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.

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**

- 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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