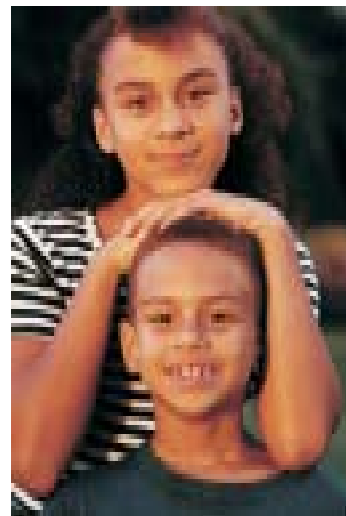


# The Federal Grants Manual for Youth Programs



## A Guide to Youth Risk Behavior Prevention Funding

Volume I  
The U.S. Department of Health and  
Human Services



*the*Institute for Youth Development

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*the* **Institute for Youth Development**

# **The Federal Grant Application Process**

## **Developing Ideas for a Proposal**

After identifying a need or problem in the community, state or the nation, one should develop ideas on how to address the problem. It's advisable to determine if the idea is already being implemented in the applicant's locality or state. If it is, the applicant may either pursue other issues or may want to find additional resources (including federal grant money) to assist the effort. Useful sources for that information include congressional representatives or entities that may have grant awards or contracts to do similar work, such as area government agencies and related public and private organizations. (The main congressional switchboard at (202) 224-3121 will connect callers to specific legislators' offices.) If, compared to any existing efforts, significant differences or improvements in the proposed project's goals can be established, consider pursuing a federal grant to help address a community need.

## **Community Support**

Community support for most proposals is essential. Once a proposal summary is developed, identify individuals or groups representing academic, political, professional, and community organizations, as well as local government agencies or public officials, who would be willing to support the proposal in writing. The type, caliber, and extent of community support is critical in the initial and subsequent review phases. Letters of endorsement detailing exact areas of project sanction and commitment are often requested as part of a proposal to a federal agency. Several months may be required to develop letters of endorsement since something of value (e.g., buildings, staff, services) is sometimes negotiated between the parties involved.

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. A useful method of generating community support may be to hold meetings with community leaders who would be interested in the proposal.

Such discussions may include a query into the merits of the proposal, development of a contract of support for the proposal, creation of a plan to generate data supporting the proposal, or development of a strategy to generate support from numerous of community groups.

## Identification of a Funding Resource

For each program in this manual, the “Description” and “Uses and Use Restrictions” may help identify programs that might provide grant funding. The “Related Programs” section may also contain potential resources. Both the applicant and the grantor agency should share the same interests, intentions, and needs if a proposal is to be considered an acceptable candidate for funding.

Once a potential grantor agency is identified, a grant application kit should be obtained from the agency. (Note: For some programs, the contact person(s) listed will differ when the grant announcement is made in the *Federal Register*. The “Resources” section in the Appendix contains more information about the *Federal Register*.)

In this process it is important to develop a relationship with grantor agency program personnel. They should be considered resources for suggestions, criticisms, and advice about the proposed project. In many cases, the more agency personnel know about the proposal, the better the chance of support and an eventual favorable decision.

Depending on agency preference, some applicants find it useful to send the proposal summary to a specific agency official in a separate cover letter, and ask for review and comment at the earliest possible convenience. If the review is unfavorable and differences cannot be resolved, the examining agency (official) can suggest another department or agency which may be interested in the proposal.

A personal visit to the agency’s regional office or headquarters is also important (see the Appendix for names and addresses of regional offices). A visit not only establishes face-to-face contact, but may also bring out some essential details about the proposal or help secure literature and references from the agency’s library.

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 budget and fiscal years to determine proposed dollar

amounts for particular budget functions. The Federal Budget is available at many libraries and on the Internet at [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su\\_docs/budget/index.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/budget/index.html).

It is important to carefully study the eligibility requirements for each federal program under consideration (see the “Applicant Eligibility” section of each program description), especially since some programs require grantees 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. They are usually associated with strict timetables for agency review. Some programs have more than one application deadline during the fiscal year. Applicants should plan proposal development around the established deadlines.

## **How To Write A Grant Proposal**

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Writing a grant proposal can be an intimidating process for first-time applicants. But this process is valuable in developing a successful program and clarifying goals. It can be done well even by first-time applicants.

### **Part One: Developing A Grant Proposal**

#### **1. Preparation**

A successful grant proposal is well-prepared, thoughtfully planned, and concisely packaged. The potential applicant should become familiar with pertinent program criteria related to the program from which assistance is sought. Before developing a proposal the agency personnel should be contacted to determine if funding is available, when applicable deadlines occur, and the process used by the grantor agency for accepting applications.

Applicants should remember that basic requirements, application forms, information and procedures vary with the federal agency making the grant award.

Individuals without prior grant proposal writing experience may find it useful to attend a grantsmanship workshop.

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

The gathering of documents such as articles of incorporation, tax exemption certificates, and bylaws should be completed, if possible, before the writing begins. Some applicants find it useful to keep (and later refer back to) a notebook or file of all ideas that are developed during the grant proposal writing stage, even if the ideas are not immediately used.

## **3. Constructive Criticism**

At some point, perhaps after the first or second draft is completed, a neutral third party should review the proposal working draft for continuity, clarity and reasoning. It is better to receive constructive criticism at this point during the agency review cycle.

## **4. Signature**

Most proposals are made to institutions rather than individuals. Often signatures of chief administrative officials are required and should be included in the proposal where appropriate.

## **5. Neatness**

Proposals should be typed, collated, copied, and packaged correctly and neatly (according to agency instructions, if any). Each package should be inspected to ensure uniformity throughout. Binding may require either clamps or hard covers. Check with the federal agency to determine its preference. A neat, organized, and attractive proposal package can leave a positive impression with the evaluator about the proposal contents.

## **6. Mailing**

A cover letter should always accompany a proposal. Standard U.S. Postal Service requirements apply unless otherwise indicated by the federal agency. Make sure there is enough time for a proposal to reach its destination. Otherwise, special arrangements may be necessary. Always coordinate such arrangements with the federal grantor agency project office (the agency which will ultimately have the responsibility for the project), the grant office (the agency which will coordinate the grant review), and the contract office (the agency responsible for disbursement and grant award notices), if necessary.

## Part Two: The Basic Components of a Proposal

There are eight basic components to creating a solid proposal package: (1) the proposal summary; (2) introduction of organization; (3) the problem statement (or needs assessment); (4) project objectives; (5) project methods or design; (6) project evaluation; (7) future funding; and (8) the project budget. The following will provide an overview of these components.

### 1. The Proposal Summary: Outline of Project Goals

The proposal summary outlines the proposed project and should appear at the beginning of the proposal. It may 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 is most useful if it is prepared after the proposal has been developed in order to encompass all the key summary points necessary to communicate the objectives of the project. This document is the cornerstone of a proposal, and the initial impression it gives is critical to the proposal's success. Sometimes the summary is the only part of the package that is carefully reviewed before the decision is made to give any further consideration to the project.

The applicant must select a fundable project which can be supported in view of the local need. Alternatives, in the absence of federal support, should be identified. 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.

### 2. Introduction: Presenting a Credible Applicant or Organization

Most proposals require a description of an applicant's organization to describe its past and present operations. The information should be relevant to the goals of the federal grantor agency and should establish the applicant's credibility. Some features to consider including are biographies of board members and key staff members; the organization's goals and philosophy; its track record with other grantors; and any success stories.

### 3. The Problem Statement: Stating the Purpose at Hand

The problem statement (or needs assessment) is a key element of a proposal that makes a clear, concise, and well-supported statement of

the problem to be addressed. Applicants should conduct and document both a formal and informal needs assessment for a program in the target or service area. The information provided should be factual and directly related to the problem addressed by the proposal.

Document the following:

- The purpose for developing the proposal.
- The beneficiaries and how will they benefit.
- The social and economic costs to be affected.
- The nature of the problem (provide as much hard evidence as possible).
- How the applicant organization came to identify the existence of the problem, and how it is currently being addressed.
- The alternatives available when funding has been exhausted.
- Most importantly, the specific manner through which problems might be solved.

Review the resources needed, considering how they will be used and to what end. 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 might help determine if there is interest in developing a student or faculty project to conduct a needs assessment. It might be helpful to include examples of the findings for highlighting in the proposal.

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

Program objectives refer to specific activities in a proposal. It is necessary to identify all objectives related to the goals to be reached, and the methods to be employed to achieve the stated objectives. To develop a well-stated objective, include quantitative (i.e., measurable), verifiable data relating to the problem statement and the outcome of proposed activities. Goals should be realistic since stated objectives will probably be used to evaluate program progress. Literature is available to help identify and write program objectives.

## 5. 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. The design should include:

- a. The activities to occur along with the related resources and staff needed to operate the project (inputs).
- b. A flow chart 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).
- c. 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 federal grantor agency and/or grant reviews which may involve peer review committees.
- d. It may be useful to devise a diagram of the program design. For example, draw a three-column block. Each column is headed by one of the parts (inputs, throughputs and outputs), and on the left (next to the first column) specific program features should be identified (i.e., implementation, staffing, procurement, and systems development). In the grid, specify something about the program design; for example, assume the first column is labeled inputs and the first row is labeled staff. On the grid one might specify under inputs five nurses to operate a child care unit. The throughput might be to maintain charts, counsel the children, and set up a daily routine; outputs might be to discharge 25 healthy children per week. This type of procedure will help to conceptualize both the scope and detail of the project.
- e. Wherever possible, justify in the narrative the course of action taken. The most economical method should be used that does not compromise project quality. The financial expenses associated with performance of the project will later become points of negotiation with the federal program staff. If everything is not carefully justified in writing in the proposal, after negotiation with the federal grantor agencies, the approved project may resemble less of the original concept. Carefully consider the pressures of the proposed implementation (i.e. the time and money needed to acquire each part of the plan). A Program Evaluation and Review

Technique (PERT) chart could be useful and supportive in justifying some proposals.

- f. Highlight the innovative features of the proposal which could be considered distinct from other proposals under consideration.
- g. Whenever possible, use appendices 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 design, could detract from its readability. Appendices 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, methodologies, legal papers, personal vitae, letters of support, and endorsements are examples of appendices.

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

The evaluation component is two-fold: product evaluation and process evaluation. Product evaluation addresses results that can be attributed to the project, as well as the extent to which the project has satisfied its desired objectives. Process evaluation addresses how the project was conducted in terms of consistency with the stated plan of action and the effectiveness of the various activities within the plan. Most federal agencies now require some form of program evaluation among grantees. The requirements of the proposed project should be carefully explored. Evaluations may be conducted by an internal staff member, an evaluation firm or both. The applicant should state the amount of time needed to evaluate, how the feedback will be distributed among the proposed staff, and a schedule for review and comment for this type of communication. Evaluation designs may start at the beginning, middle or end of a project, but the applicant should specify a start-up time. It is practical to submit an evaluation design at the start of a project for two reasons:

- Convincing evaluations require the collection of appropriate data before and during program operations; and,
- If the evaluation design cannot be prepared at the outset then a critical review of the program design may be advisable.

If the problem is not well defined and carefully analyzed for cause and effect relationships then a good evaluation design may be difficult to achieve. Sometimes a pilot study is needed to begin the identification of facts and relationships. Often a thorough literature search may be sufficient. Evaluation requires both coordination and

agreement among program decision-makers (if known). Above all, the federal grantor agency's requirements should be highlighted in the evaluation design. Also, federal grantor agencies may require specific evaluation techniques such as designated data formats (an existing information collection system) or they may offer financial inducements for voluntary participation in a national evaluation study. The applicant should ask specifically about these points. Also, the "Criteria For Selecting Proposals" section of each grant program provides information about the exact evaluation methods required for funded programs.

## **7. Future Funding: Long-Term Project Planning**

Describe a plan for continuation beyond the grant period, and/or the availability of other resources necessary to implement the grant. Discuss maintenance and future program funding if the program is for construction activity. Account for other needed expenditures if the program includes purchase of equipment.

## **8. The Proposal Budget: Planning the Budget**

Funding levels in federal assistance programs change yearly. It is useful to review the appropriations over the past several years to try to project future funding levels. (This manual includes four-year funding information for each grant.) However, applicants should never anticipate that the income from the grant will be the sole support for the project.

A well-prepared budget justifies all expenses and is consistent with the proposal narrative. Some areas in need of an evaluation for consistency are (1) if salaries in the proposal are similar to those of the applicant organization; (2) if new staff persons are being hired, additional space and equipment should be considered, as necessary; (3) if the budget calls for an equipment purchase, it should be the type allowed by the grantor agency; (4) if additional space is rented, the increase in insurance should be supported; (5) if an indirect cost rate applies to the proposal, the division between direct and indirect costs should not be in conflict, and the aggregate budget totals should refer directly to the approved formula; and (6) if matching costs are required, the contributions to the matching fund should be taken out of the budget unless otherwise specified in the application instructions.

Consideration should be given to the overall budget requirements, and in particular, to budget line items most subject to inflationary

pressures. Restraint is important in determining inflationary cost projections (avoid padding budget line items), but one should attempt to anticipate possible future cost increases. Some vulnerable budget areas include 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. In developing a budget, be certain that implementation, continuation and phase-down costs can be met. Also, consider costs associated with leases, evaluation systems, hard/soft match requirements, audits, development, implementation and maintenance of information and accounting systems, and other long-term financial commitments.

## Appeals

Applicants who do not succeed in their application may appeal the decision according to the procedures described in the application information.

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