

Proposal writing and Evaluation

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Initial questions to think about answering when looking for funding developing new projects.

- Within the field of interest, what is lacking, where is there a deficit, what is needed?
 - For research proposals, what question/hypothesis needs to be answered?
 - For applied or conservation projects, what problem will you solve?
 - -For training or meeting attendance, what will you learn?
- How can this need or question be addressed or how can you make a contribution?
- Are your answers to the above questions compatible with a particular grant or funding source?

The secret to proposal writing!

- Explain WHAT you want to do, HOW you will do it, WHY it is important, and WHEN you will know you are finished.

Components of a good grant proposal

(the following components are not written in stone, rather they are general topics that should be included or addressed in one way or another)

If the grant has a specific format, FOLLOW IT!

Title

- Should state concisely what your proposal is about.

Executive summary or abstract

- Introduces the proposal.
- States your cases clearly and strongly.
- Provided a concise summary of the project.
- Key opportunity to "sell" the proposal and get the reviewer interested in hearing more.

Introduction and/or statement of need: Explain WHAT you want to do.

- Provide more detailed background information than in the abstract/summary including prior work or research on the topic.
- Provide context for what you are proposing.
- Describe what is lacking, either in terms of scientific knowledge or conservation activity.
- Show that you are familiar with the topic at hand, competent to carry out the project, do the research, etc.
- Explain what the goals of the proposed project are.

Project description/methods: describe HOW you will accomplish the goals set out in the introduction by describing the activities of the project in detail.

- Research methods and data analysis.
- Change in management, enrichment, etc.
- Components of an educational program.
- Workshop or training to be attended.
- etc.

Significance: WHY your project is important, benefits science, wildlife conservation, etc.

- What will change as a result of you doing this work?
- For conservation projects, what will change on the ground and how will that improve wildlife conservation. Make links between project activities and conservation impact.
- For animal management projects, how will welfare, visitor experience, keeper work, etc. be improved.
- For training or workshop/meeting attendance describe why this is the best way to meet your needs.
- For research projects, what area of knowledge will be advanced, what question will be answered, what will the implications/utility of the research be?

Plan for evaluation (like an insurance policy): WHEN will you know you are successful?

- All project proposals should have a clear plan for monitoring and determining success.
- Should be ongoing throughout the project, not just at the end. Allows adjustment of project activities as project progresses if things are not going in the right direction.
- Must be quantifiable and objective, usually in the examines whether specific outputs and outcomes are being achieved on schedule.

Specific outputs and outcomes: what will be different as a result of the project.

- Tangible products of the project (outputs).
 - Number of people trained.
 - Number of km of transects walked.
 - Number of hours of training; certification achieved.
 - Exhibit furniture built.
 - Reports produced and papers published.
- Benefits accrued by the project (outcomes): what has changed?
 - Reduced rates of hunting.
 - Increase in time animal spends active.
 - Reduction in frequency of stereotypic behaviors.
 - Behaviors learned by an animal as a result of training.
 - Measurable increase in understanding of a scientific phenomenon.

Budget: clearly present how much money you need and justify your request if necessary.

- Give enough detail so it is clear what you will spend the money on, but don't go overboard.
- In general it is best to show the budget for the entire project, not just what you are applying for in this particular proposal: prevents unanswered questions.
- Show other sources of support, whether received or applied for: demonstrates either that the project has already been vetted by another organization, or that you are not relying solely on the grant at hand for support.
- Consider seeking matching funds from your institution to make the proposal more attractive to the granting organization.

Applicant information

- Personal information.
 - Include a CV/resume unless format or application does not allow you to.
 - Tailor your CV/resume to the grant. Don't just send in the most recent CV/resume on your computer.
 - Include only relevant experience.
- Organizational information: If given the opportunity, describe your institution and how your institution contributes to the project.
 - Describe how the proposed project fits into the overall mission of your institution.

Other tips

- You are trying to “sell” your proposal. Know who your audience is and make the proposal attractive to them.
- Avoid sending pre-existing versions of a proposal: cater your proposal to the criteria that will be used to evaluate it.
- Include appropriate supporting documents such as letters or recommendation, CV, letters of support, evidence of other financial support, etc.
- Proofread your proposal, use spell check, check the word count, etc. Use correct grammars, avoid misspellnigs, use correct cApitalization, etc.
- Have other people read the proposal. Both people familiar with the topic and people who aren't.
- Make sure you follow the application instructions *precisely*.
- Do everything you can to make your proposal easy to read: font, font size, formatting of paragraphs, use of sub-headings, etc. Keep it simple!

And remember...

- All grants are highly competitive. Even well thought out, well written, important proposals don't always get funding.
- Although grant review processes strive to be as fair and objective as possible, some element of randomness, bias and luck will always be present.
- There are lots of grants out there.

Grant/proposal evaluation criteria

Basic questions asked when evaluating a proposal

- Did the applicant follow the applications instructions exactly?
- Does the proposal fit with the focus area of the grant and/or institutional priorities?
- How important is the project?
- How realistic is the project?
- Are the objectives of the project clear and is there a mechanism to ensure they are met?
- Is the person applying to the grant competent to carry out the project?
- Is the budget justified?
- How interesting or compelling is the proposal?

What sort of projects do we want to support?

- Area of focus.
 - Species focus?
 - Method focus?
 - Applicant focus?
- Is the proposal appropriate for grant's area of interest?

How important is the project?

- Is the conservation/scientific/management significance of this project sufficient to warrant funding?
- What species are targeted? Are they endangered?
- Does the project benefit more people than just the applicant?
- Does the project do something that could be applied to other zoos/species/individuals?
- Are the hypotheses of broad or significance?
- Is the work new or cutting edge?

How realistic is the project?

- Is the methodology/experimental design for this project appropriate and clear?
- Is there sufficient time to complete the project within the life of the grant?
- Does the project include all the relevant partners necessary for success?
- Are there obstacles to success that the proposal does not take into account?
- Are the objectives of the project clear and appropriate? Is there a mechanism to ensure they are met?

Does the project team have the skills and expertise to execute this project?

- What are the qualifications of those involved?
- What institutional support do they have?
- Are appropriate partners included?

Is the budget for this project appropriate?

- Even if this is a good project, is the applicant asking for money for less important aspects of the work?
- Are budget items justified?
 - Is the applicant requesting funds for items that are not essential to the completion of the project (e.g., cameras, new laptops).
- Are the amounts requested reasonable for the line items in the budget?
- Is the budget within the capacity of the grant to support?
- Does the budget include funding not yet received from other sources? Is this other support crucial for successful completion of the project? Is the applicant likely to receive these other funds?

How interesting or compelling is the proposal?

- Critical need addressed?
- Public relations potential?
- Potential for long-term support from your institution?
- Potential for collaboration beyond the current proposal?

Some grant/proposal resources

- Proposal writing guides:
 - Miner & Miner, A Guide to Proposal Planning and Writing:
<http://web.wm.edu/grants/PROP/miner.pdf?svr=www>
 - National Science Foundation: A Guide for Proposal Writing,
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2004/nsf04016/nsf04016.pdf>
 - Potential sources of grant funding
 - Grant Lists:
 - AZA grant list: <http://www.aza.org/conservation-funding-sources/>
 - African Conservation Foundation grants list:
<http://www.africanconservation.org/cgi-bin/dcforum/dcboard.cgi?az=list&forum=DCForum1D28>
 - Neotropical grant list:
<http://wildlife.wisc.edu/simbiota/s-list.htm>
 - Tropical Ecology grant list:
<http://www.antiochne.edu/centerfortropicalecology/support/grants/>
- Grants:
- AAZK (Professional Development, Conservation and Research Grants):
<http://aazk.org/our-mission/grants>
 - AZA Training Scholarships:
<http://www.aza.org/scholarships/>
 - Conservation Endowment Fund:
<http://www.aza.org/ConScience/CEFInformation/>
 - International Primatological Society (several different grants):
<http://www.internationalprimatologicalsociety.org/funding.cfm>
 - National Geographic Conservation Trust:
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/field/grants-programs/conservation-trust.htm>
 - SICB travel/research:
<http://www.sicb.org/grants/researchgrant.php3>
 - Primate Conservation Inc:
http://www.primate.org/grant_in.htm
 - American Society of Primatology:
<http://www.asp.org/grants/index.html>
 - Explorer's Club:
<http://www.explorers.org/resources/funding/funding.php>
 - WWF:
<http://www.worldwildlife.org/efn/fellowships.cfm>