

# Draft Your Application

Your draft proposal is complete when you can answer "Yes" to these questions:

- Does the narrative exactly follow all of the sponsor's guidelines?
- Has at least one colleague reviewed and approved the draft?
- Are all the required attachments complete and placed in the correct order?
- Have I conveyed an honest, accurate description of what we intend to do and why?
- Have I stated the project's goals and objectives as clearly and persuasively as I can?

**Typically, in writing a grant proposal, you will have to address some, if not all, of these topics:**

1. Title page
2. Project Abstract or Summary
3. Table of Contents
4. Introduction
5. Description
6. Approach
7. Evaluation
8. Dissemination
9. Qualifications and Resources
10. Attachments

## Title page

The title page summarizes critical proposal data: title, total funding request, project director contact information, grant agency contact information, name of the program for which the project is being submitted, and project beginning and ending dates. Federal agencies frequently require applicants to prepare a pre-printed cover sheet identifying all the above elements.

## Project Abstract (Summary)

If the abstract is not part of the cover sheet, it may be placed on a separate pre-printed form or simply word-processed on its own page. Usually the length is limited to a single page or a set number of characters (for example, 2,000). Most common word-processing software has a feature that automatically counts characters and words.

The abstract usually is the last section to be written, although it appears at the beginning of the proposal package. A well-written abstract can be a key to success in obtaining funding. It should provide a complete definition of your project's scope and relationship to the sponsor's priorities. During the proposal and award process, it alone may represent your project for uses including: being circulated among sponsor staff for informational purposes, summarizing your award for national data systems, and coordinating funding among private foundations.

## Table of Contents

A well-designed table of contents can be of great value helping grant application reviewers quickly locate information they are looking for in your proposal. If required information is difficult or impossible to find, reviewers may be inclined to assume it is missing and penalize your proposal accordingly. Follow the sponsor's guidelines concerning format and content, if any. If the sponsor's program announcement assigns evaluation "points" to each section of the proposal, make sure your Table of Contents uses those section names. For applications submitted to NSF in Fastlane, Fastlane generates the Table of Contents.

## Introduction

- Draws a reader into the proposal's specific environment. It may include quotations from prominent individuals in your field, references to critical legislation, and/or recent reports of national acclaim. Surveys, newspaper and journal articles, statistical data, and generally known books also may be referenced to bring the reader from a general base of knowledge to your specific project.
- Introduces you as project director, the project team, and the institution. Typically, a sponsor is interested in knowing how large the university is, how many students are enrolled, what programs are available, and any unique characteristics of the university.
- Summarizes your project's goals. Your intent should be to motivate the reviewer to move on to the project description.

## Description

The Description section states what you intend to accomplish in the project. Typically, the major sections of the Description are:

**Statement of Need.** To convince the reader your project is valid and important, you must:

- Demonstrate your complete understanding of the problem and related issues.
- Show you have completed a careful review of the literature and are well informed about the leaders in your field of study.
- If possible, document the potential for replication and future generalization.
- Demonstrate this need as being compatible with the University's mission and philosophy and with the stated purpose(s) of the sponsor to whom you are submitting the proposal.

Your need and its justification will be reviewed with and compared to statements of need submitted by your peers from other universities.

**Statement of Goals and Objectives** must capture the vision of your project in both general and specific terms. In some cases, the statement of goals and objectives substitutes for the statement of research questions. In other cases, the research questions or hypotheses are the central focus of the proposal.

First, express your project's vision in general terms. Then state specific objectives in measurable, quantifiable terms which later can be assessed to determine level of success. The more specific your goals and objectives are, the easier measuring outcomes will be. However, very specific objectives sometimes can limit or restrict flexibility as the project progresses.

**Statement of Research Questions/Hypothesis.** See *Goals and Objectives* above. The actual formulation of research questions varies depending on the field(s) of study addressed in the proposal.

## Approach

The Approach section states HOW you will accomplish your desired outcome.

It often begins with a summary of your previous work – research studies, pilot studies, initial research – to demonstrate your successful track record.

One easy way to outline your Approach is to create a timeline containing all the steps you will take to accomplish your desired outcome: “first, we will do this, and then we'll do this, and then we'll do this, etc.” Then, for each step, answer these questions:

- What population will be studied or served? What are the demographics of that population? Why is the population most suited to achieving your proposed project results?
- How will you manage the project? For example: How will project participants/subjects be identified and selected? How will data be collected and analyzed? How will findings be reported and disseminated?

- Which people and other resources will be involved? Specifically what role and responsibilities are assigned to each person?

## Evaluation

An evaluation is a systematic process for measuring results from a project. Evaluation is not necessarily limited to the final stage of a project. For example, pre-test, concurrent test, and post-test models can reassure the sponsor that project evaluation is an on-going process.

The goals and objectives you stated in the Description section of the proposal are the basis for evaluation. Depending on your field of study, standards of evaluation may be in common use.

## Dissemination

Sponsors increasingly stress the importance of sharing program results. Common dissemination methods include:

- Presenting results at academic conferences
- Publishing in academic journals
- Distribution on request of printed materials like fact sheets and brochures and software products developed using sponsored programs' funds
- Posting of information on web sites

## Qualifications and Resources

- **Project Team Qualifications**  
Your qualifications as a project director and your key team members' qualifications can be demonstrated with complete or abbreviated Curriculum Vitae. In the narrative section of the proposal, you must summarize the key elements of experience and skill directly applicable to your proposed project. What sets you and your team members apart from the competition? What about you and your team members' track records qualifies you to conduct this project?
- **Institutional Qualifications**  
Although an award is made on behalf of an individual or team, it is made to an institution so you need to present to the sponsor a compelling reason for Tarleton to be considered the best qualified academic institution to undertake the project. For example, consider the university's historical and current commitments to work in the specific project area, the university's academic reputation in your field of study, and any public recognition the university has received relevant to your work.
- **Resources**  
Institutional resources typically include, but are not limited to, office space, laboratory space, library collections, computing resources, and administrative support. Some sponsors have forms to record information about institutional resources.

## Attachments

Attachments to grant applications and proposals vary according to the sponsor and the project. Typical attachments requested for projects are:

- **Institutional Background**
  - The University's mission and philosophy (available in the most recent version of the course catalog, for example)
  - An organizational chart of the University (available from the Office of Sponsored Projects)
  - A current list of the University's Board of Trustees (available from the Office of Sponsored Projects)
- **Resource Documentation**
  - A curriculum vitae (NSF specifies a required two page format for Biographical Sketches)
  - Letters of agreement and/or letters of support
- **Project Planning/Approach/Evaluation**

- Project timeline
  - Relevant statistical tables
  - Examples of survey instruments
- **Project Budget and Accounting**
  - Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate
  - Cost documentation for equipment and materials
  - Audited financial statements