

How to Write a Grant Proposal: A Step-By-Step Guide

The human mind is capable of real wonders. Wild, abrupt realizations can lead to life-changing ideas that, with time and proper analysis, become long-term projects. Yet, most such projects require significant funding, and if you don't have the necessary resources, you have to go get them.

One way of financing a project is with a grant. To get a grant, you need to properly present your project, and all the good it's capable of doing, to a funding organization. For this, you need to draft a grant proposal.

In this article, we'll walk you through all you need to know about when to write a grant proposal and what a proposal could look like. We'll also show you how to go about writing a proposal that gives you the best chances of getting funding.

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What is a grant proposal?

Put simply, a grant proposal is a document you submit to an organization with the purpose of securing funding for a project. The organization could be a government agency, corporation, company, or foundation.

Institutions give billions of dollars each year for projects that are in line with their activities and causes. It's up to you to convince the grantors that you deserve their financial support. The stakes are high, and the competition is tough.

Writing a proposal requires careful preparation and a deep understanding of your project. To craft an effective proposal, you need to understand that the process involves more than just requesting financing. You need to successfully convince the grantor of the merits of your project—the problems it will solve and the benefits it will bring.

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So, what does a grant proposal look like? The format varies across disciplines and industries, and can range from a simple letter to a detailed document or set of documents. Most grantors will tell you what they expect to see, and researching this information will be the first step to preparing your proposal.

When do you need a grant proposal?

You should only consider applying for a grant when you have a specific need to fill. Simply needing funding for your organization's operations won't cut it. You should be working on a specific project that promises to solve a problem or provide value to certain people or communities.

Grant proposals take up a lot of time and resources, so you need a clear vision and direction to make the task worth your while. You also need a strong sense of

purpose to stay ahead of countless other applicants who are trying to get the same financial support.

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Applying for a grant makes sense in the following situations:

- When you have a project that's impossible to complete with your current resources. Grants are especially suited to ambitious and costly undertakings that will help a lot of people.
- When you're a non-profit unable to pay back the cost of a social project such as building infrastructure that will benefit the general public, carrying out work that addresses problems on a local or national level, and performing academic research.
- When you have a project that will need sustained funding. You earn prestige, credibility, and publicity when you win a grant. These distinctions open up other opportunities for receiving financial support further down the line from private institutions and governmental agencies.

Which businesses can benefit from grants?

Before you invest time and energy in writing a proposal, you should first determine if the grant is attainable. Eligibility requirements differ across grantors, and some sectors have more opportunities than others.

Generally speaking, the following types of enterprises and organizations can benefit from a grant:

Small businesses

Governmental bodies like the [US Department of Commerce](#) and the [European Innovation Council](#) provide small business grants to encourage innovation and promote overall economic growth. Some private companies, too, support small businesses as a way to bolster their corporate social responsibility (CSR) portfolio, which then helps boost their brand image, sales, and stock prices.

Research institutions

Scientists and academics change the world with their groundbreaking theories, but even their best ideas are useless if they can't be put to the test. This is where research comes in—an endeavor that's every bit as costly as it is crucial.

Are you working on a project that aims to promote climate-resilient food systems? Perhaps you're doing applied research in patient safety? Two examples of funding sources are the [International Development Research Centre](#) and the [American Research Institute](#).

Pharma companies

Governments fund biomedical research that makes the development of new drugs possible. This provides pharmaceutical companies with an incentive to develop treatments for rare diseases. Grants are also crucial for speeding up the discovery of treatments for particularly widespread or dangerous diseases.

Construction companies

Although construction businesses are generally profitable, they deal with enormous expenses that are hard to cover. Governments can provide funding to help businesses take off or tide over the massive costs of ambitious projects.

Utility services and alternative energy

The recent explosion of action on climate change means that governments are pouring significant funding into the utility sector to support clean-energy initiatives. Grants such as those provided by the [US Department of Energy](#) are often used to cover the costs of systems or equipment, support the commercialization of a project, and subsidize research and development.

Non-profit organizations

Grantors provide funding for projects with a distinct purpose that matches their own agenda and causes. They may focus on a specific segment of the population (such as the elderly and children) or type of cause (such as animal and environmental protection). Grants help make large-scale projects with significant social impact possible.

Companies that want to expand their area of operations

Grants are available if you're looking to expand your company. Unlike a loan, a grant won't tie you up with liability or damage your business credit score. The funding, however, does come with restrictions: you can only spend the money as outlined by the grantor. You may receive a penalty if you fail to follow through.

Real-life scenarios that call for a grant proposal



Now let's take a look at how grants have helped advance projects and made a difference in the world.

Medical research

Governments and private institutions are only too willing to fund medical research. After all, society stands to reap the rewards. This reality has been made even clearer by the COVID-19 pandemic, since the health crisis has not only taken lives but has also wreaked havoc with the global economy. COVID-19-related research is a top priority for all nations, and funding for it has now exceeded **\$21.7 trillion**.

Scientific discoveries

One essential aim of scientific research is to advance the public good. Hence, the discipline will always have the support of grantors.

Larry Page and Sergey Brin started working on a search engine called Backrub as part of their academic research at Stanford University. The project was an offshoot of the Stanford Integrated Digital Library Project, which received **\$4.5 million in grants** from the National Science Foundation (NSF). Backrub later evolved to become Google.

Ubiquitous technologies like semiconductors and touchscreens also had their early beginnings in grant-funded research.

Archaeological research is another example of a sector that gets government support. The Archeological Institute of America evaluates **grant applications** from experienced archaeologists every year.

Infrastructure

Over a hundred years ago, the Overland Route, the first transcontinental railroad in North America, was built by three private companies with the support of US land grants. Today, governments are funding infrastructure that connects important hubs in a different way.

Just like railroads, fiber-optic cables support trade and connect workers to their jobs, albeit virtually. Broadband infrastructure companies like the **Appalachian Valley Fiber Network** and **BlueBird Media** have both received significant support from the US government.

Non-profit programs

Dahan-e-Qalacha Middle School, a rural school in the Bamyān Province of Afghanistan, provides a proper venue for students to receive their education. The young learners no longer have to take their classes under the shade of a tree, in

a tent, or in a private residence. The project was made possible by grants implemented by the Afghan Ministry of Education.

Habitat for Humanity, a US non-governmental and nonprofit organization, relies on grants from family and corporate foundations to sustain projects that aim to provide families with affordable homeownership and repairs. The non-profit organization works actively in 70 different countries, including Nepal, Bangladesh, the United States, and Australia.

Types of grant proposals

Grant proposals differ in structure depending on the type of funding you need and your specific area of study or industry.

Education

Both educators and students can write education grant proposals. Educators can apply for school funding that will help them acquire some much-needed teaching supplies, while students can reach out to private organizations for grants based on needs and merit. Students can also prepare a grant proposal for education programs geared toward a particular course of study.

Writing an educational grant is a complex process that only highly motivated students and educators can complete.

Government

Governmental bodies support projects that serve the greater good. They fund initiatives that directly provide public services or indirectly benefit people by

stimulating the economy. Grants are also offered to programs that revolutionize the way we do things.

While grants are not loans that need to be paid back, governments sometimes make an arrangement where the grantees are expected to share their revenues when a discovery begins to generate profit.

Effective government grant writing involves effective communication of a project's greater purpose. The scope isn't limited to underprivileged communities or marginalized sectors—you can also get funding for initiatives that aim to take people's quality of life to the next level. Maybe you have what it takes to commercialize flying cars? Write government grants that are as astounding as they are convincing.

Non-profit

A non-profit grant proposal is crucial to any charitable organization's fundraising strategy. A grant can fuel large-scale projects and sustainable development goals. Although writing a grant proposal for a non-profit organization is extremely challenging, successfully securing funding for a worthwhile cause is a truly rewarding experience.

Research

Scientists, medical professionals, and academics need grants to complete their research and publish papers that will take their careers to the next level. More importantly, research grant proposals sow the seeds of scientific discoveries that contribute to the advancement of society.

Although private institutions and government agencies recognize the importance of research, **public funding levels are seeing a decline**. This adds another layer of difficulty to the already challenging process of writing a research grant proposal.

Grant proposal format

Grantors generally provide their own detailed guidelines on the expected format for a grant proposal. Whatever you do, be sure to follow them and include all the requested material. You should also closely study the grantor's mission and purpose to ensure your messaging aligns with what matters to them.

Here, we'll give a general overview of the main sections that most grantors will require and how you can make them more persuasive.

Executive summary

This section lets the reader know what to expect from your grant proposal. Sometimes called an abstract or a short overview, your executive summary must be able to explain the key elements of your proposal in one concise paragraph. You can stretch it to at least a full page if you're dealing with a long proposal.

Although the abstract comes first in your proposal, it's actually best to write this section last. After all, it's a summary of the whole document, and you can only clarify the main ideas once you've laid them all out.

An effective abstract will generally answer the following questions, although the guidelines for your particular application may be more specific:

- What's the purpose or objective of your project, and which problems or needs are you addressing?

- What results do you envision for your project, and how do you plan to make them happen?
- How will you measure the outcome or define the success of your project?
- How does your project stand out from other initiatives? Why is it important?
- Who are you, and what do you stand for?

Check whether your granting institution needs you to state the kind of support or amount of funding you're expecting in your executive summary.

Statement of the problem

Your project is only as important as the issue it's resolving. The issue may be a pressing need for resources or services, a knowledge gap, or unmet opportunities. Use this statement section to emphasize the difference your project can make. Provide ample context by answering questions such as:

- What is the background of the problem?
- Who will benefit from the project?
- Which locations will be impacted?

Provide data where appropriate and prepare a literature review that demonstrates you've studied the topic extensively.

Description of your project

It's time to lay out the objectives and methodology of your project. Sometimes called a project narrative, your description section should answer the following questions:

- What are the goals of your research or project?
- What outcomes do you expect?
- How do you plan to achieve your project goals?

- How will you measure or verify the outcomes of your project?
- How will you determine whether the project is actually solving the problem you've identified?
- What's the timeline for your project?

Use this section to highlight the impact you intend to create with your project. Don't just put together goals that may seem unattainable: balance big-picture thinking with an awareness of practicalities. Show that your objectives are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) and that you've devised ways to measure their success.

Budget

You need to be clear about the budget or resources you're asking for. How much or what exactly do you need? How do you plan to spend the money or use the resources? Prepare clearly labeled figures and properly formatted tables, and explain why each cost or supply is vital to completing your project.

Other sections

Some grant application sections are not always required but may be requested by your target organization.

Cover letter

A cover letter lets you introduce yourself or your organization, talk about your beliefs and aspirations, showcase your professionalism, and introduce your project and convey your passion for its purpose. In your letter, don't forget to thank the reader for taking the time to read and consider your proposal.

Organization's qualification

You may be required to add a section showing that your organization can walk the talk. Use it to describe your organization's function, nature, mission, and purpose. You can place this section near the statement of the problem.

Supporting documents

You can use an appendix section to include supporting documents such as personnel bios, letters of support, and other records. Make sure that whatever you attach is relevant to your proposal. The last thing you want is to confuse or annoy your reader.

Now that you're familiar with the main sections, it's time to learn how to write a grant proposal.

Create a grant proposal that grants



Learning how to write a proposal for funding can be greatly rewarding, but be prepared for plenty of rejections. You've probably heard the likes of [Kylie Ball](#) talk about bagging more than \$25 million in grant funding, but success stories like this are exceptional. Even Ball admits to getting twice as many rejections as wins.

So how do you write a grant proposal that gives you the best chance of securing funding? The first step is to find the best grantor to fit your needs. Once you've done that, speak with your peers and check with former grant recipients and the funding agency. You should learn as much as you can about what an effective proposal might look like.

While every grantor has specific guidelines and formatting requirements, some tips apply across the board. The following grant proposal writing steps will set you off on the right track.

Step 1: Set the stage with a strong cover letter

Your cover letter provides you with an opportunity to stand out from the crowd and leave a strong impression. Aim to capture the reader's attention and make it stick. Early on, the funder should already have a good idea of what it is you're asking for and what you have to offer in return.

These tips will help you write an effective grant proposal cover letter:

- **Get straight to the point, but don't be overly formal.** The goal is to make it short and sweet.
- **Avoid repeating information that's already in the proposal.** Your cover letter is not a recap of key points but an opportunity to connect with the funder on a different level.

- **Connect your agenda with the funder's key values and mission.** Show the reader that you fully understand their requirements. It helps to borrow certain keywords from the organization's call for proposals and use them throughout the document.

Not sure where to start? Follow these steps to complete your cover letter:

- **Use a formal header.** Start with a formal header, which begins with your contact information, followed by the date the proposal is sent. The header should also include the recipient's contact information.
- **Introduce your organization.** A quick backgrounder about your organization will put your proposal into context. State your institution's title, how long it's existed, and its purpose and values. Be thorough, but make it brief. Keep in mind that you're seeking funding for a specific project, not your organization as a whole.
- **Explain the purpose of your project.** Use the main section of the letter to discuss the purpose of your project. Paint a picture of what your organization wants to accomplish with the funding you'll receive.
- **Justify why you need funding.** Explain the reasons you're seeking funding. Mention the amount you need and how you plan to spend it.
- **Wind up with a formal closing statement.** End your letter with a quick summary of the project and its benefits. Make sure you thank the funder for considering your proposal.

Step 2. Write a short executive summary

Your application should usually begin with a summary of its contents. Quickly introduce the main points of your grant proposal, including the project's objectives,

beneficiaries, key parameters for success, and value proposition. Mention the funds or resources you're seeking and how you plan to use them.

Bear these tips in mind when writing your executive summary:

- **Keep this section short and crisp**, with just the right amount of detail to get the reader interested and informed. At this point, the funder should already have a solid understanding of what your project is about and how they can help you.
- **Avoid addressing the reader directly.** You're no longer writing the cover letter.
- **Adopt a formal tone** as soon as you start writing the grant proposal itself.
- **Refrain from rambling.** Avoid mentioning details that you can easily cover in later parts of the document.

Step 3. Introduce your organization

Although the grantor will be funding your project, not your organization, you should still be able to sell yourself. You need to convince the funders that your institution is capable of honoring its obligations.

Here are some helpful tips:

- **Cover all the relevant points.** Devote a section of your proposal to presenting your organization's track record, mission and vision, and the background of its key staff. Effectively communicate your key competencies and values.
- **Back up your claims.** Include client recommendations, feedback, and letters of thanks that support your points. Industry certifications, licenses, and other similar documents can also help solidify your argument. In some cases, you

may be required to furnish solvency statements to prove your organization can meet its financial commitments.

- **Avoid inflating your organization's credentials.** Stick to the facts and don't get bogged down in unnecessary details.

Step 4. Define the problem

Also called a "statement of need" or "needs statement," your problem statement is where you explain the issue you're resolving or the need you're trying to meet.

Allow these tips to guide you:

- **Show your grasp of the context.** Conduct extensive research so you can show a deep understanding of the problem and its context. This will help you dig up past solutions that did not work and explain why yours will fare better. You can also cite data that prove the viability of your proposed project.
- **Add a call to action.** Emphasize the urgency of the project and the advantages of implementing it sooner.
- **Stay on topic.** To make your statement effective, avoid getting sidetracked by other issues connected to your main problem. Present your argument with clarity.
- **Focus on who stands to gain.** Make sure you're keeping the project beneficiaries—not you or your organization—at the center of your discussion.

Step 5. Clearly state your goals and objectives

Grantors care about results, and this is your chance to show them what you intend to deliver. Many proposals are rejected because they bungle this part. Avoid the same mistake by being very clear about your goals and objectives.

Make sure that you:

- **State your desired outcomes and measures of success.**
- **Show your worth.** Demonstrate how the project will benefit the grantors, your target community, and the general public. Show the funders that it's worth their investment.
- **Know the difference between goals and objectives.** Goals are broad statements while objectives delve into the specifics. As mentioned above, your objectives must be expressed in SMART terms. That is, they should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

Step 6. Explain your methodologies

It's time to show the grantors how you plan to achieve your goals and objectives.

Here are some tips to help you:

- **Demonstrate your project management skills** by laying out methods and strategies complete with detailed requirements, deliverables, and task assignments and schedules.
- **Tie it all together.** Make sure you don't get too engrossed in the details that you lose sight of your objectives and problem statement. Always connect your methodologies to your bottom line.
- **Support your choices.** Wherever possible, cite previous projects that succeeded using the same methods.
- **Show common sense.** Show that your way of doing things is cost-effective, well-researched, and rational.

Step 7. Prepare to track progress with process evaluation

Grantors need to know they're providing funding to the right beneficiaries and that their investments are making a real difference. Hence, process evaluation is a

crucial part of your proposal. This section explains how you intend to track and evaluate your progress. The plan should include details on the timeframe, assigned personnel, skills, and costs.

Evaluation can be complex and resource-intensive, so make sure you have your project management skills and tools handy.

Step 8. Demonstrate sustainability

Grantors are interested in pouring resources into initiatives that make a lasting impact. Be ready to demonstrate the longevity of your project.

Get this part done with the following helpful tips.

- **Use this section to request funding that extends beyond the project.** Ask for resources that will help you with ongoing maintenance and daily operations. It's best to plan for at least the next five years.
- **Be comprehensive.** Take into account inflation, future growth, and end-of-project decommissioning costs.
- **Mention any other funding sources** that may help you sustain your long-term plans.
- **Make sure your sustainability blueprint is expertly prepared.** Keep in mind that your grant proposal will be studied by decision-makers who have extensive experience in the field.

Step 9. Prepare a budget

You're asking for funding, so budgeting will be a key part of your proposal. You need to provide a detailed account of how you'll spend the money. What's more, you can't just add figures as you please. A high quote can create the impression that you're overcharging and profiteering and won't win you any grants. On the

other hand, underquoting can result in failure to deliver on the project you were proposing.

Some grant applicants underquote to get their feet in the door, then just hustle for more funding later on in the project. Even if this can work, you risk damaging your brand's reputation and community standing. Always play by the rules—don't underquote and hustle later.

Be meticulous with your budget. Double-check your figures to the last zero and decimal point, and ask for assistance or assemble a team if you need help with the math.

Grant proposal writing services

If you don't have the time, knowledge, and resources to write a grant proposal, some companies and freelancers can do it for you. Still, this option means that you'll have to go through the delicate process of making sure that your writer fully understands the value your project brings. Moreover, you need to find grant writers who can clearly express your message and tailor your proposal to different grant organizations.

You can also streamline grant proposal writing using document automation software. Whatever your sector or the kind of grant you're looking for, you'll likely be applying to several places to improve your chances of success. Document management software like AXDRAFT can help you put together workflows to create tailored proposals in a matter of minutes, adapt them to different needs, and avoid mistakes in wording and data.

Learn more about how [AXDRAFT CLM](#) can assist you with your grant proposal writing. You may also [try a demo](#) to see how the document management software works.

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