

Illustrated by Melissa Merrick

**Planning, writing and submitting
a grant proposal**

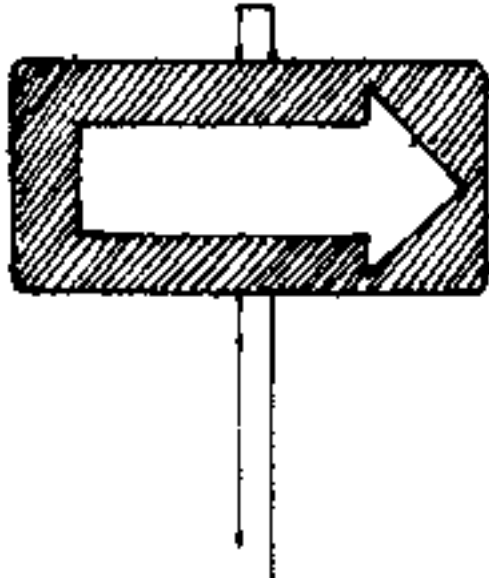
Message to the reader:

As a grantmaking agency, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority regularly receives and reviews program descriptions and budgets. Sometimes these are wonderful — we know what is wanted and why, and what results to expect if federal funds are awarded. Too often, however, the writer misses the mark — even though the problem he or she hopes to address is important.

If you've been asked to prepare a grant proposal and don't know where to begin, or if you're looking for a quick refresher, this booklet is for you. It is not definitive, but it does describe the basics of a grant proposal and how to go about putting it together.

Thanks to the Grantsmanship Center for refining many of the concepts included in this booklet.

Planning, writing and submitting a grant proposal is similar in a lot of ways to any complex project — say, a family of four taking a two-week vacation. Like a vacation, a successful grant proposal requires organizing a number of parts into the right order, step by step.



Last thing written, the first thing read

The first part of your proposal will be the **program summary**. Although the summary is the first thing the reader sees, it should be the last thing you write. By writing it after you write the rest of the proposal, you'll have the clearest idea of what you want to say.

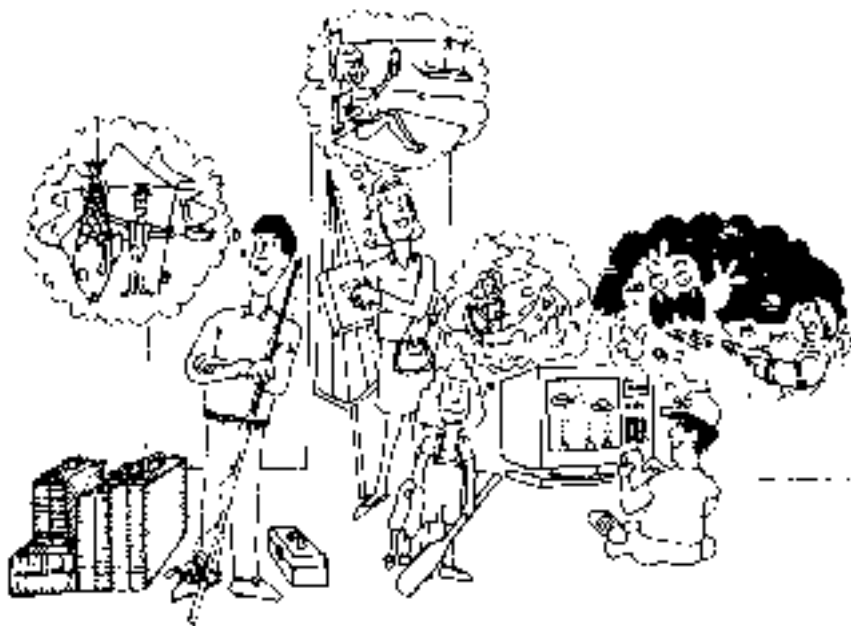
First impressions are very important, so you should make sure the summary is absolutely clear and as brief as possible.



Many of the people reviewing the proposal may read only that far. Like a vacation slide show, if it goes on too long, you'll put your audience to sleep...even if *you* had a great time.

Be specific in the summary. Describe:

- who you are;
- what your experience is;
- what problem your project will address;



- what you expect to accomplish;
- the strategy you will use; and
- how much it will cost.

Make sure you get all the essentials (but only the essentials) into the summary.

We've got a problem...

The **problem statement** is the foundation of your proposal. Open your problem statement with a discussion of:

- your agency's purpose and goals;
- how long it's been in existence;
- how you've grown;

- some significant accomplishments; and
- success with related projects.

K **keep the**
problem
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about it.

Then lay out exactly what you want to address with the money you are requesting.

You may find that, like a family trying to make sure *everyone* has a good time on vacation, it may be hard to include everyone's priorities in your problem statement and still remain in the realm of the possible.

Keep the problem narrowly defined, so that it is clear that an organization the size of yours can do something about it, and make sure that you establish a logical connection between your organization and the problem to be solved.

Define the problem as one belonging to the community you serve, not one belonging to your organization. You're asking for money to give help to a certain number of people that wouldn't get it otherwise, not because *your* organization needs more staff or is short on funds.

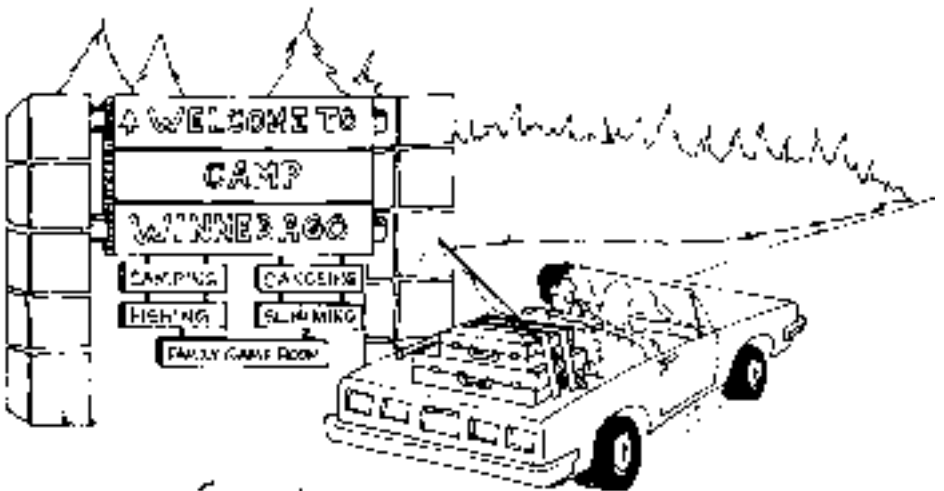
Support your statement with relevant data. Quote statistics or statements from research studies, local officials, surveys of prospective clients, public and private agencies such as

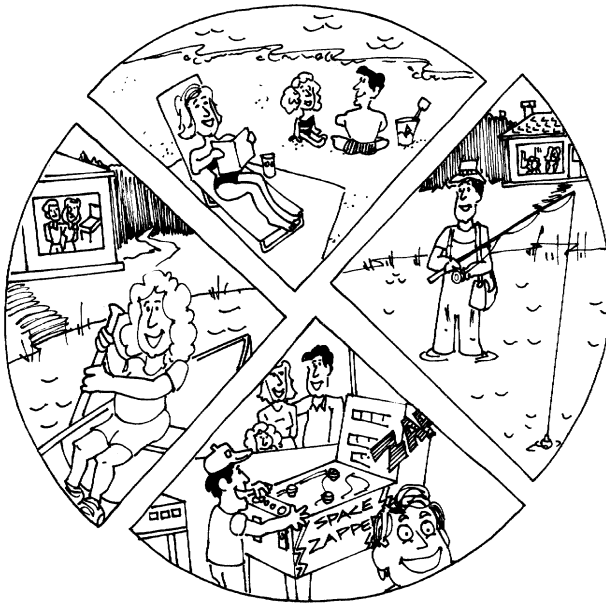
hospitals and police departments that also deal with the problem. The more local your data, the better — it’s closer to your problem. Don’t overwhelm the reader with numbers, though. If you have loads of data, pull out the most important statistics, and save the rest for an appendix.

Finally, a well-crafted problem statement should suggest possible program strategies to the reader.

Knowing where you want to go

Goals and objectives describe what you want to achieve. What is the difference between a “goal” and an “objective”? A goal is a general statement of what your project hopes to accomplish in addressing the need you described in the problem statement. Objectives are the specific, measurable, changes you expect to bring about. You should have at least one measurable objective in response to each problem you describe in the problem statement.





Say you've decided to go on vacation. Your goal might be for each family member to have a good time doing what they like best to do. Your measurable objectives would be the amount of time each family member spent doing their favorite activities while on vacation.

Make sure your objectives are realistic. If you select a vacation spot that's 1,000 miles away and plan to drive, you're setting an unrealistic objective if you only have one week for your vacation.

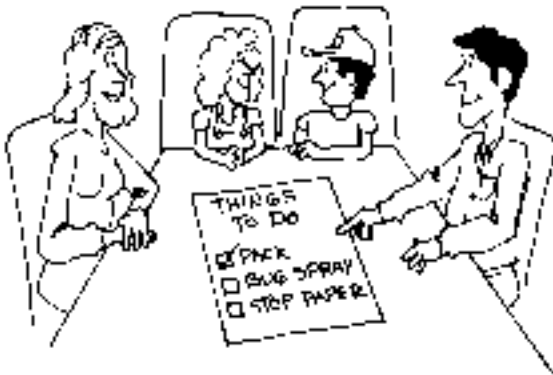
Be careful not to confuse your strategies with your objectives. Your objectives in going on vacation are not to buy lane tickets or make reservations at a campground. Also be careful not to say that "the objective of this vacation is to go on vacation." Such a statement doesn't make clear exactly what you want to accomplish by going on vacation.

So just how are we going to do this?

The program strategy describes what you will do to solve the problem(s) and meet your objectives. This is where you get to describe the nitty-gritty of who will do what for whom. (Mom makes reservations, dad packs clothes for kids, kids oil fishing reel for dad, and so on.)

Remember to be realistic about what you actually can do. If you have defined the problem you are addressing narrowly enough, you should be able to define the scope of what you can accomplish within the time available. Looking first at what your organization can reasonably expect to do, in fact, may help you hone down the scope of the program to a manageable size.

The strategy should give the reader a clear picture of exactly how the program will work, in detail. Give the steps in a logical order, and make sure you don't leave out a vital element.



To check the effectiveness of your program strategy description, ask someone to read it who is unfamiliar with your agency and the program that you are proposing.

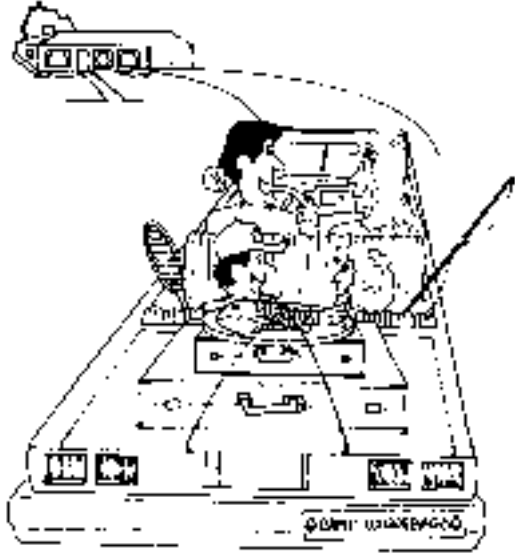
Build a case for your approach to the problem being the most reasonable in light of the objective(s) you've set and the resources that are and will be available. You should know who else is working on the same problem in your community or elsewhere, what their strategies are, and how well those methods have worked.

Finally, include a schedule of the tasks that will be performed, when each task will begin and end, and who will be doing each one.

To check the effectiveness of your program strategy description, ask someone to read it who is unfamiliar with your agency and the program that you are proposing. That person should then, on the basis of what he or she read, be able to explain the program to a third person, describing how the program fits into the workings of your agency, who the program will serve, and what benefits to expect from the program.

Wow! That was really...

The evaluation of your vacation usually takes place in the car or on the plane on the way home, or when you talk about it with your friends. The evaluation of your project should be more formal. Your proposal should include an **evaluation plan** that will somehow measure how well you are accomplishing your objectives (that's why they have to be *measurable!*).



You should collect data that's pertinent to each objective — preferably related to the most important thing you expect to change — starting at the beginning of the program and continuing on a regular basis until the program's conclusion. It's possible that the data you're collecting will suggest some needed fine tuning of strategies early on. The evaluation at the close of the program, using all the data you've collected, will provide information on the program's effectiveness. You can then use this information to build a case for additional funding.

And \$200 for...

When you go on vacation, you have to know what you'll expect to pay for gas, lodging, food and entertainment, so you'll know how much money to take with you.

The amount of detail in the **budget** you will be required to submit will differ depending on the funding source. Your budget may include personnel, equipment, contractual costs, travel, commodities, other costs.

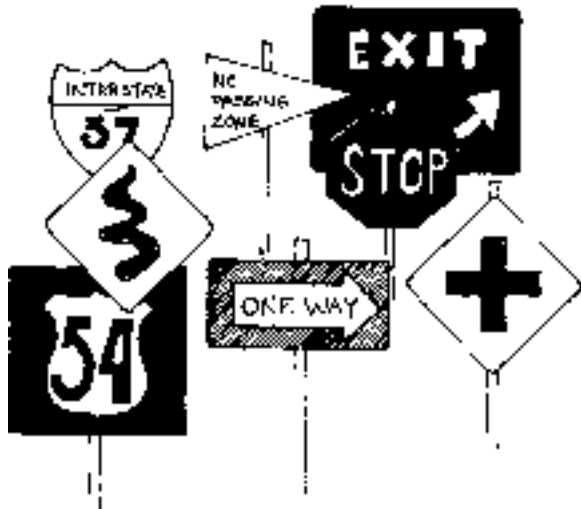
You will need to build your budget from the ground up, based on what you want to do, itemizing such things as staffing, facilities, equipment, supplies, and travel. Most funding sources require you to show how the costs listed in the budget were calculated.



Rules of the road

Here are some tips to help you make your proposal have the impact you'd like:

- Write clearly and simply, using subheadings to indicate topics.
- Watch out for jargon! Would someone who didn't work in your field know what you were talking about?
- If you are responding to a request for proposal, make sure you follow the required format and include everything the RFP asks for.
- After the last draft of the proposal is finished, read it through *critically* one more time. Is anything missing? Is anything unclear? If the answer to either question is yes, bite the bullet and do one more draft.



- Make sure the proposal is attractively presented. It should be neatly typed (no *typos or spelling errors*) with 3/4-inch or one-inch margins on 8 ½ by 11-inch paper.
- Staple the proposal in the upper left corner; don't put it in a binder. (Other organizations may have different requirements; check before you send in the proposal.)
- Send the proposal with a cover letter briefly explaining what the proposal is about. Address the letter to a real person at the organization. Call to find out who that is, if necessary, and to get the proper spelling of the person's name and his or her title.

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Created in 1983, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice. The Authority works to enhance the information tools and management resources of state and local criminal justice agencies, and it serves as a statewide forum for criminal justice coordination, planning, and problem solving. It also is responsible for research, information systems development, and administration of federal anti-crime funds. The Authority's specific powers and duties are spelled out in the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Act [20 ILCS 3930/1].

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority is governed by a 20-member board of state and local leaders from the criminal justice system, plus experts from the private sector. Authority members help develop priorities and monitor their progress. The agency's day-to-day work is carried out by a full-time professional staff working out of the Authority's Chicago office.

This project was supported by Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant #99-JB-VX-0017. However, these guidelines apply to programs funded through the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant, Victims of Crime Act, and Violence Against Women Act by the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Printed by authority of the State of Illinois, November 2001. Printing order #02-132/2,500 copies.



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