understand the flow of the proposal.

6. Statement of Need

Given the increasing competition for funding support, it is important that your project stand out as being particularly worthy of funding. This section can demonstrate that worthiness, and should indicate the need the project will address. The significance of the need can be shown using a variety of data and information sources.

6.1 Suggestions for this Section

1. Describe the problem and why it occurs, using appropriate statistical data and qualitative information. This description establishes the central idea that will guide the proposed project.
2. Convince the funding agency of the

importance of your project and the contribution your project will make.

3. Link prior research and experience with this project in order to demonstrate your knowledge of the field.

4. The Statement of Need should answer the following questions:

(i) What is the need?

(ii) What are the separate elements or facets of the need?

(iii) What is the extent of the need (numbers affected, rate of occurrence etc.)?

(iv) How long has the need existed?

(v) What prior attempts have been made to address or reduce the need, and what were the results of those efforts?

(vi) What other resources exist to address the need, and what is the gap between the need and available resources?

(vii) What is your organization's history as it relates to the need?

(viii) What consequences might arise if the need is not addressed?

7. Goals and Objectives

Clearly described project goals and objectives are essential in a proposal.

The project goals should describe the anticipated outcome of the project in a general way. It is not always possible to

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directly measure project goals. For example, if a proposal was being sent to an agency which funds projects dealing with special needs education, a project goal may be:

“This project will address the issue of special needs education in our school.”

Project objectives, on the other hand, are more specific than the project goals, and are usually easier to measure. For example, the objectives for the same special needs proposal might include:

“This project will aim to:

-- hire an education specialist to identify how many students in our school have special needs;

-- develop workshops for our teachers to help them understand how to assist students with special needs; and

-- design specific programs for students with special needs.”

It is important to remember that goals and objectives indicate outcomes to be achieved, not activities which will be undertaken.

Goals and objectives should be reasonable and achievable given the available resources and time available for the project.

8. Methodology

How are you going to do it?

The methodology section, one of the key aspects of a proposal, may include the following sub-sections:

8.1 Introduction

The introduction to the methodology section briefly summarizes the project's overall approach or procedures, and emphasizes any innovative or unusual techniques being proposed.

It may also explain how you will transfer what you learn to other areas with similar needs.

8.2 Program Activities

This section of the proposal describes in detail all of the activities to be undertaken, how and when the activities will be carried out, and by whom. In effect, the methods section is a description of how the project goals and objectives will be achieved.

The project methods must be justified—that is, it is important to explain why the proposed approach is appropriate.

It may be useful to organize your activities according to one of the following formats:

By Phases of Activity. Identify major project phases, outline the activities chronologically under each phase, and includes a description of each task.

In Chronological Order. For straightforward projects with a limited number of activities, include a chronological listing of tasks with a brief description each task.

Activities under Each Goal/Objective. List each objective separately, then list and describe the tasks and activities that will be implemented to achieve the objective.

Whichever format is chosen, the proposal should include:

- (1) clear and manageable steps and distinct activities;
- (2) a description of why the procedures will produce intended outcome;
- (3) a realistic time frame; and
- (4) a plan for addressing any problems which may arise.

8.3 Proposal Support

This section identifies groups or organizations who support and/or will be involved with the project implementation. It is useful to describe the nature of that support or participation, and documents from the organizations stating their support, such as BCRs, letters from language authorities, letters from schools etc., should be included in an appendix.

8.4 Staffing and Administration

This section should describe the plan for administering the project. It can include an indication of the staff people needed for the project and, if applicable, it can indicate the consultants or advisory boards to be involved in the project implementation.

In some proposals, it may be necessary to include the title of each staff member, a description of their roles and responsibilities, and the amount of time (full-time or part-time, duration of appointment) required from each project staff person.

In some cases, it may also be useful to describe the administrative structure of your organization, and to indicate the procedures which will be used for the coordination of the project.

In this section, it may also be useful to describe the qualifications of the project staff, and biographical information and/or resumes can be included in an appendix.

8.5 Work Plan / Timetable

The work plan or timetable is a useful tool for demonstrating that the proposed project activities can be completed within the time scheduled.

The work plan can also serve as a project implementation and monitoring tool, useful for evaluating the progress made.

The use of charts and graphs is often a useful method for showing the work plan in a visual way.

8.5 Evaluation

Funding agencies often require evidence of your plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The evaluation section of your proposal may present a plan to assess the extent to which the project objectives are accomplished. This plan can also serve as a guide for monitoring and modifying project activities.

Each project objective should have a related evaluative measure, which may include measurable data and details regarding how data will be gathered and analyzed.

It is useful to include in this section:

1. What is going to be evaluated.
2. What information will be collected.
3. The sources of the information.
4. Instruments/procedures for data collection, if applicable.
5. How the data will be compiled and analyzed.
6. The timelines for evaluative efforts.
7. Who will be responsible for the evaluation.
8. Plans for reporting and using results.

You may also describe how you will use evaluative data in program planning, in decision-making, and in maintaining accountability to the funding agency.

This description may include a plan to submit interim reports, final reports, or other information.

If a third party will conduct the evaluation, or if the evaluation design and procedures will be determined after the project is funded, staff time and budget allocations for this activity should be described. You should also ensure that the evaluation activities described in this section are reflected in the Work Plan/Timetable.

9. Outcomes

This section provides an opportunity for you to explain the products of your work, and to emphasize the short-term and long-term results expected from the successful completion of the project. You may indicate the benefits that will be realized by completing the project's activities and attaining the projects goals and objectives.

In addition, if the project is expected to result in indirect or long-term benefits, identify those in this section.

10. Legal Status

In any proposal, it is important to indicate the status of your organization, such as its legal standing or affiliation with another organization. It is also useful to attach copies of any documents demonstrating that your organization is in good standing, such as current licences or certificates.

11. Detailed Budget

A proposal always requires an indication of the costs associated with each project component. Many funding agencies specify the form in which budgets are to be presented and define which costs are allowable. In that case, always follow the instructions carefully, and become familiar with the funding agency's fiscal policies and regulations.

If you need help with budget development, obtain it. Also ensure that your budget is realistic and well justified.

In some cases, you may be asked by a funding agency to modify your budget (up or down). Use caution if you are asked to scale down the objectives or scope of a project to match available funds. It pays to know bottom lines and postpone or refuse projects that are fiscally doomed from the start.

In preparing your budget, indicate all potential funding sources, and indicate which of those are confirmed and unconfirmed.

11.1 Budget Justification

You may want to include a section which describes the basis for your budget estimates. For easy cross-referencing, you may simply footnote an item listed in the Budget and describe it in this section.

11.2 Plan For Future Funding

Few funders are interested in funding projects indefinitely. If your project will require funding beyond the period for which you are requesting funds, it is useful to include a plan describing how subsequent funds will be obtained.

12. Dissemination of Results

Funding agencies are showing increased interest in the distribution of information and project results so that they have a broad impact. If you have plans to share your project results with other interested organizations, you should describe those plans in the proposal. Your willingness to promote information sharing or to extend the impact of your project may be viewed favorably by funding agencies, and may increase your chances of securing funds.

The information sharing component of your project can range from informing others about a project through presentations and media strategies, to more in-depth strategies such as workshops and training manuals.

General Remarks

Generally, it is important to make your proposal clear and concise. It is crucial that you provide all of the information requested by the funding agency, but do not “pad” your proposal with unnecessary infor-

mation. Most importantly, always stay within the length limits set by the funding agency. Attach supporting documents in appendices, and make sure that your proposal is complete. Finally, it is imperative that you submit your proposal before the deadline, preferably by mail or by courier. Faxed proposals are often not accepted, and it is difficult to ensure that they are received in a complete and clear manner.

Good luck with your proposal writing.