

Grant Writing Tips for MES Students

Components of Grant Proposals

Outreach Programs/Community Development/Social Change

Need/Problem Statement	What is the problem or need you want to fix? Why is it significant? What are the broad impacts? For instance, pet waste. Don't just tell your potential funder it's smelly, ruins your shoes, and everyone hates it. Talk about its impact on the environment. What role does it play in fish kills, human intestinal illnesses, reducing native vegetation?
Goals and Objectives	What do you hope your grant will change? What are your expected outcomes? Are they measurable? A goal is a broad statement of purpose. An objective is a specific, measurable outcome. Goal: Our goal is to eliminate the unnecessary environmental damage that results from improper pet waste disposal in the city of Olympia. Objective: As a result of our efforts, by December 2014 we will speak in-person with 5,000 Olympia pet owners and provide them with written information about proper pet waste disposal.
Project Design and Activities	What specific activities do you propose to fix the problem or address the need? What makes you think this will work? Do you have any research or past practice to back you up? Be specific about each component. Don't just tell people you're going educate the public; tell them you'll hold 17 workshops, staff tables at 9 community fairs (and what they are and how many attend them), start an ad campaign using public service announcements, and put signs up in parks. You may be asked to include a management plan and timeline. Be specific about who is responsible for which activities, as room allows. Tables are effective for presenting this kind of information.
Qualifications	What in the background of the individuals or the organizations uniquely qualifies them to do this project? If you've got the city park's department, the animal shelter, the Humane Society, and the local Mothers Concerned for the Environment association, say what strengths, networks, and experiences each will bring to the initiative. If you've got a project director or other key staff, describe why they are qualified. Include resumes if asked.
Evaluation	What will you do to see if your project is successful? How will you know it's working? Evaluation can and usually should occur both during and at the end of the project. Have a plan for using evaluation data to make mid-course corrections. If you need to, request money to conduct an evaluation.
Dissemination	What will you do with what you've learned? How will you let others know? Can you encourage other organizations or communities to take up similar projects? How? Web sites? Professional conferences? Published papers? Media?
Budget	Be specific and reasonable in requesting costs. Provide details about each budget item. Broad categories may include: Salaries/wages and benefits; office operations (phone, copier, etc.); equipment; goods (supplies) and services; contractor costs; travel; and sometimes indirect (overhead) costs.

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Research/Scientific Proposals

Research question and its significance	What specific research question(s) are you trying to answer and why is it significant — i.e., what broader implications might there be that could be illuminated by knowledge of this kind?
Activities and research on which current project builds	What research and study has gone before that will inform the work? How are you building on existing knowledge instead of reinventing the wheel?
Proposed methods and activities of current project	What specifically will you collect, observe, measure? What are your research protocols? Is there anything innovative in your research approach? Are there any ethical considerations to address?
Experience and capacity of principal investigator(s)	What qualifies the principal investigator(s) to do this project? Describe past experiences, education, access to resources, etc.
Evaluation	How will you evaluate the success of the project? What factors contributed to its successes and/or failures? What steps did you take when faced with problems?
Dissemination	How will you disseminate the actual findings of your project?
Budget	Be specific and reasonable in requesting costs. Provide details about each budget item. Broad categories may include: Salaries/wages and benefits; office operations; equipment; goods (supplies, consumables) and services; contractor costs; travel; and sometimes indirect (overhead) costs.

Characteristics of Successful Proposals

Successful proposals:

- Follow directions.
- Are relevant and significant. (Content trumps everything. The best writing in the world can't make a bad idea better.)
- Are clear (linear), explain all technical terms, avoid jargon, and use plain English.
- Are succinct.
- Have reasonable (though not necessarily small) budgets.
- Are based in facts and research.
- Avoid overt, manipulative (and empty) appeals to emotion.
- Frequently partner two or more organizations.
- Have an internal logic:

Need ⇨ Goals and Objectives ⇨ Activities ⇨ Evaluation

Goals and objectives address the needs identified; activities are designed to meet those goals and objectives; evaluation measures the success of the activities in meeting goals and objectives, thus closing the circle by showing progress in meeting the needs.

- Tell a good story

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Types of Proposals

Letter Proposals

Some grant applications can be as simple as a letter. I recommend not more than two to three pages in such cases, unless a funder provides a higher limit. These proposals need not have the depth of a full application, but they should cover the same ground in a condensed fashion. Letter proposals usually are for smaller amounts — \$25,000 or less.

Letter of Inquiry/Letter of Intent

You may be asked to submit a letter of inquiry or a letter of intent prior to submitting a full application. A letter of inquiry asks a funder if it is interested in receiving an application from you for a specific project. It then goes on to summarize the project in much the same way as a letter proposal. A letter of intent meets a funder's requirement that it be notified in advance by a certain deadline of your intention to submit a proposal for an upcoming competition; letters of intent can take many formats, from a simple paragraph to a full summary of the proposal. Both should be concise and follow any guidelines provided by the funder.

Full Proposals

Full proposals are lengthier documents, often with prescribed forms. Each funder will have its own requirements. In general, full proposals give you more room to develop the plans for your proposed project. Again, follow the guidelines of the funder and provide all the information requested.

Some things to remember:

Initial contact: Be sure you find out what kind of initial contact a funding organization accepts. Some want letters of inquiry first; some want letter applications or full applications first. Others want you to call them to inquire before sending mail. Other simply will not accept unsolicited proposal. The Foundation Center online directory provides initial contact protocols for all organizations in their listings.

Always craft your application to give the organization exactly what they want in the order that they want it. Generally, it's a good idea not to give them more than they ask for; it frequently doesn't help and it can hurt your chances.

Pay close attention to format requirements (numbers of pages, line spacing, font sizes, page margins). These requirements are almost always firm in a funder's mind, and if you don't follow them, you've provided a very convenient way for them to eliminate you from their pool *before* they've read your application. If a funder doesn't provide specific formats, a safe approach is 1" margins all around, single spacing with a line between paragraphs, 12 point type in Arial or Times New Roman.

Have an outside person, someone unfamiliar with your project, read your proposal. See if it makes sense to them. Does it say what it needs to in plain English? Does it provide enough detail without overwhelming the reader? Does the prose flow smoothly?

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Resources:

Some Books

Jane C. Geever. 2007. *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing*. 5th ed. New York: Foundation Center.

Susan Howlett and Renee Bourque. 2011. *Getting Funded: The Complete Guide to Writing Grant Proposals*. 5th edition. Seattle: Word and Raby.

Some Web Sites

Earthplatform.com — a list of organizations that support environmental nonprofit activities and programs	www.earthplatform.com/environmental/grants
The Foundation Center — an all-purpose site to find funding organizations and get technical expertise; you can use parts of it for free, but you get more with membership	foundationcenter.org
The Foundation Directory Online — the Foundation Center's database and powerful search engine that allows you to search for grants and grant makers across the nation.	To use the college's subscription, visit the library and ask a reference librarian.
EPA Grant Writing Tips — good tips whether you're writing an EPA grant or not	www.epa.gov/ogd/recipient/tips.htm
M. J. Murdock Charitable Trust — "Great Grant Writing" brochure from a local philanthropy	www.murdock-trust.org/murdock-documents/resources/studies/great_grant_writing.pdf
Grants.gov — the place to find information about almost all federal grant competitions, and increasingly the portal through which to apply for federal funds	www.grants.gov
National Science Foundation — home page for NSF funding opportunities	www.nsf.gov/funding
Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal — a brief and good how-to manual	www.learnerassociates.net/proposal/index.htm
Puget Sound Grantwriters Association — a regional network of grant writers; consider joining if you stay in this business — it's generally worth the \$85/year	www.grantwriters.org
Philanthropy Northwest — an organization of northwest grant makers; the PNW uniform grant application form is frequently required from foundations in the region	http://www.philanthropynw.org/s_pnw/index.asp

People

The fabulous reference librarians at most any library, including Evergreen's. They can help direct you to many more resources on grant writing.