

Going for the Gold: Editing Grant Proposals

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Overview

- Introduction
- What is a Grant Proposal?
- Anatomy of a Grant Proposal
- The Proposal Writing and Editing Process
- Copyediting Issues with Grant Proposals
- Q&A



Pet Peeve!

- No one actually “writes a grant.”
- A *grant* is the actual agreement that awards funding.
- We write a *proposal* for a grant.
- But the terms “grant writer” and “grant editor” are now commonly used and accepted. Our language is always changing!



What is a Grant Proposal?

- Seeking funding for organization or program to carry out activities to benefit society
- Grant proposals are mostly submitted to:
 - government agencies (federal, state, county, city)
 - foundations (private, family, community, corporate)
 - multinational organizations
- Grant proposals have some similarities to other types of “bidding” in the for-profit world



What Do Grant Proposals Look Like?

- **Letter of inquiry** or letter of interest (1-5 pages)
- **Short proposal** to foundation (5-7 pages)
- **Long proposal** to foundation (20-25 pages)
- **Major** government agency proposal (50+ pages)
- **Nightmare** government agency proposal (100-200+ pages)



Anatomy of a Grant Proposal

- Executive Summary (Abstract, Project Summary)
- Project Narrative (Technical Proposal)
- Project Budget and Budget Narrative (Cost Proposal)
- Appendices (Attachments)
 - Organizational background
 - Biographical sketches and CVs
 - Financial/legal documentation
 - Letters of support/letters of collaboration
 - Implementation plan or workplan
 - Monitoring & evaluation plan / logic model
 - Past projects/past performance references
 - Program-specific information



General Structure of a Project Narrative

- Executive Summary
- Need or Problem Statement
- Solution or Approach
 - Goals, objectives, and planned activities
- Evaluation: Measuring results and impact
- Organization and Personnel
- Budget



Proposal Preparation Process

- Pre-proposal preparation
 - interaction with funder, assessing competition, “capture” planning, making a go/no go decision
- Proposal Kickoff
 - develop overall messaging and “win themes,” make proposal assignments
- Writing and review of drafts (pink, red, gold)
- Copyediting
- Proofreading and Final Production



Value of Copyediting to Proposal Process

- Improves writing, flow, ease of reading
- Reinforces compliance with proposal instructions and evaluation criteria
- Ensures an external perspective
- Forces a defined step in process that lessens possibility of delays or last-minute rushes



Who Reads Grant Proposals?

- Nearly every proposal is reviewed by some type of evaluation panel (reviewers, peer panel, board)
- Sometimes an individual program officer reviews
- Evaluation criteria are almost always provided in the proposal instructions
- Reviewers complete a review form that is based on the evaluation criteria



The Reviewer = The Key Audience

- Make it clear and easy for the reviewer!
- Remember the 12 – 12 – 12* scenario:
 - It's **12 midnight**.
 - The reviewer has been reading proposals for **12 hours**.
 - Yours is his/her **12th proposal** to read.

* Richardson, Kimberly, *The Official Federal Grants Prep Guide*, 2013.



Copyediting for Proposals #1: What kind of editing am I doing?

- Light: Ensure general adherence to proposal format instructions
- Medium: Assess proposal clarity/depth re: evaluation criteria
- Heavy: Suggest improvements to respond better to criteria
- Developmental: Coaching writers through drafts



Copyediting for Proposals #2: What style guide do I use?

- **Funder's Specific Instructions for Program** (RFP, RFA, FOA, "grant application")
 - Font type and size, margins, graphics
 - Page limits
 - Order and presentation of content
- General funder-specific guides
 - Examples: NSF Grant Proposal Guide, NIH SF 424 Guide
- Then:
 - House style guide
 - Common style guide: Chicago, APA, etc.



Copyediting for Proposals #3: First or Third Person?

- Third person: “Lincoln Educational Center will...”
 - Pros: subliminal reminder of the organization; clear
 - Cons: takes up more letters; can be impersonal
- First person: “We will...”
 - Pros: more personal, impassioned, collaborative
 - Cons: can be vague; other proposals will use it too



Copyediting for Proposals #4: Working with multiple writers

- “One voicing” the combined proposal
 - Encourage use of proposal templates, style sheets
 - Ensure consistency in sentence structure, word/sentence length, first/third person use
- Queries to writers
 - Focus on comments/questions from the reviewer’s (=reader’s) perspective
 - Make constructive suggestions
 - Reinforce importance of consistency



Copyediting for Proposals #5: Style, Word Choice, Tense

- Active > passive (“we will train...”)
- Specific > general (“20 fifth-grade students”)
- Fewer and simpler words > lengthy and complex
 - Be careful about jargon and excessive use of terminology (who is the reviewer?)
- Future tense > conditional (“we will...”)
- Tone: collaborative, confident, authoritative



Copyediting for Proposals #6: Correlation of Parts

Accuracy and consistency of:

- Proposal narrative and budget
- Headings and subheadings
- Narrative references to attachments/appendices
- Consistency of page formatting



Copyediting for Proposals #7: Online Proposals

- Growing among private and corporate foundations
- Information submitted primarily through form fields
- Prepare offline in Word
- Carefully measure word/character counts
- Test form early on



Resources

- Grant Professionals Association (GPA) -- www.grantprofessionals.org
- Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP) – www.apmp.org
 - Shipley Proposal Method
- Foundation Center – www.foundationcenter.org
- Past proposals: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)



Q & A

Thank you!

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