

## Key Proposal Components

The following structure can be used for your proposal if a funder does not provide specific guidelines or a form. As always, OFGR is here to help you brainstorm and edit any of these proposal components.

**Abstract or Executive Summary:** Initial reviews are often based on the abstract (approximately 200 words) or executive summary (one to two pages). Write as a stand-alone piece for an audience of educated people who know nothing about your topic.

**Cover Letter:** Like an executive summary, the cover letter should summarize the project and serve as a brief overview of the requested amount, goals, objectives, and methods. Use the letter to show that you understand the funder's program and how your project fits into it.

**Introduction:** Briefly state the goal of your research project, provide an overview of how you intend to carry it out, and include the amount you are requesting. Throughout the narrative, draw connections between your goals and the priorities of the funder.

**Needs Statement/Statement of Significance:** Place your needs statement near the beginning of the proposal so that reviewers immediately understand why the project is important.

- Present the problem as something that you can solve.
- Include empirical data and comments from leaders in the field.
- Be positive. Focus on the project's impact, not on the challenges you face.
- Avoid circular logic, in which the lack of a solution is the problem.
- Describe who will benefit and *how* they will benefit.

**Professional/Institutional Qualifications:** Describe your qualifications to undertake the project. Provide evidence of the institution's commitment to your project or field of study and the institutional strengths that will support your project's success. If applicable, describe results from prior grant support.

**Literature Review/Project Background:** Put your project in context. What aspects of the problem have others addressed? What do you plan to build upon? What makes your project unique? Why is it the next logical step in addressing the problem?

**Goals and Objectives:** Transition from stating the problem to offering a solution. Begin with a set of goals and objectives that you intend to work toward.

- A goal is a general statement about the aim of a project. "To contribute new knowledge to the field of..." "To expand the curriculum in the area of..."
- Objectives are indicators of whether a project is successfully working toward the overarching goal. An objective describes the specific outcome of a project and can be indicated by a measurable change (increase or decrease) or a final product (scholarly article, data set, new technique).

**Project Description:** This is the heart of the proposal and should be the longest part of the narrative.

- Describe and defend your methods.
- Outline the project in a logical sequence of events.
- Include a chart or graph to illustrate the timeline.

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- Demonstrate that you have the resources to accomplish the project: Describe personnel, equipment, facilities, external specialists, experts, institutional resources, and other external funding sources.

**Sustainability:** Describe if and how the project will continue after funding. Are there specific start- and end-dates? If not, will it continue to be financially viable?

**Assessment:** This is an increasingly important proposal component. Describe your plans to evaluate what worked, what didn't work, and why. Some accepted forms of assessment include measurable outcomes, peer-reviewed publications, and outside consultant review.

**Dissemination:** Describe who will benefit from the knowledge gained as a result of the project. How will you let them know about it? Might your project's methods and/or outcomes be incorporated into the work of others?

**Conclusion:** In one or two paragraphs, make a final appeal for your project. Restate the main points of your proposal. Tie your project again to your long-range goals and to the goals of the grant-maker.

**Budget:** The budget reflects the full scope of the project. Don't overstate the cost of your project, but don't understate it either. Rather, present an accurate reflection of the financial resources required to meet your goals. Include income such as other external support, institutional support, and matching funds. Include expenses for all project components, with narrative explanations where necessary.

*Thanks to the Corporate, Foundation, and Government Relations website at Swarthmore College for use of their Key Proposal Components page.*