

Basic components of a proposal

Private foundation proposals differ greatly from most federal proposals. While foundations often outline the general format that they prefer, there is more latitude regarding the structure of the narrative. Always frame your proposal to align as closely as possible to the funders programs' stated mission, without going so far that you are compromising your research interests.

Further, if there is a published list of judges/reviewers available, as is usually the case for scientific applications, try to compose your proposal so that it piques the interest of one or more of the judges' expertise.

1. Abstract/Summary

- The abstract is the most important component of the proposal. Spend time developing the best possible title. If the length is not mandated, it should be no longer than one half to one page maximum.
- Use bolded subheadings. Include highlights in the topic sentence in each section of the proposal.
- What will be done, by whom, how, over what period of time? What is the problem/need? Who will the outcomes benefit?

2. Statement of Need

- What is the issue that you are addressing and why does it matter?
- Why is what you propose necessary? What is the void in Knowledge?
- Who benefits? Indicate the public good, not just the effect on campus.
- Why hasn't this issue been addressed sufficiently in the past? Who else is working in this field, what have they done, and why isn't that enough? Demonstrate your knowledge of the field.
- Provide convincing evidence that what you are proposing does not duplicate other work. Replication of someone else's work in a new environment or larger scale may be fundable.

3. Project Activity, Methodology and Outcomes

- Why did you choose to address the issue in the manner that you have? Are there other approaches? If so, why aren't they appropriate to the situation?
- What are the specific activities involved? Who will do them?
- Present a timeline of activities. Tables and charts work best here. They crystallize data, break up pages of narrative, and convey extensive information well in a limited space.
- What specific outcomes will be achieved? What will change?
- Why are you/your organization the best one to do what you propose to do? Is it an extension of successful, innovative work or a pilot project you already completed?

4. Evaluation

- Essential piece that should be both quantitative and qualitative, if feasible.
- Outline clearly the methodology that you will use to assess the projects success.

5. Dissemination

- Dissemination should be linked to your project goals and objectives. If you are trying to affect policy, your dissemination plan should target policy-makers, media, and affected populations.
- Describe your communication strategy.
- Be creative. Sending an article to a professional journal is only one of many options. Consider submitting op-ed pieces to newspapers and articles to more popular periodicals; work with University Relations to obtain newspaper coverage and interviews on local radio stations; engage in conference presentations, community outreach activities, presentations to policy-makers and community groups, such as the Chamber of Commerce; launch a web site or blog; convene work groups of your peers; create briefing papers, press releases, videos; and, list yourself on speakers bureaus.

6. Budget and Continuation Funding

- Show your budget in table form and use a budget narrative to explain each item.
- Only Include other sources of funding if the funder mandates it's inclusion. UMass policy does not allow including in-kind or outside contributions unless it is required, as it adds administrative burden and costs.
- Indicate how the project will be funded or be sustainable after the grant funds have run out.
- The [Office of Grants and Contract Administration \(OGCA\)](#) makes available all university policies covering all legal, fiscal, human resources and intellectual property issues.