



What to know before you start Writing a Proposal



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Introduction

Most non-profit organizations find themselves in a survival mode, constantly on the lookout for any funding opportunities that might come their way. They often [intentionally] confuse aligning with the goals of funders with the question of "how can we make it look as if we are a good match." We have had experience with a few of these proposals, and some have been successful! However, if you have limited time or personnel dedicated to fundraising, it's crucial to initially focus your efforts on opportunities that offer a better-than-average fit. Here are some guidelines for "screening" potential funders and opportunities, whether it's for calls for proposals or "cold" proposals.

Follow the guidelines

The initial step in crafting an exceptional proposal is to thoroughly review all the instructions provided. While it's crucial to fulfill every requirement, it's equally vital to avoid including any elements not specified. Adding unnecessary information to the proposal will likely irritate the donor, rather than impress them.

Key considerations include:

- Page Limit
- Font Size and Type
- Margin Space
- Line Space
- Proposal Submission Process
- Proposal Format (or follow the provided online form)
- Complete the Application Thoroughly
- Submission Method (email, traditional mail, online, etc.)
- Required Attachments
- Deadline

Remember, the key to a successful grant proposal is to adhere to the guidelines, focus on the essentials, and ensure the proposal is clear, concise, and tailored to the donor's needs.



Know Your Donor

- **Do you satisfy the eligibility requirements**

Before you start preparing the response against the solicitation, it is advisable that you go through the eligibility criteria and work on the proposal, only when your organization is eligible for applying. This could be

- Geographic location - rural, country, province etc.
- Management- Youth led or women lead
- Registration – only NPO's or only government entities, only collaborations etc
- Thematic area
- And more – if you don't satisfy these requirements do not proceed

- **What have they supported in the past -Are Donors willing to support your cause**

- Review successful applications to look for effective ways proposal writers have conveyed their ideas and what the donor has supported in the past.
- Visit their website and those of the organizations they have supported in the past.

- **Who are you Writing the Proposal for**

- **Government** [including embassies]: Application requirements can be complex; Process long and bureaucratic
- **Foundations:** Process can be lengthy and complex. Priorities change more often. Smaller ones have limited funds and prior personal contact/relationship can be advantage
- **Corporate:** Priorities change quite often – careful not to alienate other parties that they work with on the profit side of their business. Need to point out the advantages for them in working with you.



Know Your Organization

- **Have you completed and Developed a Case of Support**

If not - Stop

- **Do you have the capacity to write and complete proposal**

- such as online registration before application can be submitted
- Document submission- do you have all the required documents and do they satisfy requirements. If they ask for quotes and need 3 quotes and you only 2, and not have time to get a third – Stop. If they need tax compliance pin and you are not registered with SARS – Stop.
- Many organizations dive into crafting a proposal without first assessing whether they possess the necessary manpower to produce a high-quality proposal.

- **Do you have enough time for preparing and submitting the proposal?**

This is an important question to be answered and in case the answer is in negative, you better look at another opportunity. It's crucial to begin early and submit your proposal promptly. To secure a grant, you need ample time to develop a compelling proposal and fulfill all the required formalities.

Planning and Research

Most of the aspects mentioned above can be categorized under planning and research and should be treated as such. However, we have decided to include a separate heading in this regard to emphasize the importance of planning and research. Some additional factors to consider are:

- **Clear your doubts by asking questions:**

The process of writing and submitting a proposal can be confusing, and you may find yourself needing support from the donor agency. If you encounter any doubts or queries during the application process, reach out to the designated point of contact at the donor agency. Approaching the support office at the right time will assist you in completing your proposal most effectively and accurately. Remember to only contact individuals who have been specifically mentioned in the solicitation and not anyone else.



Avoid

- **Avoid using jargons and technical language:**

Include straightforward, clear language in the proposal. The person reading or reviewing the proposal might not be an expert in the specific area and might not be familiar with technical terms, so use plain language to describe your issue and how you plan to solve it.

- **Avoid Plagiarism**

If you've utilized a paragraph, data, facts, or any other information from an article, it's crucial to properly credit all your sources. You have several options for doing this: you can paraphrase, cite, quote, or include a reference page at the end of your proposal to prevent plagiarism. Many agencies, particularly those with a research focus, utilize anti-plagiarism software. Should your proposal show any indications of plagiarism, it may be disqualified.

- **Don't Clutter your Proposal**

Often, organizations become overly enthusiastic while drafting proposals and end up including multiple problems and projects – anything that looks like a fit. Make difficult decisions and select a project/program that you believe is the best fit. Opting for a single major problem in your proposal allows you to focus your efforts clearly on a single solution, thereby saving time.

- **Don't get bogged down in your internal service packaging**

In your internal planning you might develop your Programs as follows

Youth	Women	Community Development
Substance Abuse	Mental Health	Gender Based Violence
Mental Health	Gender Based Violence	Substance Abuse
Gender Based Violence		
Job Creation		

- If you have identified a funder that focus on youth- your target group is first column – including relevant projects such as substance abuse etc.



- If your funder's focus is Gender Based violence – you can include all three of your programs with problem, focus on gender-based violence
- **Remember**
 - Do not confuse alignment with funder focus with “squeezing” your projects/programs to look as if they are a fit
 - If you have a comprehensive Case of support with clear project/program goals and objectives this should not be a difficult task