PROPOSAL COMPONENTS
- Tips & Techniques -

A funder's guidelines will tell you what to include in a grant proposal for its organization. Most funders want the same basic information, even if they use different words or ask questions in a different order.

General Considerations --

- Don't assume the funder knows much about your subject area. Most review panels are generalists.

- Why is this work important?

- Describe the situation in both factual and human interest terms, if possible.

- Clearly explain what are you going to do. Describe the activities. Tell the funder about the project's "output"

- What project planning has already taken place? If you have already done research, secured the commitment of participants or done other initial work, be sure to describe it so the funder can see that you are well-prepared.

- Make sure that the first page acts as a stand-alone summary of the entire proposal. Assume (it's a safe assumption) that many readers will get no further than the first page.

- Show that you know about the work that others have done on the problem. This evidence may take the form of a short review as well as representative references.

It is important to answer questions about:
- *WHAT* you are proposing,
- *HOW* you plan to do it,
- *WHEN* you plan to do it,
- *HOW MUCH* it is going to cost.

Basic Proposal Composition --

The most basic composition of a proposal, as with any other written document, is simple; it needs a *beginning* (the Introduction), a *middle* (the Body of material to be presented) and an *end* (the Conclusion/Recommendation).

- The INTRODUCTION presents and summarizes the problem you intend to solve and your solution to that problem, including the benefits the reader/group will receive from the solution and the cost of that solution.

- The BODY of the proposal should explain the complete details of the solution: history of research in the field; what method will be used to do it; a schedule of activites; a budget and justification that provides a cost breakdown for the project; and a general bibliography for the project.

- The CONCLUSION should emphasize the benefits/outcomes of the work. It should be encouraging, confident and assertive in tone.

The goal of the writer is not only to persuade the reader to fund what is being requested, but also to make the reader believe that the solution is practical and appropriate. In persuasive proposal writing, the case is built by the demonstration of logic and reason in the approach taken.

Facts must lead logically and inevitably to the conclusion and/or the solution presented. Evidence should be given in a **descending order of importance**, beginning with the most important evidence.

Common Shortcomings --

Here are some of the ways in which proposals often fail:

- It is not clear what question is being addressed by the proposal. In particular, it is not clear what the outcome of the research might be, or what would constitute success or failure.

- The question being addressed is woolly or ill-formed. The committee are looking for evidence of clear thinking both in the formulation of the problem and in the planned attack on it.

- It is not clear why the question is worth addressing. The proposal must be well motivated.

- The proposal is just a routine application of known techniques. Research funding agencies are interested in funding research rather than development.

- There is no evidence that the proposers will succeed where others have failed. It is easy enough to write a proposal with an exciting-sounding wish-list of hoped-for achievements, but you must substantiate your goals with solid evidence of why you have a good chance of achieving them.

- A new idea is claimed but insufficient technical details of the idea are given for the committee to be able to judge whether it looks promising. Since the committee cannot be expert in all areas there is a danger of overwhelming them with technical details, but it is better to err by overwhelming them than by underwhelming them.

- The proposers seem unaware of related research. Related work must be mentioned, if only to be dismissed. Otherwise, the committee will think that the proposers are ignorant and, therefore, not the best group to fund.

- The proposed research has already been done - or appears to have been done. Rival solutions must be discussed and their inadequacies revealed.

- The proposal is badly presented, or incomprehensible to all but an expert in the field. Remember that your proposal will be read by non-experts as well as (hopefully) experts. A good proposal is simultaneously comprehensible to non-experts, while also convincing experts that you know your subject.

Adapted from: http://www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm
                   http://members.dca.net/areid/proposal.htm
                   http://www.research.microsoft.com/users/simonpj/papers/Proposal.html