

## 7 PROJECT PROPOSAL WRITING <sup>4</sup>

A project proposal should contain the following sections:

**Title Page**

**Table of Contents**

**Summary**

**I. Introduction**

**II. Project Context or Justification**

**III. Problem Statement**

**IV. Objectives**

**V. Anticipated Outcomes or Results**

**VI. Work scope or Implementation Plan**

**VII. Project Evaluation**

**VIII. Project Budget**

**IX. Project Sustainability**

**Appendices, including timetable for activities.**

There are variations of this outline, and as noted previously, some donors require projects to follow their guidelines. However, let us look at what each section in our outline contains.

### ***Title Page***

The title should be short and evoke the donor's attention. Titles can tell the donor what kind of project it is and sometimes who the target group will be. Title pages need to be well laid out. We find it useful to put the date of submittal in one of the corners at the bottom of the title page. Some applicant organizations use official stationery for the title page. However, this is not necessary.

### ***Table of Contents***

A table of contents can be helpful to donors in reviewing a project. It should be kept to one page.

### ***Summary***

Since donor personnel have many proposals to review, a summary is helpful in telling them what the project is about quickly. If properly presented, it can lead them to study the proposal closer. A summary also makes the proposal appear more professional. In the summary, one should include the following:

- Organization or group making the request: address, telephone, fax, e-mail.
- Description of your organization in one paragraph.
- Project manager(s).
- Problem statement.
- Goal and objectives.
- Amount requested. We find that it is not necessary to include the full budget. The total amount and one or two lines of what the money will be used for suffices.

---

4

We thank International Partnership for Human Development, London, for the permission to use pages 5-16 of The International Donor Directory (1997) for this project proposal outline.

You might add a paragraph on the partner organisation: name, address, telephone, two-line description.

The Summary section should be short, preferably one page, but never longer than two pages. You might find it easier to write the summary last.

## **Main Part of the Application Form**

### *1 Introduction*

Normally, we repeat the project title at the top of this page. The Introduction should describe in more detail your organization, and set the stage for linking the project to your organization's mission and program goals/strategies. It should be no longer than half a page.

### *2 Project Context*

Some project proposal writers put the problem statement before the project context; however, we prefer it the other way since it identifies the conditions surrounding the problem, and then you can later present the problem statement in a more concise fashion. Either approach seems effective.

One should be extremely careful not to make this section too long. Keep it to two pages. If necessary, documentation or other material can be annexed. While some people put a description of their organization and their partner group in this section, we prefer to put it in the Introduction. Obviously, if the project problem relates to organizational and administrative concerns, this becomes a part of the project context. For example, a family planning project may address concerns of training supervisors or of service contract management, but the description of the organization itself (mission, objectives, etc.) should be in the Introduction. Only if needed, can one describe the organization in more detail here, if it does not detract from presenting the project context with its concerns and problems.

This section should present a brief history of the region, the people, the social, economic, health, and other conditions, highlighting those that the project will impact on. Apart from describing your organization, which was done earlier, you should present your organization's involvement in the project or region, in previously addressing this or other problems (achievements) with the target group and/or other groups.

An outline to follow is:

- Describe history of area and people.
- Describe social, economic, health and other pertinent conditions.
- What has been your organization's involvement in this region: what achievements?
- What is the government doing to address these problems? Private sector groups and churches? What plans do these have to address these problems?

### *3 Problem Statement*

This should be a short and concise descriptive statement of the problem(s) and need(s) to be addressed, how the problem impacts the lives of the people who are the project's target group. If data is available, it should be used (i.e. 70% of the target group of children under 5 years of age suffer from at least one form of parasite infection - name source). It is suggested to always state why this problem has priority over other problems, and why your organization has a particular role in addressing this problem.

#### 4 *Project Goal(s) and Objectives*

Try to present a simple one sentence goal statement. For example, "the project will improve the health of children under 5 years of age in the northern two states of the country". It lets the donor know what your organization intends to do to address the problem. Objectives can be separated, if there are multiple ones, into primary or major, and secondary objectives.

Objectives should state in measurable terms who will benefit, the time frame needed to achieve it, and the development units or outputs. Some examples;

- To provide 10,000 children under 5 years of age with parasite treatment in El Quiche Department (Guatemala) in the first year.
- To construct 10 water systems in one year to benefit 10 villages with about 5,000 people in El Quiche.
- To train 50 family planning workers in 6 months for northern Para, Brazil.

Objectives should be **SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timed**.

This is one of the most important sections of any proposal. The work scope or implementation plan that follows later will be designed in order to achieve these objectives.

#### 5 *Anticipated Results and Assumptions*

Some project proposal developers feel this section is not necessary since it repeats the objectives or results stated earlier. However, most donors insist on this section. For ourselves it enables us to take a closer look at our objectives and allows us to analyse them in terms of tangible and intangible results. Anticipated are tangible results or those that are measurable and found in the objectives. Intangible results, on the other hand, cannot easily be measured, and may not be contained in the objectives.

For a parasite treatment project, the anticipated and tangible results would be the number of children treated in one year, the number of treatments per child, increase in weights, decreased bouts of diarrhoea (although this is harder to measure), number of children treated in clinics or health posts who have been treated previously (the number should decrease). Intangible results would be improved health, better absorption of nutrients, more energy and more alert children, and so forth. If they are in your objectives, try to make them measurable.

In the case of a water project, tangible results would be 10 wells in 10 villages by the end of one year, number of household taps, number of community water tanks, amount of water flow, amount of water available to the community or home daily, or for irrigation and home gardens, formation of a water committee, collection of water fees, etc. Intangible results would be improved health and hygiene, savings from carrying water, reduced parasite infection, etc.

A statement might be made concerning the environmental impact of the project. For example, for a water project, would the water table be lowered to the point that it will effect other water supplies, cause the saline level to increase, etc. One should also look carefully at a project in regard to soil erosion and deforestation. Many donors want to know if you have considered environmental impact. While the project may bring a benefit to the people, would it later cause environmental problems.

#### 6 *Work Plan (Implementation)*

- A detailed implementation plan should be presented. It can be presented in a step by step fashion of activities. Some points to consider are:

- Was the local population involved in planning the project, and how will they participate in its implementation? Many donors want the local population involved from the planning stage, through implementation and evaluation. Describe this role along with their inputs.
- The number and kind of personnel needed to carry out the project. Provide their qualifications, whether they are available locally, and how they would be recruited. Mention who they would be responsible to, or report to.
- Describe the relationship for this project between the applicant and the implementing or field agency. What administrative and supervisory responsibilities does each have?
- Describe your action plan or methods -how you will implement the project. For example, for a water project, after hiring a water technician and mobilizing the community, pipe, cement and other materials will need to be purchased. Materials will need to be inventoried and stored (how and where, and by whom). How long will this start up phase take? Try to present your project in phases or stages.
- Describe how and why you selected your target group, target villages, and so on. In describing educational and training activities, many project writers fail to describe how they will identify and select candidates for training. Selection criteria should be presented.
- Describe at each step what resources are needed. Try to stay away from mentioning funds, which is better kept for the Budget section. We describe resources in terms of pipe, pumps, vehicles, seeds, training manuals, space or locale for courses, tools, and other items. Always try to quantify resource needs, i.e. 100 training manuals, 10 kilometres of plastic piping, 50 new family planning promoters, 3 supervisors, and so forth. Technical assistance inputs should be described.
- Try to show what alternatives there are to your plan of action or methods and why you did not choose them.

Basically, this is the section of the project where you will describe how you are going to carry out the project to achieve your outputs and project objectives.

## 7 *Monitoring and Evaluation*

This section is very important. It tells the donor how and when the project will be evaluated. The evaluation should be designed to determine how well the objectives are being achieved. The project should be evaluated at certain points during its implementation, with a final evaluation at the end of the project. In a 2- or 3-year project, monitoring should take place at least every six months. This section should include:

- Person(s) who will undertake the monitoring/evaluation.
- Time periods for the evaluation, i.e. every 6 months or at the end of each project stage.
- How data or information will be recorded, analysed, and presented.
- Criteria for evaluating outcomes or achievements, and progress made toward achieving objectives.
- How and to whom evaluations will be presented.
- How evaluations will be used by the project, the community, the implementing agency, and project holder (if different than implementer).

It is important to feed back to the project staff and community the results of the evaluation. They must take part in solving problems, but first they must understand them. It also gives them encouragement when achievements are on schedule. Evaluations should be reviewed by agency boards or persons designated by them, since this information has a bearing (usually) on the NGO's mission and development strategies.

The evaluation section should also address problems, how they were solved or what can be done to solve them, recommended changes in outputs, resources, and administration, modifications of objectives, and other pertinent data. A simple statement can be made in the project proposal that these points would be addressed.

## 8 *Project Budget*

Projects generally under-budget rather than over-budget. Certainly, ambitious, high cost budgets are sometimes presented. Budgets must be realistic to cover project inputs or costs to achieve outputs. Budgets should:

- Be expressed on a yearly basis. For a 3-year project, each year's budget can be shown in separate columns, with a last column for totals.
- Show costs in dollars and local currency. The exchange rate used should be indicated below the budget.
- Always show what local funds and other resources are available. Many donors like to see a 20-50 percent local input.
- Always divide expenditures into major sections, such as personnel, travel, equipment and materials, course costs, office costs, technical assistance, and so on.
- Allow for inflation or other currency fluctuations, and for unforeseen costs. We sometimes add 5 to 10 percent to the cost of the project for these items (Contingencies). It depends on the country, and the kind of project presented.

Some tips:

- When presenting salary costs, calculate the monthly salary x 12 months to arrive at one year's salary
- Show fringe benefits in a separate line item from salaries. Remember, some countries have a 13th to a 15th month bonus, besides other benefits.
- Separate travel costs. Show line items for: air travel, land travel, vehicle maintenance, per diem or hotel and meals, other travel.
- Under office expenses: show separate line items for rent, communication (postage, telephone, fax, internet), stationary, office equipment, maintenance, and other.
- When showing the costs of materials, indicate the per unit cost.
- Show local inputs. Project applicants often forget that when volunteers are involved in a project, their input has a local value. It can be calculated easily by determining the number of hours weekly or monthly they will work on the project over the project's lifespan, times the minimum established wage in the country or region of it. One is often surprised by how large this input can be. Use of vehicles and office space can be calculated as local inputs as well. Estimates can be made for donated local materials, such as the gravel, wood, sand and hand tools donated by a village for a water project. Educational materials that have already been developed and will be used for your project can also be given a value. The more local inputs/value one has, the more attractive the budget and project itself becomes to the donor NGO.
- When purchasing equipment such as a vehicle, computer, vocational shop machinery, tractor, and similar items, remember to depreciate them at 20 to 25 percent per year. You should also indicate how these would be maintained and replaced, and if maintenance is available locally. It is a good idea to set up an equipment replacement fund if your project generates income.

At the end of the budget section, one might add a paragraph on cost/benefit ratios. Some agencies try to calculate cost- effectiveness, but for most projects we do not recommend such a complicated exercise.

Some projects contain a full page or more of budget notes. Try to keep notes to a minimum, no more than 2 or 3 notes.

An example of a budget format is the following:

Line Item (Expenditures: In US\$)	
A. Personnel	
Salaries (list and calculate)	
Fringe Benefits	
	Subtotal
B. Travel	
Purchase of motorbike	
Gasoline: \$20 per month X 12 months.	
Registration, insurance and maintenance	
Per diem: 10 days per month at \$15 per day x 12 months	
Bus fare	
	Subtotal
C. Materials	
ORT salts: \$0.10 X 1,000 packets	
Printing of 500 posters: \$1.00 each.	
Etc.	
	Subtotal
D. Office	
Rent: \$100 per month X 12 months.	
Communication: \$125 per month X 12 months.	
Stationary.	
Etc.	
	Subtotal
E. Course Costs	
Five nutrition courses:	
30 people in each at \$10 per day per person X 30 X 5 courses.	
	Subtotal
F. Contingencies (Unforeseen and inflation).	
Estimate: 10% per year.	
	Subtotal
	TOTAL

In the budget, one should show other grants that are anticipated. Sometimes donors want to know how and who will manage the funds, and what kind of accounting system you have.

## 9 *Project Sustainability*

Increasingly, donors want to know how the activity will be continued once their grant is expended. It is a good idea to address this point in every project.

There are at least three kinds of sustainability:

**Financial Sustainability:** the proposal should indicate how the project can continue or be sustained after donor funds are expended, i.e. through the use of locally generated funds, government funding, etc.

**Technical Sustainability:** Indicate that the target group can provide technical inputs to the project after donor funding ends, that they have the training, skills and materials to continue to sustain the project.

**Managerial Sustainability:** The proposal should show that the local target group and/or applicant will continue to provide organizational or managerial inputs after donor funding. Can the community or target group itself reach a level where it can manage the project and organize for expanded or new activities? What will local leadership and organization be like at the end of the project?

### *Appendices*

There should be very few appendices. If there are too many appendices, the document is unattractive and turns away donors. We suggest that only pertinent and very important documents or information be appended. One such appendix might be a time line of activities. This shows by month or quarter year what activities will be undertaken. Others might be a map of the project region, letter from responsible government official, information highlighting problems to be addressed, letter of support from another donor, staff credentials, etc.