
Postgraduate Certificate in Nonprofit Fundraising and Marketing

Grant Writing and Proposal Development

Acronym – A shortened form of a phrase formed from initial letters, used frequently in grant writing to save space and increase readability.

Related terms: initialism, abbreviation, terminology.

Explanation: Acronyms such as RFP (Request for Proposal) or ROI (Return on Investment) appear throughout funder guidelines and proposal narratives.

Example: In a proposal to a health foundation, the writer might state “Our HIV prevention program aligns with the funder’s priorities.”

Practical application: Create an acronym list early in the drafting process to ensure consistency and avoid confusion.

Challenge: Overuse can obscure meaning for readers unfamiliar with the terms; always define the acronym at first mention.

Active Voice – A grammatical construction where the subject performs the action, preferred in proposals for clarity and impact.

Related terms: passive voice, sentence structure, readability.

Explanation: “The team will conduct workshops” is clearer than “Workshops will be conducted by the team.”

Example: An active statement like “We will increase literacy rates by 20%” directly ties actions to outcomes.

Practical application: Review drafts to replace passive constructions, enhancing persuasiveness.

Challenge: Some complex processes may naturally lend themselves to passive phrasing; balance clarity with technical accuracy.

Alignment – The degree to which a proposal’s objectives match a funder’s priorities, mission, and strategic goals.

Related terms: fit, relevance, donor priorities.

Explanation: Successful proposals demonstrate clear alignment, showing that the organization’s work advances the funder’s agenda.

Example: A nonprofit focused on youth employment aligns its project with a corporate foundation’s “job creation” priority.

Practical application: Use the funder’s language in the proposal narrative to illustrate alignment.

Challenge: Misinterpreting funder priorities can lead to proposals that appear off-target, reducing funding chances.

Budget Narrative – A detailed description that explains each line item in the budget, justifying costs and demonstrating fiscal responsibility.

Related terms: line-item budget, cost justification, financial plan.

Explanation: The narrative should connect expenses to project activities and outcomes, showing why each cost is necessary.

Example: "Personnel costs cover the salary of a full-time project manager who will oversee implementation and reporting."

Practical application: Pair the budget narrative with a spreadsheet to ensure consistency.

Challenge: Over-justifying minor costs can clutter the narrative; focus on significant expenditures.

Case for Support – A concise, compelling argument that articulates why a project deserves funding, often used in cover letters and executive summaries.

Related terms: pitch, elevator statement, compelling narrative.

Explanation: It highlights the problem, solution, impact, and unique strengths of the organization.

Example: "In the past year, 1,200 families have lost access to affordable childcare; our program will restore services for 500 children."

Practical application: Craft the case for support first; it guides the rest of the proposal.

Challenge: Balancing brevity with sufficient detail to persuade a busy funder.

Collaboration – A partnership between two or more organizations that combines resources, expertise, and networks to achieve shared goals.

Related terms: joint venture, partnership, consortium.

Explanation: Funders often favor collaborative projects because they demonstrate broader impact and risk sharing.

Example: A health nonprofit partners with a university to evaluate program outcomes, enhancing credibility.

Practical application: Clearly define each partner's role, contributions, and governance in the proposal.

Challenge: Managing differing organizational cultures and ensuring equitable credit.

Concept Paper – A brief document (usually 2–4 pages) that outlines a project idea, intended to gauge funder interest before a full proposal is submitted.

Related terms: pre-proposal, letter of inquiry, abstract.

Explanation: It includes the problem statement, objectives, methodology, and budget estimate.

Example: A concept paper might propose a pilot program to test a new digital literacy curriculum.

Practical application: Use the concept paper to refine ideas based on funder feedback.

Challenge: Limited space forces concise articulation; omitting key details can lead to rejection.

Consistency – Uniformity in language, formatting, data, and messaging throughout the proposal.

Related terms: cohesion, standardization, brand voice.

Explanation: Consistency reinforces credibility and aids reviewer comprehension.

Example: If the executive summary states a target of 10,000 beneficiaries, the body must reflect the same figure.

Practical application: Develop a style guide for headings, fonts, and terminology.

Challenge: Multiple authors may introduce variations; rigorous editing is required.

Data-Driven Approach – The use of quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform project design, implementation, and evaluation.

Related terms: evidence-based, metrics, monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Explanation: Demonstrating that a project is grounded in data reassures funders of its effectiveness.

Example: Citing a study that shows a 30% reduction in recidivism when mentorship programs are implemented.

Practical application: Include baseline data, targets, and indicators in the proposal.

Challenge: Accessing reliable data can be costly; ensure data sources are credible.

Deliverables – Tangible or intangible outputs that the project will produce, such as reports, trainings, or services.

Related terms: outputs, milestones, products.

Explanation: Clearly defined deliverables help funders assess progress and impact.

Example: "Three community workshops on financial literacy will be delivered by month six."

Practical application: Align deliverables with the budget and timeline.

Challenge: Over-promising deliverables can strain resources; keep expectations realistic.

Evaluation Plan – A systematic method for measuring project outcomes, impact, and effectiveness, often required by funders.

Related terms: logic model, theory of change, impact assessment.

Explanation: The plan outlines indicators, data collection methods, and analysis procedures.

Example: Using pre- and post-test surveys to assess changes in participants' knowledge.

Practical application: Incorporate both formative and summative evaluation components.

Challenge: Designing robust evaluation within limited budgets; consider leveraging existing data sources.

Funder Guidelines – The set of rules, criteria, and preferences published by a funding agency that dictate proposal eligibility and format.

Related terms: RFP, solicitation, eligibility criteria.

Explanation: Strict adherence to guidelines is essential; non-compliance often leads to automatic disqualification.

Example: A guideline may require a 12-month project period and a maximum budget of \$150,000.

Practical application: Create a checklist from the guidelines to verify compliance before submission.

Challenge: Interpreting ambiguous language; when in doubt, contact the funder for clarification.

Grant Management – The process of overseeing a funded project from award through closeout, ensuring compliance, reporting, and financial stewardship.

Related terms: post-award administration, compliance, audit.

Explanation: Effective grant management sustains donor relationships and positions the organization for future funding.

Example: Submitting quarterly progress reports that detail activities, expenditures, and outcomes.

Practical application: Assign a dedicated grant manager to track deadlines and documentation.

Challenge: Balancing grant administration duties with program delivery responsibilities.

Implementation Timeline – A chronological schedule that outlines when project activities, milestones, and deliverables will occur.

Related terms: Gantt chart, work plan, schedule.

Explanation: Timelines provide reviewers with a realistic sense of project pacing and feasibility.

Example: Phase 1 (months 1-3): needs assessment; Phase 2 (months 4-9): service delivery; Phase 3 (months 10-12): evaluation.

Practical application: Use visual tools to display the timeline in the proposal appendix.

Challenge: Accounting for unforeseen delays; include buffer periods where possible.

Impact – The long-term, systemic change resulting from a project, beyond immediate outputs.

Related terms: outcomes, sustainability, ripple effect.

Explanation: Funders look for projects that generate measurable, lasting benefits.

Example: Reducing youth unemployment rates in a region by 15% over five years.

Practical application: Articulate both short-term outcomes and projected long-term impact.

Challenge: Predicting future impact involves assumptions; be transparent about uncertainties.

Indicative Budget – An estimate of projected costs used in early stages (e.g., concept papers) to signal financial feasibility.

Related terms: provisional budget, cost estimate, preliminary budget.

Explanation: While not final, the indicative budget must be realistic and aligned with project scope.

Example: Allocating \$20,000 for staff salaries in a pilot program.

Practical application: Base the estimate on historical cost data and vendor quotes.

Challenge: Over- or under-estimating can mislead funders; include a disclaimer that figures are subject to refinement.

Innovation – The introduction of novel methods, technologies, or approaches that address a problem in a unique way.

Related terms: novelty, breakthrough, creative solution.

Explanation: Funders often prioritize innovative projects that have the potential to scale or replicate.

Example: Using AI-driven analytics to target at-risk students for early intervention.

Practical application: Highlight how the innovation builds on existing research and fills a gap.

Challenge: Demonstrating feasibility and risk mitigation for untested ideas.

Letter of Inquiry (LOI) – A brief, formal request to gauge funder interest before submitting a full proposal, typically limited to one or two pages.

Related terms: concept paper, pre-proposal, expression of interest.

Explanation: The LOI includes a summary of the problem, proposed solution, budget range, and organizational capacity.

Example: An LOI may request \$75,000 to pilot a mobile health clinic in a rural area.

Practical application: Follow the funder's LOI format precisely; brevity is essential.

Challenge: Conveying sufficient detail within strict word limits.

Logical Framework (Logframe) – A matrix that links project inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts with indicators and assumptions.

Related terms: logic model, results framework, theory of change.

Explanation: The logframe provides a systematic way to plan, monitor, and evaluate a project.

Example: Input: \$100,000; Activity: conduct workshops; Output: 20 workshops delivered; Outcome: participants increase skill proficiency by 30%.

Practical application: Include a condensed logframe in the proposal to illustrate clarity of planning.

Challenge: Over-complicating the matrix can confuse reviewers; keep it concise.

Metrics – Quantifiable measures used to assess progress toward goals and objectives, such as numbers, percentages, or rates.

Related terms: indicators, key performance indicators (KPIs), data points.

Explanation: Metrics enable funders to track the effectiveness of funded activities.

Example: "Number of households reached" or "percentage reduction in carbon emissions."

Practical application: Align each metric with a specific outcome and define data collection methods.

Challenge: Selecting metrics that are both meaningful and feasible to collect.

Mission Alignment – The extent to which a project supports the core purpose and values of the applying organization.

Related terms: organizational fit, strategic relevance, core competencies.

Explanation: Demonstrating mission alignment reassures funders that the organization has the expertise and commitment to deliver.

Example: A nonprofit whose mission is "empowering women through education" proposes a scholarship program for female students.

Practical application: Reference the organization's mission statement directly within the narrative.

Challenge: Avoiding generic statements; tie specific program elements to mission pillars.

Needs Assessment – A systematic process of identifying gaps, problems, and priorities within a target community or sector.

Related terms: gap analysis, baseline study, community survey.

Explanation: A robust needs assessment provides the evidence base for why a project is necessary.

Example: Survey data reveal that 40% of low-income families lack access to broadband services.

Practical application: Use secondary data and primary research to triangulate findings.

Challenge: Limited resources may restrict data collection; prioritize the most critical indicators.

Outcome – The immediate and intermediate changes that result from project activities, often measurable and linked to outputs.

Related terms: result, effect, short-term impact.

Explanation: Outcomes bridge the gap between deliverables and long-term impact.

Example: After delivering nutrition workshops, participants improve their diet quality scores by 15%.

Practical application: Phrase outcomes as specific, measurable statements using verbs like "increase," "reduce," or "enhance."

Challenge: Distinguishing outcomes from outputs; avoid conflating the two.

Overhead Rate – The percentage of a grant budget allocated to indirect costs such as administration, facilities, and utilities.

Related terms: indirect costs, administrative expense, facility fee.

Explanation: Funders may cap overhead rates; common limits range from 10% to 15% of total budget.

Example: A 12% overhead on a \$200,000 grant equals \$24,000 for organizational support.

Practical application: Include a clear justification for the overhead rate in the budget narrative.

Challenge: Negotiating higher rates with funders who prefer low overhead allocations.

Partner Capacity – The ability of a collaborating organization to fulfill its responsibilities, measured by expertise, staffing, and resources.

Related terms: capability, competency, resource base.

Explanation: Demonstrating partner capacity strengthens the proposal's credibility.

Example: A university partner contributes research expertise and data analysis staff.

Practical application: Provide brief bios or organizational profiles of key partners.

Challenge: Verifying partner capacity without over-promising; include letters of support where possible.

Performance Metrics – Specific indicators used to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of project implementation.

Related terms: process indicators, operational metrics, KPI.

Explanation: These metrics track how well activities are executed, such as timeliness or cost efficiency.

Example: "Percentage of workshops completed on schedule" or "average cost per participant served."

Practical application: Align performance metrics with the implementation timeline.

Challenge: Collecting real-time data may require additional monitoring tools.

Program Narrative – The core section of a proposal that describes the problem, solution, methodology, and expected outcomes in detail.

Related terms: project description, narrative, story.

Explanation: It is the persuasive heart of the proposal, where the applicant makes a logical case for funding.

Example: A narrative may begin with a compelling anecdote that illustrates the community need.

Practical application: Follow a logical flow: problem statement → goals → objectives → activities → evaluation.

Challenge: Balancing technical detail with readability; avoid jargon that could alienate reviewers.

Proposal Budget – The financial plan that outlines all anticipated costs, including personnel, supplies, travel, and indirect expenses.

Related terms: cost breakdown, financial proposal, budget justification.

Explanation: The budget must be realistic, complete, and aligned with the narrative.

Example: Salary line item includes position title, FTE percentage, annual rate, and total cost.

Practical application: Use a spreadsheet template that matches the funder's required format.

Challenge: Reconciling budget constraints with ambitious program goals; prioritize essential activities.

Proof of Concept – Evidence that a proposed solution is feasible and effective on a small scale before full implementation.

Related terms: pilot study, feasibility test, validation.

Explanation: Providing proof of concept reduces perceived risk for funders.

Example: A pilot of a mobile app shows a 25% increase in user engagement over three months.

Practical application: Include pilot results, methodology, and lessons learned in the proposal.

Challenge: Limited pilot data may not fully predict large-scale outcomes; be transparent about limitations.

Qualitative Data – Non-numeric information such as interviews, focus groups, or observations that provide depth and context.

Related terms: narrative data, descriptive data, thematic analysis.

Explanation: Qualitative data enriches the story, illustrating human impact beyond statistics.

Example: Participant quotes describing how a mentorship program changed their confidence.

Practical application: Integrate qualitative findings with quantitative metrics for a mixed-methods approach.

Challenge: Analyzing qualitative data requires time and expertise; ensure rigorous coding procedures.

Recipient Organization – The nonprofit or entity applying for funding, responsible for delivering the proposed project.

Related terms: applicant, grantee, implementing agency.

Explanation: Funders assess the recipient's credibility, track record, and capacity.

Example: A well-established organization with a 10-year history of successful grant management.

Practical application: Include a concise organizational profile highlighting relevant experience.

Challenge: New or small organizations may need to compensate for limited history with strong partnerships and evidence.

Reference Letter – A written endorsement from a respected individual or organization attesting to the applicant's competence and the project's merit.

Related terms: letter of support, testimonial, endorsement.

Explanation: Strong letters can tip the balance when reviewers are undecided.

Example: A letter from a city mayor praising the nonprofit's community impact.

Practical application: Request letters early and provide the writer with key points to address.

Challenge: Ensuring letters are specific, not generic; avoid overly promotional language.

Research Ethics – Principles governing the responsible conduct of research, including informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection.

Related terms: IRB approval, ethical review, participant rights.

Explanation: Funders may require ethical compliance for projects involving human subjects.

Example: Obtaining signed consent forms from participants in a health intervention study.

Practical application: Include an ethics statement and any required approvals in the proposal.

Challenge: Navigating institutional review board processes can delay project start dates.

Resource Allocation – The distribution of funds, staff time, and materials across project components to achieve objectives efficiently.

Related terms: budgeting, prioritization, fund distribution.

Explanation: Effective allocation demonstrates strategic planning and stewardship.

Example: Allocating 40% of the budget to direct service delivery, 30% to evaluation, and 30% to overhead.

Practical application: Use a resource matrix to map activities to budget categories.

Challenge: Balancing competing priorities while staying within funder constraints.

Return on Investment (ROI) – A measure of the value generated relative to the cost invested, often expressed as a ratio or percentage.

Related terms: impact ratio, cost-benefit analysis, value-added.

Explanation: While nonprofits may prioritize social outcomes, funders often request ROI calculations to assess efficiency.

Example: For every \$1 invested, the program saves \$3 in public health costs.

Practical application: Conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis and present results in the budget narrative.

Challenge: Quantifying social benefits in monetary terms can be complex; use accepted methodologies.

Risk Management Plan – A systematic approach to identifying, assessing, and mitigating potential obstacles that could jeopardize project success.

Related terms: contingency plan, mitigation strategy, risk assessment.

Explanation: Demonstrating awareness of risks reassures funders that the project is well-controlled.

Example: Identifying a risk of staff turnover and planning cross-training to mitigate impact.

Practical application: Include a risk matrix with likelihood, impact, and mitigation actions.

Challenge: Over-emphasizing risks can alarm reviewers; focus on realistic, manageable risks.

Sustainability – The ability of a project to continue delivering benefits after the grant period ends, through ongoing funding, capacity building, or institutionalization.

Related terms: long-term viability, program continuation, legacy.

Explanation: Funders favor projects that embed lasting change rather than temporary fixes.

Example: Training local staff to manage a program after the external grant concludes.

Practical application: Outline a sustainability strategy that includes diversified revenue streams or policy integration.

Challenge: Predicting future funding landscapes; be realistic about sustainability prospects.

Target Population – The specific group of individuals or communities that the project aims to serve.

Related terms: beneficiaries, focus group, demographic.

Explanation: Clearly defining the target population helps demonstrate relevance and impact.

Example: Low-income households with children under five in a rural county.

Practical application: Use demographic data to justify need and tailor interventions.

Challenge: Over-broad definitions can dilute focus; ensure the population is measurable and reachable.

Technical Assistance (TA) – Support services provided to build capacity, such as training, consulting, or toolkits.

Related terms: capacity building, support services, expertise sharing.

Explanation: Including TA in a proposal can enhance project effectiveness and funder confidence.

Example: Providing workshops on financial literacy to partner agencies.

Practical application: Detail the TA provider, curriculum, and expected outcomes.

Challenge: Allocating sufficient budget for TA without inflating costs.

Timeline – A chronological representation of project phases, tasks, and deadlines, often displayed as a table or Gantt chart.

Related terms: schedule, work plan, milestones.

Explanation: A clear timeline shows feasibility and helps reviewers assess project pacing.

Example: Month 1: recruitment; Month 2-4: training; Month 5-10: service delivery; Month 11-12: evaluation.

Practical application: Align each activity with corresponding budget line items.

Challenge: Accounting for unforeseen delays; include contingency periods.

Triangulation – The use of multiple data sources or methods to validate findings and strengthen credibility.

Related terms: cross-verification, mixed methods, corroboration.

Explanation: Triangulating data reduces bias and enhances the reliability of impact claims.

Example: Combining survey results, focus group feedback, and administrative records to assess program success.

Practical application: Describe how each data source will be collected and integrated.

Challenge: Managing and analyzing diverse data sets can be resource-intensive.

Volunteer Management – The process of recruiting, training, supervising, and retaining volunteers who contribute labor to the project.

Related terms: civic engagement, pro bono support, volunteer coordination.

Explanation: Volunteers can expand capacity while keeping costs low, appealing to many funders.

Example: A literacy program utilizes trained volunteers to tutor children after school.

Practical application: Include a volunteer recruitment plan and supervision structure.

Challenge: Ensuring volunteers are reliable and meet program quality standards.

Write-In Grant – A proposal submitted to a funder that does not have a formal solicitation or open call, often based on observed alignment.

Related terms: unsolicited proposal, opportunistic grant, cold application.

Explanation: While riskier, write-in grants can open new funding avenues if the fit is strong.

Example: A nonprofit discovers a corporate foundation's interest in climate resilience and submits a tailored proposal.

Practical application: Research the funder's past giving patterns and tailor the proposal accordingly.

Challenge: Higher likelihood of rejection; ensure the proposal is exceptionally compelling and well-researched.