

Writing Funding Proposals

Why Write a Funding Proposal?

Given today's economy and increasing demands for citizen services and programs, many municipalities are being asked to do more with less. Grants or other funding opportunities can help a municipality bridge the gap in resources to achieve community goals. Receiving grant funds can prove advantageous. A grant can enable a jurisdiction to fund a trail project or recreation program that improves the quality of life and health of citizens, but may be considered lower funding priorities than other basic municipal services. Grant funds can enable a municipality to make better use of tax dollars by paying only a portion of the total cost of a project. Grants can also provide more bang for the buck by effective leveraging of funds. When a municipality applies for a grant or writes a funding proposal, matching funds are usually required. A municipality can maximize its required match, and effectively leverage funds, by using in-kind donations (e.g., non-cash donations of equipment, labor, volunteer services, value of land) to provide their share of financial support for a project. Conversely, while grants provide financial advantages, there are also drawbacks to seeking funding. The process is often competitive and labor intensive. Writing a funding proposal requires planning and organization, involves research and data collection, and the preparation of a sound work plan and detailed budget projects.

For most municipalities, obtaining a grant to fund a program or an activity is difficult and remains an elusive wish rather than reality. In recent years, grants and funding opportunities have become more competitive as state, federal, and foundation funding has become more constrained or reallocated to new priority areas. Careful planning and preparation of a funding proposal is essential to meet the challenges of grant writing and to improve a municipality's chance for a successful grant award.

Keys to a Winning Funding Proposal

Writing a funding proposal is best accomplished with a team approach, with one person responsible for grant preparation and submission. To write a winning funding proposal, consider the following tips:

- **Complete homework** – Gather sources of information, collect data, and document citizen and political support for the proposed activity.
- **Follow the proposal/application guidelines** – Determine format of the proposal, required information, documentation requirements, funding limitations and match requirements, and submission deadlines.

- **Be concise** – Describe the need for the project, project activities, methods of implementation, measures of success, intended outcomes, and level of funding needed.
- **Define goals and objectives** – Explain what the proposed project or activity is expected to accomplish in broad terms and how/when the project will be implemented. Describe objectives to achieve the goal in realistic, measurable, and attainable terms. Goals should be consistent with the overall mission, goals, and objectives of both the municipality and funding organization.
- **Propose project results** – Indicate what the expected results of the project will be (outputs) and, what anticipated benefits the public will receive (outcomes), and other expected accomplishments that will be documented and disseminated.
- **Organize** – Follow the required, predefined format to achieve a logical flow for the proposal. Additional documentation should be included in the appendices (e.g., maps, photographs, support letters, surveys, public input, resolutions, professional drawings, plans, cost estimates). Edit the proposal for readability and provide contact information.
- **Develop good cost estimates** – Provide a future-oriented cost estimate that relates the projected budget to the project timeframe. A budget narrative must describe how each item was calculated and be in proportion to stated goals and objectives. Budget preparation should include cost estimates from contractors or engineers.

Is Your Municipality Ready to Write a Funding Proposal?

Pre-planning activities are needed before a municipality should undertake writing a funding proposal. In order to plan for proposal writing, a municipality should determine if the activity is consistent with planning documents and has the sufficient organizational capacity to administer the project or activity. Generally, a pre-application meeting is advised with the funding organization or agency to confirm that the jurisdiction has done its homework prior to the proposal process. Before writing a proposal, consider the following checklist questions regarding the plan for the project and its state of readiness.

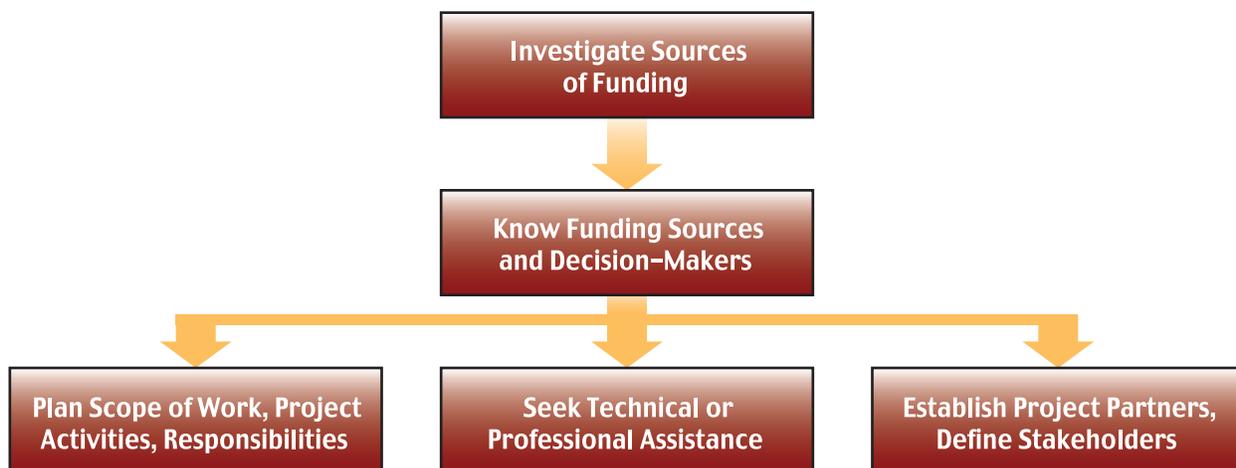
- **Is the project consistent with overall mission, goals, and objectives?**
 - Is this project consistent with local, regional, state, or federal plans?
 - Is this project consistent with the municipality's mission, goals, and objectives and that of the funding organization?
 - Is there support for the project?
 - Political support?
 - Financial support?
 - Community support?
 - Do approved planning and financial documents (e.g., comprehensive plans, ordinances, engineering studies, concept or master plans, general operating budget, capital improvement program, transportation or mobility studies, public opinion surveys, annual reports) provide support for the proposed project or activity?

- **Is the proposed project in a state of readiness?**
 - Has feasibility of the project been assessed? Is a cost/benefit analysis needed?
 - Has a concept plan and/or master plan been prepared?
 - Has a project budget been prepared?
 - Does current zoning support the proposed land use?
 - Are pre-construction activities needed (e.g., engineering studies/surveys, site work, environmental assessments and clearances, historical preservation studies, right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation)?
 - Has an action plan and project timetable been prepared?
 - Do bid specifications need to be prepared for a contractual project?

- **Is there organizational capacity to administer the project/activity?**
 - Does the municipality have the organizational capacity and experience to administer the project/activity in an efficient and timely manner?
 - Who will administer the programmatic and financial aspects of the grant?
 - Who will implement the grant project/activities?
 - Are matching funds in place to support the project budget?

Grant Proposal–Planning Process

Once it has been determined that the proposed project is consistent with the overall mission of the organization, has adequate internal and external support, is in a sufficient state of readiness, and there is good organizational capacity, plans to prepare a funding proposal can move forward. It is often helpful to draft a concept paper, which provides an overview of the proposed project and community benefits. A concept paper can be circulated to garner letters of support, enhance outreach efforts at public hearings or workshops, and help prospective funders determine whether the project is an eligible activity for funding before time is spent preparing a proposal. Grant proposal–planning steps are listed and illustrated in the graphic below.



Investigate Sources of Funding

The “Technical Assistance and Funding Resources” section within this document provides an array of websites and possible sources for federal, state, and foundation grants to explore and enhance walkability of a community. Within that section, local funding strategies are suggested as possible sources of matching funds for the grant proposal. It is important to seek funding opportunities that are consistent with the mission of your organization and project goals and objectives.

Know Funding Sources and Decision-Makers

If a prospective funding source is identified, make an introductory call or schedule a pre-application meeting with the granting agency or foundation to determine:

- Is your municipality eligible for funding?
- Based on the concept paper (provided in advance) does the proposed activity meet funding eligibility criteria?
- How much funding is available, what is the average award amount, and how many applications will be awarded?
- What are key elements for a successful application?
- Does the granting agency have copies of successful grant applications or a list of organizations that have been successfully awarded grants?
- Is there a formal grant application period and deadline?

Plan the Scope of Work, Project Activities, and Responsibilities

Assemble a project team to plan the scope of work and all aspects of the proposed grant activity. The grant planning process should garner input from those who will be involved in the administration, operations, and maintenance of the project and may include department directors, financial administrators, planners, engineers, police personnel, and the public works and/or parks and recreation personnel. The scope of work should be realistic given the time period for the grant and measurable. It is helpful to prepare a timeline to identify when and who will be responsible for conducting specific activities. It is also critical at this stage to differentiate personnel responsible for implementing the programmatic aspects and administering the financial aspects of the grant.

Seek Technical or Professional Assistance

Often, smaller jurisdictions do not have the staffing resources or expertise to carry out a large capital improvement activity such as the construction of a trail system, pedestrian network, streetscape project, or park project. For activities that will be contracted, it is helpful to issue a Request for Quotation (RFQ) to obtain cost estimates for contractual services such as engineering services, contracted labor, consultant costs, appraisals, audits, or legal services. Quotations and professionally prepared cost estimates can be the basis for developing an accurate, detailed budget.

Establish Project Partners

The key to establishing partners is identifying stakeholders for the walkability project. Think about individuals or organizations that will benefit from the outcome of the project. For a trail construction project, stakeholders may include residents, families, scouting organizations, hiking or nature clubs, tourists, bicyclists, nonprofit organizations, historians, healthcare professionals or organizations, schools, businesses catering to hikers or bicyclists, community members, environmentalists, adjacent property owners, municipal boards, or committees. See the section “Identifying Stakeholders and Strategic Partners to Catalyze Change,” in this resource guide for more information on developing strategic partnerships.

Anatomy of a Proposal

An effective grant proposal must convince the prospective granting agency or foundation that the proposed activities meet the funding goals and objectives of the organization, have realistic program activities and timeline, provide a detailed and balanced budget, show community support and partnerships, and demonstrate how the program is part of a long-term, sustainable strategy.

It is essential that grant applicants read the grant application guidelines and follow the prescribed format precisely. If no specific format or guidelines are provided, the proposal narrative should be no more than fifteen single-spaced pages and include an executive summary. The follow checklist outlines the anatomy of a typical grant proposal.

- **Title page**
 - Provide the name of the grant and project title.
 - Provide contact information for your municipality.
 - Include the date of submission.
- **Cover letter**
- **Required grant application form(s)**
- **Executive summary**
 - Limit this to one page.
 - Summarize the purpose of proposed grant, proposed activities, and expected results.
 - Highlight how the activity benefits the community and complements other initiatives.
 - Specify total cost of proposed project, requested funding, and matching funds.
- **Program narrative** (largest section)
 - Introduce the municipality/organization and highlight its capacity to implement the proposed scope of work and administer the grant.

- Problem statement
 - Builds on the municipality's strengths and opportunities rather than focusing on weaknesses and needs.
 - Focus on the benefits of the grant to community rather than municipality.
- Program goals and objectives
 - Provide a broad statement explaining what the grant program is expected to accomplish (goal) and specific statements explaining what will lead to the achievement of the goal (objectives).
 - Demonstrate how the program goals and objectives relate to that of the funding agency/foundation.
- Methodology/scope of work
 - Describe how objectives will be accomplished.
 - Explain the methods, activities, and outcomes of the proposed activity.
 - Who will be served and will implement activities?
 - How will programs, activities, and services be implemented?
 - When will activities be implemented (timetable)?
 - With whom will activities be conducted (e.g., partners, volunteers, cooperating agencies)?
 - What are the anticipated outcomes/outputs? How will impacts be measured or evaluated?
 - Clarify the plan for the project's future sustainability.
- Evaluation
 - Describe what will be evaluated.
 - Explain who will evaluate the activity in terms of needs, objectives, methods, and budget.
 - Detail when the data will be compiled.
 - Determine how the evaluation will be conducted.
- **Project budget/budget narrative**
 - Detail the total project total.
 - Provide sources and amounts of in-kind or cash matches.
 - Provide a breakdown of project costs by expenditure category.
 - Provide copies of estimates for project costs and professional services.
- **Appendices**
 - Include resolutions.
 - Provide supporting documentation (e.g, surveys, studies, petitions).
 - Incorporate excerpts or citations from planning documents.
 - Provide letters of support.
 - List project partners.
 - Showcase professional drawings, plans, maps.
 - Include copies of relevant newspaper articles.

Resources for Writing a Grant Proposal

Grant writing can be a time consuming and frustrating process, especially for first-time grant writers. Successful funding proposals are distinguished by writing a clear description of work activities, identifying the target audience(s) that will benefit from the activity, articulating the anticipated impact, and outlining proposed evaluation methods. The importance of organizing and editing a proposal cannot be overlooked. Failure to follow instructions, complete application forms, include required information, adhere to page limits, and submit the proposal by the deadline will lead to the rejection of a grant proposal. Useful tips and pointers on writing a successful funding proposal are detailed within the following resources.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

This website provides guidance for initial proposal development, tips for organizing and writing a grant proposal, long-term project planning, and other federal resources.

See: [12.46.245.173/pls/portal30/CATALOG.GRANT_PROPOSAL_DYN.show](https://www.plsportal30.com/CATALOG.GRANT_PROPOSAL_DYN.show)

Community Tool Box

The Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas has developed a Community Tool Box (CTB) with resources to build healthy communities. The CTB offers two types of support to promote community health and development. First, the online resource provides support to implement “best processes,” or evidence-based mechanisms for promoting community change and improvement. Second, the website provides links to databases to address specific problems or needs such as promoting physical activity.

See: ctb.ku.edu/en

Delaware Valley Grantmakers

While this organization serves as a forum for grantmakers in the Philadelphia region and does not provide grants, the website offers resources for organizations seeking foundation grants. Online resources include tips for writing the proposal narrative, an application checklist, and a sample budget form.

See: www.dvg.org/grantseekers/grant_app.htm

Foundation Center

This entity serves as the nation’s leading authority on philanthropy and seeks to connect nonprofits and grantmaking organizations. The website offers resources to learn about foundations and fundraising, identify funding sources, and offers an online foundation directory for subscribers.

See: foundationcenter.org

Grantcraft

This website, developed by the Ford Foundation, provides tools such as publications, videos, case studies, and suggestions from donors and grant makers. The “map of the craft” is particularly helpful. It describes how to plan for grant writing, organize for impact, work with grantees, collaborate, design the grant, understand the role of a grantwriter, and be a lead player in the organization.

See: www.grantcraft.org

Nonprofit Guides

Provides web-based grant-writing tools for nonprofit organizations, charitable, educational, public organizations, and other community-oriented entities. Both grantmaking tips and sample documents are provided.

See: www.npguides.org