

# **Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis**

*How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal*



*A Guide to Improving Grant Proposal Writing and Research*

**[www.house.gov/solis](http://www.house.gov/solis)**

**A Message from Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis**



Dear Friend,

As the United States Representative for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District, I am working hard to protect the interests of working people and to bring home federal funding to help our local community in the areas of: youth and education-related programs, health care, transportation improvements, and environmental improvements to enhance our local quality of life.

I have prepared the following guide, "How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal," in order to better assist you request grants from the federal government. I am proud and honored to serve you and be your voice in our nation's capitol. If you have any questions or need assistance, please feel free to contact one of my offices.

Thank you for your continued support.

*Hilda L. Solis*

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## **How to Develop a Grant Proposal**

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## **How to Develop and Write a Grant Proposal: Preparation**

A successful grant proposal is one that is well-prepared, thoughtfully planned, and concisely packaged. The potential applicant must first become familiar with all of the pertinent program criteria of the funding institution.

Grant seekers should know that the basic requirements, application forms, information, and procedures vary among grant-making agencies and foundations. Federal agencies and large foundations may have formal application packets, strict guidelines, and fixed deadlines with which applicants must comply, while smaller foundations may operate more informally and even provide assistance to inexperienced grant seekers. However, the steps outlined in this report generally apply to any grant-seeking effort.

Individuals without prior grant proposal writing experience may find it useful to attend a grantsmanship class or workshop. Applicants interested in locating workshops or consulting more resources on grantsmanship and proposal development should consult the Internet sites listed at the end of this report and explore other resources in their local libraries.

### **Developing Ideas for the Proposal**

The first step in proposal planning is the development of a clear, concise description of the proposed project. To develop a convincing proposal for project funding, the project must fit into the philosophy and mission of the grant-seeking organization or agency; and the need that the proposal is addressing must be well-documented and well-articulated.

Typically, funding agencies or foundations will want to know that a proposed activity or project reinforces the overall mission of an organization or grant seeker, and that the project is necessary. To make a compelling case, the following should be included in the proposal:

- Nature of the project, its goals, needs, and anticipated outcomes
- How the project will be conducted
- Timetable for completion
- How best to evaluate the results (performance measures)
- Staffing needs, including use of existing staff and new hires or volunteers
- Preliminary budget, covering expenses and financial requirements, to determine funding levels to seek

When developing an idea for a proposal, it is also important to determine if the idea has already been considered in the applicant's locality or state. A thorough check should be made with state legislators, local government, and related public and private agencies which may currently have grant awards or contracts to do similar work. If a similar program already exists, the applicant may need to reconsider submitting the proposed project, particularly if duplication of effort is perceived. However, if significant

differences or improvements in the proposed project's goals can be clearly established, it may be worthwhile to pursue federal or private foundation assistance.

### **Community Support**

Community support for many proposals is essential. Once a proposal summary is developed, look for individuals or groups representing academic, political, professional, and lay organizations which may be willing to support the proposal in writing. The type and caliber of community support is critical in the initial and subsequent review phases. Letters of endorsement detailing exact areas of project sanction and financial or in-kind commitment are often requested as part of a proposal to a federal agency. Numerous letters of support can influence the administering agency or foundation. For example, solicit support from local government agencies and public officials. Several months may be required to develop letters of endorsement since something of value (e.g., buildings, staff, and services) is sometimes negotiated between the parties involved.

While money is the primary concern of most grant seekers, thought should be given to the kinds of non-monetary contributions that may be available. In many instances, academic institutions, corporations, and other nonprofit groups in the community may be willing to contribute technical and professional assistance, equipment, or space to a worthy project. Not only will such contributions reduce the amount of money being sought, but evidence of such local support will be viewed favorably by most grant-making agencies or foundations.

Many agencies require, in writing, affiliation agreements (a mutual agreement to share services between agencies) and building space commitments prior to either grant approval or award.

### **Identifying Funding Resources**

Once the project has been specifically defined, the grant seekers should research appropriate funding sources. Both the applicant and the grantor agency or foundation should have the same interests, intentions, and needs if a proposal is to be considered an acceptable candidate for funding. It is not productive to send out proposals indiscriminately in the hope of attracting funding. Grant-making agencies and foundations whose interest and intentions are consistent with those of the applicant are the most likely to provide support. Cast a wide, but targeted, net. Many projects, in fact, may only be accomplished with funds coming from a combination of sources, among them federal, state, or local programs and grants from private or corporate foundations.

The best funding resources are now on the Internet. Key sources for funding information include the federal government's *Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (CFDA) [<http://www.cfda.gov>], and the Foundation Center [<http://www.foundationcenter.org>], the clearing house of private and corporate foundation funding. For a summary of federal programs and sources, you may request CRS Report RS 20514, *Grants Information for*

*Constituents*, and other reports on topics such as block grants to states, federal assistance for homeland security, and other funding areas, from your Senator or Representative.

A review of the government or private foundation's program descriptions, objectives and uses, as well as any use restrictions, can clarify which programs might provide funding for an idea. When reviewing individual CFDA program descriptions, do not overlook the related programs as potential resources. Also, the kinds of projects the agency or foundation funded in the past may be helpful in fashioning your grant proposal. Who have been past grant recipients? Program listings in the CFDA or foundation information will often include examples of past funded projects.

It should be pointed out that many federal grants do not go directly to the final beneficiary, but are awarded through "block" or "formula" grants to state or local agencies which, in turn, distribute the funds. For more information, CRS Report RL 30818, *Block Grants: An Overview*, and CRS Report 30778, *Federal Grants to State and Local Governments: Concepts for Legislative Design and Oversight*, may be requested from your Representative or Senator.

There are many types of foundations: national, family, community, corporate, etc. For district or community projects, as a general rule, it is a good idea not to start searching with large national foundations but to look for funding sources close to home, which are frequently most concerned with solving local problems. Corporations, for example, tend to support projects in areas where they have offices or plants.

Once a potential grantor agency or foundation is identified, contact it and ask for a grant application kit or information. Later, ask some of the grantor agency or project. In many cases, the more agency or foundation personnel know about the proposal, the better the chance of support and of an eventual favorable decision.

Sometimes it is useful to send the proposal summary to a specific agency or foundation official in a separate cover letter, and ask for preliminary review and comment. Always check with the government agency or foundation first to determine its preference if this approach is under consideration. If the review is unfavorable and differences cannot be resolved, ask the examining agency or foundation and differences cannot be resolved, ask the examining agency or foundation official to suggest another department, agency, or foundation's state or regional office or headquarters (if available) may also be beneficial. A visit not only establishes face-to-face contact but also may bring out some essential details about the proposal or help secure additional advice or information.

Projects can easily be laid out using commercial off-the-shelf project management software that will run on any personal computer. A Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) chart could be useful and supportive in justifying some proposals. The software allows the project manager to construct a PERT chart that provides a graphical representation of all tasks in the project and the way tasks are related to each other. Such project manager software provides a variety of report formats can be

maintained on a network of computers so that all project participants can access the latest project information.

Whenever possible, use appendixes to provide details, supplementary data, references, and information requiring in-depth analysis. These types of data, although supportive of the proposal, if included in the body of the proposal, could detract from its readability. Appendixes provide the proposal reader with immediate access to details if and when clarification of an idea, sequence or conclusion is required. Time tables, work plans, schedules, activities, and methodologies, legal papers, personal vitae, letters of support, and endorsements are examples of appendixes.

### **Evaluation: Product and Process Analysis**

An evaluation plan should be a consideration at every stage of the proposal's development. Data collected for the problem statement form a comparative basis for determining whether measurable objectives are indeed being met and whether proposed methods are accomplishing these ends or whether different parts of the plan need to be fine-tuned to be made more effective and efficient.

Among the considerations will be whether evaluation will be done by the organization itself or by outside experts. The organizations will have to decide whether outside experts have the standing in the field and the degree of objectivity that would justify the added expense, or whether the job could be done with sufficient expertise by its own staff, without taking too much time away from the project itself.

Methods of measurement, whether standardized tests, interviews, questionnaires, observation, etc., will depend upon the nature and scope of the project. Procedures and schedules for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data will need to be spelled out.

Federal agencies are required to report funding information as funds are approved, increased, or decreased among projects within a given state depending on the type of required reporting. Also, consider reviewing the federal budget for the current and future fiscal years to determine proposed dollar amounts for particular budget functions.

The applicant should carefully study the eligibility requirements for each government or foundation program under consideration (see example the Applicant Eligibility and Rules and Regulations sections of the CFDA program description). The Rules section provides a citation to the Code of Federal regulations (CFR) covering the program. In a careful reading of the applicable CFR, the grant seeker may determine that it needs to modify its original concept in order to meet funding requirements for the federal grant. The applicant may learn that he or she is required to provide services otherwise unintended such as a service to particular client groups, or involvement of specific institutions. It may necessitate the modification of the original concept in order for the project to be eligible for funding. Questions about eligibility should be discussed with the appropriate program officer.

Deadlines for submitting applications are often not negotiable, though some federal programs do have open application dates (refer to the program description). Specified deadlines are usually associated with strict timetables for agency or foundation review. Some programs have more than one application deadline during the fiscal or calendar year. Applicants should plan proposal development around the established deadlines.

## **Getting Organized to Write the Proposal**

The grant seeker, having narrowed down the field of potential funders, will want to approach the most likely prospects to confirm that they might indeed be interested in the project. Many federal agencies and foundations are willing to provide an assessment of a preliminary one- or two-page concept paper before a formal proposal is prepared. The concept paper should give a brief description of the needs to be addressed, who is to carry out the project, what is to be accomplished, by what means, how long it will take, how the accomplishments will be measured, plans for the future, how much it will cost, and the ways this proposal relates to the mission of the funding source.

Developing a concept paper is excellent preparation for writing the final proposal. The grant seeker should try to see the project or activity from the viewpoint of the grant-making agency or foundation. Like the proposal, the concept paper should be brief, clear, and informative. It is important to understand that from the funder's vantage point, the grant is not seen as the end of the process, but only as the midpoint. The funder will want to know what will happen to the project once the grant ends. For example, will it be self-supporting or will it be used as a demonstration to apply for further funding? Will it need ongoing support, for how long, and what are the anticipated outcomes?

If the funding sources express interest in the concept paper, the grant seeker can ask for suggestions, criticism, and guidance, before writing the final proposal. Feedback and dialog are essential elements to a successful funding proposal. Throughout the proposal writing stage, keep a notebook or a file handy to write down or gather ideas and related materials and review them. The gathering of documents such as articles of incorporation, tax exemption certificates, and bylaws should be completed, if possible, before the writing begins.

## **Writing an Effective Grant Proposal**

### **Overall Considerations**

An effective grant proposal has to make a compelling case. Not only must the idea be a good one, but so must the presentation. Things to be considered include:

- All of the requirements of the funding source must be met: prescribed format, necessary inclusions, deadlines, etc.
- The proposal should have a clear, descriptive title.
- The proposal should be cohesive, building logically, with one section leading to another; this is an especially important consideration when several people have been involved in its preparation.



- Language should be clear and concise, devoid of jargon; explanations should be offered for acronyms and terms which may be unfamiliar to someone outside the field.
- Each of the parts of the proposal should provide as brief but informative a narrative as possible, with supporting data relegated to an appendix.

At various stages in the proposal writing process, the proposal should be reviewed by a number of interested and disinterested parties. Each time it has been critiqued, it may be necessary to rethink the project and its presentation. While such revision is necessary to clarify the proposal, one of the dangers is that the original excitement of those making the proposal sometimes gets written out. Somehow, this must be conveyed in the final proposal.

### **Basic Components of a Proposal**

The basic sections of a standard grant proposal include:

1. Cover letter
2. Proposal summary or abstract
3. Introduction describing the grant seeker or organization
4. Problem statement (or needs assessment)
5. Project objectives
6. Project methods or design
7. Project evaluation
8. Future funding
9. Project budget

### **Cover Letter**

The one-page cover letter should be written on the applicant's letterhead and should be signed by the organization's highest official. It should be addressed to the individual at the funding source with whom the organization has dealt, and should refer to earlier discussions. While giving a brief outline of the needs addressed in the proposal, the cover letter should demonstrate a familiarity with the mission of the grant making agency or foundation and emphasize the ways in which this project contributes to these goals.

### **Proposal Summary: Outline of Project Goals**

The proposal summary outlines the proposed project and should appear at the beginning of the proposal. It could be in the form of a cover letter or a separate page, but should definitely be brief—no longer than two or three paragraphs.

The summary should be prepared after the proposal has been developed in order to encompass all the key points necessary to communicate the objectives of the project. It is this document that becomes the cornerstone of your proposal, and the initial impression it gives will be critical to the success of your venture. In many cases, the summary will be

the first part of the proposal package seen by agency or foundation officials and very possibly could be the only part of the package that is carefully reviewed before the decision is made to consider the project any further.

The summary should include a description of the applicant, a definition of the problem to be solved, a statement of the objectives to be achieved, an outline of the activities and procedures to be used to accomplish those objectives, a description of the evaluation design, plans for the project at the end of the grants, and a statement of what it will cost the funding agency. It may also identify other funding sources or entities participating in the project.

For federal funding, the applicant should develop a project which can be supported in view of the local need. Alternatives, in the absence of federal support, should be pointed out. The influence of the project both during and after the project period should be explained. The consequences of the project as a result of funding should be highlighted.

### **Introduction: Presenting a Credible Applicant**

In the introduction, applicants describe their organization and demonstrate that they are qualified to carry out the proposed project—they establish their credibility and make the point that they are a good investment, in no more than a page. Statements made here should be carefully tailored, pointing out that the overall goals and purposes of the applicant are consistent with those of the funding source. This section should give:

- A brief history of the organization, its past and present operations, its goals and mission, its significant accomplishments, any success stories.
- Reference should be made to grants, endorsements, and press coverage the organization has already received (with supporting documentation included in the Appendix).
- Qualifications of its professional staff, and a list of its board of directors.
- Indicate whether funds for other parts of the project are being sought elsewhere; such evidence will, in fact, strengthen the proposal, demonstrating to the reviewing officer that all avenues of support have been thoroughly explored.
- An individual applicant should include a succinct resume relating to the objectives of the proposal (what makes the applicant eligible to undertake the work or project?).

### **Problem Statement of Needs Assessment**

This section lays out the reason for the proposal. It should make a clear, concise, and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed, from the beneficiaries' viewpoint, in no more than two pages.

The best way to collect information about the problem is to conduct and document both a formal and informal needs assessment for a program in the target or service area. The information provided should be both factual and directly related to the problem addressed

by the proposal. Areas to document are:

- Purpose for developing the proposal.
- Beneficiaries—who are they and how will they benefit.
- Social and economic costs to be affected.
- Nature of the problem (provide as much hard evidence as possible).
- How the applicant or organization came to realize the problem exists, and what is currently being done about the problem.
- Stress what gaps exist in addressing the problem that will be addressed by the proposal.
- Remaining alternatives available when funding has been exhausted. Explain what will happen to the project and the impending implications.
- The specific manner through which problems might be solved. Review the resources needed, considering how they will be used and to what end.

One of the pitfalls to be avoided is defining the problem as a lack of program or facility, i.e., giving one of the possible solutions to a problem as the problem itself. For example, the lack of a medical center in an economically depressed area is not the problem—the problem is that poor people in that area have health needs that are not currently being addressed. The problem described should be of reasonable dimensions, with the targeted population and geographic area clearly defined. It should include a retrospective view of the situation, describing past efforts to ameliorate it, and making projections for the future. The problem statement developed with input from the beneficiaries must be supported by statistics and statement from authorities in the fields. The case must be made that the applicant, because of its history, demonstrable skills, and past accomplishments, is the right organization to solve the problem.

There is a considerable body of literature on the exact assessment techniques to be used. Any local, regional, or state government planning office, or local university offering course work in planning and evaluation techniques should be able to provide excellent background references. Types of data that may be collected include: historical, geographic, quantitative, factual, statistical, and philosophical information, as well as studies completed by colleges, and literature searches from public or university libraries. Local colleges or universities which have a department or section related to the proposal topic may help determine if there is interest in developing a student or faculty project to conduct a needs assessment. It may be helpful to include examples of the findings for highlighting in the proposal.

### **Project Objectives: Goals and Desired Outcome**

Once the needs have been described, proposed solutions have to be outlined, wherever possible in quantitative terms. The population to be served, time frame of the project, and specific anticipated outcomes must be defined. The figures used should be verifiable. Remember, if the proposal is funded, the stated objectives will probably be used to evaluate program progress, so be realistic. There is literature available to help

identify and write program objectives.

It is important not to confuse objectives with methods or strategies toward those ends. For example, the objective should not be stated as “building a prenatal clinic in Adams County,” but as “reducing the infant mortality rate in Adams County to X percent by a specific date.” The concurrent strategy or method of accomplishing the stated objective may include the establishment of mobile clinics that bring services to the community.

### **Program Methods and Program Design: A Plan of Action**

The program design refers to how the project is expected to work and solve the stated problem. Just as the statement of objectives builds upon the problem statement, the description of methods or strategies builds upon the statement of objectives. For each objective, a specific plan of action should be laid out. It should delineate a sequence of justifiable activities, indicating the proposed staffing and timetable for each task. This section should be carefully reviewed to make sure that what is being proposed is realistic in terms of the applicant’s resources and time frame. Outline the following:

1. The activities to occur along with the related resources and staff needed to operate the project (“inputs”).
2. A flowchart of the organizational features of the project: describe how the parts interrelate, where personnel will be needed, and what they are expected to do. Identify the kinds of facilities, transportation, and support services required (“throughputs”).
3. Explain what will be achieved through 1 and 2 above (“outputs”), i.e., plan for measurable results. Project staff may be required to produce evidence of program performance through an examination of stated objectives during either a site visit by the grantor agency or foundation, and/or grant reviews which may involve peer review committees.
4. It may be useful to devise a diagram of the program design. Such a procedure will help to conceptualize both the scope and detail of the project.
5. Carefully consider the pressures of the proposed implementation, that is, the time and money needed to undertake each part of the plan. Wherever possible, justify in the narrative the course of action taken. The most economical method should be used that does not compromise or sacrifice project quality. The financial expenses associated with performance of the project will later become point negotiation with the government or foundation program staff.

### **Future Funding**

The last narrative part of the proposal explains what will happen to the program once the grant ends. It should describe a plan for continuation beyond the grant period, and outline all other contemplated fundraising efforts and future plans for applying for additional grants. Projections for operating and maintaining facilities and equipment should also be given. Discuss maintenance and future program funding if program funds are for construction activity. Account for other needed expenditures if the program

includes purchase of equipment.

## **Budget Development and Requirements**

While the degree of specificity of any budget will vary depending upon the nature of the project and the requirement of the funding source, a complete, well thought out budget serves to reinforce the applicant's credibility, and to increase the likelihood of the proposal being funded. The estimated expenses in the budget should build upon the justifications given in the narrative section of the proposal. A well-prepared budget should be reasonable and demonstrate that the funds being asked for will be used wisely. The budget should be made to be realistic, to estimate costs accurately, and not to underestimate staff time.

The budget format should be as clear as possible. It should begin with a Budget Summary, which, like the Proposal Summary, is written after the entire budget has been prepared. Each section of the budget should, in outline form, list line items under major headings and subdivisions. Each of the major components should be subtotaled with a grand total placed at the end. If the funding source provides forms, most of these elements can simply be filled into the appropriate spaces. Generally, budgets are divided into two categories, personnel costs and non-personnel costs. In preparing the budget, first review the proposal and make lists of items needed for the project. The personnel section usually includes a breakdown of:

- Salaries (including increases in multiyear projects)
- Fringe benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans
- Consultant and contract services

The items in the non-personnel section will vary widely, but may include:

- Space/office rental or leasing costs
- Utilities
- Purchase or rental of equipment
- Training to use new equipment
- Photocopying, office supplies, etc.

Some hard to pin down budget areas are: utilities, rental of buildings and equipment, salary increases, food, telephones, insurance, and transportation. Budget adjustments are sometimes made after the grant award, but this can be a lengthy process. A well-prepared budget justifies all expenses and is consistent with the proposal narrative.

For federal grants, it is also important to become familiar with grants management requirements. The CFDA identifies in the program description the Office of Management and Budget circulars applicable to each federal program. Applicants should review appropriate documents while developing a proposal budget since they are essential in determining items such as cost principles, administrative and audit

requirements and compliance, and conform to government guidelines for federal domestic assistance.

### **Proposal Appendix**

Lengthy documents which are referred to in the narrative are best added to the proposal in an Appendix. Examples include letters of endorsement, partial list of previous funders, key staff resumes, annual reports, statistical data, maps, pictorial material, and newspaper and magazine articles about the organizations. Nonprofit organizations should include an IRS 501 (c)(3) Letter of Tax Exempt Status.

#### **Additional Proposal Writing Web Sites**

All about Grants Tutorials (National Institute of Health; English and Spanish)

[<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/ncn/grants/default.htm>]

Grant Writing Tips Sheet

[[http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/grant\\_tips.htm](http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/grant_tips.htm)]

Basic Elements of Grant-Writing (Corporation for Public Broadcasting)

[<http://www.cpb.org/grants/grantwriting.html>]

EPA Grant Writing Tutorial (source from Purdue University)

[<http://purdue.edu/envirosoft/grants/src/title.htm>]

General Proposal Guidelines (University of Southern California)

[<http://dcg.usc.edu/PropPrep/gg.cfm>]

Grant-Writing Tools for Non-Profit Organizations (Non-Profit Guides)

[<http://npguides.org>]

Sample proposals

[[http://www.npguides.org/guide/sample\\_proposals.htm](http://www.npguides.org/guide/sample_proposals.htm)]

Grants and Grant Proposal Writing (St. Louis University)

[<http://eweb.slu.edu/papers2/grant01v32e.pdf>]

Grants and Non-profit Information Center (Tuscon-Pima Public Library)

[<http://www.library.pima.gov/research/grants/>]

How to Enhance a Grant Proposal (Environmental Protection Agency)

[<http://cobweb.ecn.purdue.edu/~epados/grants/src/writing/write.htm>]

Proposal Writing Short Course (Foundation Center; English and Spanish)

[<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/index.html>]

Where can I find examples of grant proposals?

[<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/faqs/html/propsample.html>]

Quick Guide for Grant Applications (National Cancer Institute)

[<http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/EXTRA/EXTDOCS/gntapp.htm>]

Useful Links: Grant-Writing Instructions (Los Angeles City College District Office of Resource Development)

[[http://hudson2.skidmore.edu/administration/assessment//grant\\_writing.htm](http://hudson2.skidmore.edu/administration/assessment//grant_writing.htm)]

#### **Federal Guidelines and Literature**

*Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance* (General Services Administration)

[<http://www.cfda.gov>]

*Federal Register* (National Archives)

[[www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html)]

Office of Management and Budget *Circulars* (OMB)

[[http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants\\_circulars.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/grants_circulars.html)]

