



Guidelines for Writing Grant Proposals



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INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, nations are challenged in their capacity to address health priorities and meet the need and demand for health services, practice, education and research. Although there is emphasis on providing quality health care services that are cost efficient and effective, there are often severe economic constraints to providing such care. Seeking funding options or grants to provide resources for quality health care, to develop and provide nursing and health educational programmes, or to advance nursing science and evidenced-based nursing interventions is a must in today's health environment.

Writing grant proposals is a necessary part of nurses and other health professionals work assignments in health systems today. Some nurses have been successful in writing proposals and securing funding to deal with issues such as the shortage of nursing staff and strategies for recruitment and retention, the development of nurse leaders and managers, the delivery of nursing care to patients with HIV and AIDS, Malaria or tuberculosis. Some of us have also been able to receive funds to develop new models of care or implement new evidenced-based nursing interventions. As well, we have successfully found money to design and implement new teaching modalities and strategies for continuing nursing education and found resources to provide new books, new equipment and new systems for on-line nursing education. These are a few examples of areas where we have been successful.

For many nurses and nursing organisations grant writing is a new competency and therefore nurses need to develop and enhance their skills in writing proposals that convince the potential funder. *Guidelines for Writing Grant Proposals* provides nurses and other health professionals with a step-by-step approach to writing a grant proposal.

STEP 1. PLANNING

In the Reference and Appendix section, there are examples of other resources available for writing grant proposals and a checklist for final review of the grant application.

STEP 1. PLANNING

The first step in the grant writing process is planning. You must plan your work first before you start to prepare content and write the proposal. This is the time to select a key person who will be responsible for the overall coordination of the grant proposal. The person assigned to this role will also be responsible for communicating with the grantor or funding agency representatives; receiving, banking and managing grant monies; monitoring the budget and providing financial and other reports required. In some cases this may be shared with another colleague. Regardless of how many people work with the grant, it is critical to have a key contact person who negotiates and carves out the personnel responsibilities and duties during the planning phase. The early selection of a key contact person for the grant is imperative and can help all involved avoid conflict, confusion and miscommunication.

1. Clarify the idea

- What do you want the proposal to focus on and why?
- Is there a clear need for the project/programme?
- Is it timely?
- What difference would the proposed activity or topic make?
- What has already been accomplished in the proposed area?
- Is it relevant to nursing, health care, the community and society?

2. Determine resources needed

- What resources do you need in order to develop the grant proposal?

For example, personnel with expertise in budgeting, finance, research, marketing, writing and editing. Also, determine other resources needed such as facilities, equipment, supplies, access to Internet and database research engines.

3. Determine key partners and stakeholders

- With whom do you need to work in order to be successful?

Think about all the potential partners and key stakeholders that you need to bring to the planning process. For instance, if you were interested in developing an HIV/AIDS programme for infected health care workers in a certain country, you should build collaborative partnerships and seek support for the grant proposal from the infected health workers, their communities and the national nurses association (NNA). These key stakeholders can assist in the proposal planning phase. In this instance, it would be beneficial for some of the above key partners to provide letters of support.

4. Explore funding sources

- What funding sources are available?
- What are the internal funding possibilities and the external funding possibilities?

Internally, consider what resources are available and what is lacking. This will help when you prepare the content of the proposal later in the process. For example, funders like to see what resources you have that can add to the potential amount of money they may give you in order to achieve the proposed project or programme. An inventory of your currently available internal resources can strengthen your request.

Think of ways you can be innovative in seeking funding. Explore all avenues and think about all people and organisations: funding institutions, community organisations, national and international foundations, profession-

STEP 1. PLANNING

al organisations (e.g. nursing associations, public health organisations), governmental and non-governmental development agencies (e.g. the African Development Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the regional organisations of the World Health Organization), cultural and religious organisations, financial institutions, local and national governmental offices such as ministries of health, departments of education, social services and human resources departments. Remember, although you may be focusing on a health issue, many non-health agencies fund health programmes and activities. If you were interested, for example, in developing a car safety belt campaign, consider seeking funds from the government's transportation department.

Look at this phase of exploring funding opportunities as an adventure. You may be surprised how many people are interested in your idea and in achieving a successful outcome that makes a difference in health care and society in general. The challenge will be to convince potential funders that your proposal is unique and that the money requested will achieve the proposed outcome.

Ideas for researching funding sources include:

- Visiting your local library. Most libraries have a resource section on funding organisations.
- Exploring the world-wide web for funders and request for proposals. In some cases, you can download the application and mail it in or fill in the application online.
- Asking community partners and governmental organisations for financial support and ideas for funding options.

After exploring funding sources, you need to determine which funders best fit your overall project, programme or proposed activities. Sometimes you can take your

ideas and an initial draft or concept paper (no more than two pages) to potential funders to review and provide feedback on your plans. Often, funders do not accept unsolicited grant proposals, but prefer to receive a concept paper, which is sometimes referred to as a letter of inquiry or intent. For examples of a concept paper and a letter of inquiry refer to www.npguides.org.

Most funders have dedicated staff assigned to work with potential applicants. They can assist you with clarifying the ideas and preparing the proposal. They will not write the proposal for you but they can help you better understand what they are looking for and what they have funded in the past. Do not rely solely on letters of communication or electronic letters seeking proposal information to potential funders. Sometimes you need to call the funders' staff and discuss your proposal ideas or make an appointment to meet with them to discuss the proposal. Always take account of the value of the personal approach. The more detailed proposal is developed later if a positive response is received.

Funders usually require a set format for the application with page limits and a deadline for submission. Read it carefully and work out how best you can adapt your request to fit their format, guidelines or criteria. Consider the funding agency's mission, values, goals and objectives.

Follow the guidelines step by step. You can be creative in your ideas, but put them in the prescribed format. Funders may be reviewing a large number of applications and if they have to search to find specific information, the application may be put aside and not make it through the review process.

Some funders will request more information if they see merit in the application or if they want to help your organisation in applying for funds. In general, it is advis-

able to put your best efforts forward in the first application. First impressions, both in person and in written proposals, do make a difference.

Step 1: Planning – points to remember

- *Assign a key person to lead the grant proposal process.*
- *Clarify the idea.*
- *Determine your resources.*
- *Determine key partners and stakeholders.*
- *Explore funding sources.*
- *Follow the funder's guidelines.*

STEP 2. PREPARING

Develop a proposal overview

Now that you have completed the planning phase, the second step is the preparation of the overview (WHO 1986). A proposal overview is a map to follow during the proposal preparation phase. It helps to organise the proposal and assures that all critical information is collected for inclusion in the written document. After careful review during this step, you can then move forward with the actual writing of the grant proposal.

Key overview components: There are ten aspects that should be developed in the proposal overview:

- 1. Introduction:** Describe the activity, the need for it and who will benefit, the expected outcome, who is applying for the funds, the group's credentials and the amount requested. The *Introduction* sets the context for the grant application reviewers and is a crucial link to the body of the proposal. Defining the proposed project or programme in a succinct and clear manner will help reviewers quickly grasp what you are proposing to do.

- 2. Background:** Define the project or programme and its scope. Include the rationale, a concise description of the topic, who would benefit, supporting data, relevant references. The scope of the proposed project or programme gives a brief synopsis of a selected part of the topic or issue you are writing about, not every detail. For example, your organisation may have an extensive background and expertise in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention, yet your request for funds may be specifically focused on providing antiretroviral treatment to health care workers to prevent mother to child transmission of the HIV virus. Thus, the scope of your programme is targeting only a selected part of the larger subject. It is not necessary to discuss the larger issue of HIV and AIDS in the context of other modalities. On the other hand, when you list ideas in the *Background* section, it is important to weave in specific data and quotes about the topic area to support your request, and mention your previous work and the work of others in the larger subject area as well as the specific area within that subject area for which you are requesting funds. This builds your credibility and shows that you are well versed in the subject area.
- 3. Significance:** A grant proposal is a means to persuade the potential funder why they should invest in your idea, your project, programme or activity. Do not assume that because it is important to you, others will agree.
- 4. Collaboration:** Identify any other organisations with whom you will be working. Include letters of support and other funding obtained or sought.
- 5. Goals and objectives:** State the overall goal and the objectives in terms of expected outputs or outcomes – what, how much, and by when.

6. **Methods:** Outline your action plan, including strategies, targets, activities and timeline.
7. **Evaluation and sustainability:** Describe what outcomes or changes are expected, how these will be measured and by what criteria, how the objectives will be monitored and how feedback will be given to key stakeholders. Describe how you will sustain the programme after the funding has ended.
8. **Dissemination:** Explain how you will disseminate your findings or results to a wider audience, i.e. meetings, conferences, on-line, presentations, journals or other media.
9. **Budget and budget justification:** List personnel, facilities, equipment and supplies; what you need to implement the project, and why.
10. **Supporting documents:** In addition to letters of support, consider including evaluation documents from previous work, press releases or other documents that may support the grant proposal.

Step 2: Preparing the proposal – points to remember

- *Research the topic area and review the available information.*
- *Gather facts and supporting documentation.*
- *Key proposal components include:*
 1. *Introduction*
 2. *Background*
 3. *Significance*
 4. *Collaboration*
 5. *Goals and objectives*
 6. *Methods*
 7. *Evaluation and sustainability*
 8. *Dissemination*
 9. *Budget and budget justification*
 10. *Supporting documents*

STEP 3. WRITING THE PROPOSAL

After completion of the planning and preparation steps in the grant writing process, you are now ready to write the proposal.

Follow precisely the funder's application, including formatting requirements, page limits, and required space limits for each section. If you have questions regarding the application, your key contact person responsible for the grant application should contact the funding organisation.

As you begin to write the proposal, consider the following:

- The funding agency's mission, values, goals and objectives.
- The format required for proposal submission and number of copies to be sent in paper or by electronic means.
- The deadline for submission of the proposal, including date and time.
- If you do not understand the application, seek assistance from a staff member of the funding agency. Do your networking. Ask questions and share your ideas to see if you are on track according to their guidelines. Remember, your key contact person should be the only person contacting the funding organisation. You do not want to bombard the funder with several people from the same organisation or agency calling and asking questions about the same grant proposal.
- Letters of support should be requested ahead of time from key stakeholders.

Once again, it is imperative to determine from the start how to share the work of preparing the grant proposal. This is the time to review and clarify roles with key

personnel working with the grant and writing information in designated portions of the grant.

The persons writing the grant proposal should have regular meetings for peer review and revision. The key person responsible for the grant application should determine who should be involved in these sessions and what input is needed from them.

Suggestions for each written portion of the grant application:

1. Introduction

The Introduction is a short concise section. It establishes a brief summary about the applicant, describes the purpose, goal and objectives of the project, the need, and the anticipated outcomes and impact.

2. Background

This section presents the rationale, provides a concise description of the issue/topic/activity and describes who would benefit and how from the proposed project. The need should be supported by relevant information and references. So, in general this section includes:

- Brief review of the literature and rationale.
- Concise description of the issue/situation that needs to be developed, enhanced, changed (statement of need, plus use of information to support claim).
- Presentation of the project in terms of benefits to society, the community, or the profession.
- Relevant references.

3. Significance

Write a clear explanation why this particular activity, programme or project is important. Discuss its relevance to nursing, health care, the community and society. This section can be a stand-alone part of the application or explained or placed in the Background section.

4. Collaboration

In this section, write about the other organisations you will be working with, from whom you will be receiving letters of support, other funding obtained or applied for to achieve the proposed activity.

In summary:

- Describe the partners for the proposed activity.
- Give the reasons for each collaboration.
- Describe the resources that will be provided through the collaborative partnership(s).
- In the appendix, include letter(s) of agreement and support from the chief administrator(s) of the organisation(s) involved.

5. Goals and objectives

This section should describe the overall goal(s) and objectives. It is important to differentiate between goals and objectives. A goal is a broad statement describing a desired outcome, which is usually long range and general. An objective is a measurable result to be reached on the way to obtaining the goal. The objectives should focus on outputs of the proposed activities. Objectives should be stated in measurable terms. Think SMART when you write goals and objectives:

S: specific

M: measurable

A: action oriented

R: realistic or relevant

T: time specific

6. Methods

This section is very important. It should give a written description of your key strategies, activities and targets with a timeline. The Methods section should be in narrative format and the information should be summarized in chart, table or timeline format.

7. Evaluation and sustainability

In this section, write about the outcomes or changes expected to be achieved, how these will be measured and by what criteria and methods, how objectives will be monitored, how feedback to key stakeholders will be delivered, and how you plan to sustain the proposed project or programme when funds are no longer available. You will need to quantify your data and collect other valuable indicators of success from a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

8. Dissemination

Here you need to indicate how you will disseminate your progress and findings to funders. For example will you disseminate the information via meetings, conferences, on-line Internet or web-based methodologies, journals, mainstream media, or by informal and formal presentations?

9. Budget

The budget section covers the total amount of money requested in the application and how the money would be used, monitored and audited. Discuss the following budget subsections:

- a) **Personnel** - list of people participating and their credentials, what will they be doing and the percentage of time with the project and cost.
- b) **Facilities, equipment and supplies** - list what other resources are needed to carry out the project. Consider the cost of travel, web support, publication, postage and dissemination.
- c) **Budget justification** - write the reasons you are asking for the specific budget items for the proposal.
- d) **Indirect costs** - present the costs incurred by your organization, e.g. electricity, office and/or storage space, computer and phone access and staff. Some funders will not allocate monies for this category.

Consider presenting your budget in table format.

Remember, when you present the budget and its justification, you need to present actual costs. Make sure you ask for funding that is within the funder's guidelines. For instance, some funders will not pay for food, facilities or infrastructure, or for administrative costs. During the planning and preparation phases of the grant writing process do your homework and set information on exactly what the funder is willing to pay for. Sometimes a funder will give more funds in certain categories for certain tasks. In the end, summarise budget categories and funds requested to assist the grant application reviewers.

If you have no experience writing and justifying budgets, this is a good section to delegate to a person with financial expertise. You can discuss your ideas with them and they can do the cost calculations. For further information on financial management, consider the following source: ICN, *Financial Management for Nurses, 2001*.

Internal Review

The first draft of the proposal should be reviewed by everyone involved to:

- 1. Check clarity.** Is the proposal clear, easy to follow and understandable?
- 2. Ensure conciseness.** Have you written the proposal in a concise manner? Have you conveyed your ideas clearly using simple language? Have you synthesized and ordered your ideas and key points in a way that engages the interest and attention of the funder?
- 3. Check consistency of style.** Is your writing style consistent throughout the document and formatted according to the funder's guidelines?
- 4. Verify completeness.** Have you completed and answered every part of the grant application?

- 5. Consult with key stakeholders and expected beneficiaries to get their ideas and input.** Have you consulted with key partners and stakeholders, gathered their input and received their letters of support?
- 6. Review the budget with financial experts.** Have you determined the financial needs for the proposal? Is the budget complete? Are your calculations correct? Did you seek assistance and approval from financial experts in and/or outside of your organisation?
- 7. Finalise the application.** Have you asked one or two key people to do a final review, preferably those who will be providing letters of support?

Prepare the final document

1. Use your proposal overview and the application components to develop a checklist to ensure all grant application information is contained, and statements are concise. See Appendix 1 for an example of a Grant Proposal Submission Checklist.
2. Prepare the application according to the funder's guidelines and present the final product in a professional manner.
3. Ensure it is addressed and sent according to the application details.
4. Meet the deadline for application receipt!
5. Follow up with the funding organisation to ensure your grant proposal has been received.
6. If your grant proposal is successful, you will need to report progress according to their guidelines. Regular reporting and networking with the funder can be useful when applying for future grants.
7. If your proposal is not funded, you should follow up to see what you can do to improve the proposal and when you can resubmit it.
8. For examples of letters of inquiry, proposals and budgets, refer to the following website: www.npguides.org

Step 3: Writing the proposal – points to remember

1. Follow the funder's guidelines and deadlines.
2. Refer back to the proposal overview components to ensure inclusion of all content.
3. Review the proposal and seek others to review and edit to ensure its clarity, conciseness and consistency of style.
4. Determine all budget needs and verify budget calculations with financial experts and key partners.

STEP 4. GETTING FUNDED

The grant review process

When you have completed the checklist (see Appendix 1), you are ready to send the grant to the funder. Remember to follow the funder's requirements regarding the number of original paper copies needed and electronic copies.

During the grant review process, proposals can be rejected for a variety of reasons. The reasons can be mechanical or methodological in nature or simply because the funder decided it was not a priority topic at the time of review (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman 2000). Some of the mechanical reasons for grant proposal rejection include not meeting the submission deadline, not following guidelines for proposal content, format and length, or poor and unconvincing quality of writing. On the other hand, there may have been some methodological issues such as that the purpose, key goals and objectives were not clear, or that the background information and justification were not strong. Other reasons for rejection could be that the strategies, targets or timelines were not realistic, or

perhaps, the evaluation was weak or the budget too general or broad to clearly relate cost to the key activity areas.

Common Characteristics and Weaknesses in Grant Applications¹

Name of project: Some project titles do not clearly convey the focus of the project. People reading the title should be able to get a good idea about your topic. A good title attracts people to read further, while a bad title can discourage the reader.

Purpose and key goals: A common mistake is to try to incorporate too much, so the focus is lost.

Background information and justification: This needs to be strong to justify and describe the relevance of the project, and to convince the funder that it is important.

Strategies, targets, timeline: This section is important because it should convince the funder that the applicants are able to achieve the desired results, or have a good chance of doing so.

Evaluation and sustainability plans: Sometimes people forget to do an evaluation plan or discuss how the project will be sustained once funding is no longer available.

Budget: This is often not well done, and help or advice is not always sought when needed. Some budgets are too general and line items too broad to be able to clearly relate them to key activity areas in the project. If you are asked questions such as: “from where is the main funding expected to come?” or “what is the likelihood of success in obtaining other funding?”, they must be answered. Do not leave them blank.

¹ In the *ICN Leadership for Change Programme*TM participants are given extensive training in preparing successful grant applications and managing received funds. Through ICN’s experiences, working in more than 50 countries, we have assisted participants in avoiding some of the common characteristics and weaknesses in funding applications.

Monitoring and audit: Find out what is required. Read the funder's guidelines.

Credentials: The funder wants to know if the project staff has the necessary experience and knowledge to help ensure the implementation of a successful project. They need to be convinced they are giving money to credible people who are likely to spend it wisely and in such a way as to have the best impact possible on the desired outcomes. Do not just list qualifications and experiences. Include comments on their relevance to the particular project being proposed.

Letters of support: These are often requested. They should be from key stakeholders, who can support and justify why the project is important and what benefits there are to the stakeholders. If care is not taken with this, funders could ask, "Why have they not bothered? Does it mean they have no support from key stakeholders? If so, why should we support them?"

Key contact: Naming one person as the key contact, with comprehensive contact details, is very important. It aids communication and identifies a person accountable for meeting funder requirements such as reporting on financial and project progress.

Deadline: This must be met if applications are to be considered. If there are real problems, ask if an extension is possible.

Despite the reasons for a grant proposal rejection, you should request further information so you can learn from the experience and/or re-apply, if appropriate, to the same funder or to another organisation.

Step 4: Submitting the proposal – points to remember

1. Clarify the funder's expectations and grant review process before submitting the grant.
2. Avoid common characteristics and weaknesses in the grant application:
 - Have a project title that clearly conveys the focus.
 - Do not incorporate too much in the purpose and key goals.
 - Have a strong background and significance section to justify and describe the relevance of the project.
 - Seek assistance in budget preparation.
 - Find out budget monitoring and auditing requirements.
 - Make sure staff credentials match the knowledge and expertise needed to ensure the implementation of a successful project.
 - Obtain letters of support from key partners and stakeholders who can justify why the project is important and what benefits it will bring.
 - Name one person as the key contact.
 - **Meet the funder's deadline for proposal submission.**

REFERENCES

Locke L, Spirduso W & Silverman S.(2000). *Proposals that work: A guide for planning dissertations and grant proposals* (4th Edition), Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

WHO (1986). *Writing a funding proposal: It's easy as 1, 2, 3*, ref. WHO/HMD/NUR 86.2.

Other resources from the International Council of Nurses (ICN) relevant for writing grant proposals

ICN (2003). ***Ethical Guidelines for Nursing Research***. These revised guidelines refer to the ethical principles for nurses conducting research including guidance on integrity in research, informed consent, data safety and monitoring. Available through the ICN Bookshop: www.icn.ch

ICN (2001). ***Financial Management for Nurses***. An easy-to-use monograph covering why and what nurses need to know about financial management. It aims to provide basic knowledge and practical tools for those who are new to this area. It provides useful information for effectively managing resources and budgets, and contributing to key decision-making in today's changing health environment. Available through the ICN Bookshop: www.icn.ch

ICN (2001). ***Writing for Journals***. This monograph provides valuable tips on writing effectively. Available through the ICN Bookshop: www.icn.ch

ICN (1996). ***Planning Human Resources for Nursing***. Using a step-by-step approach, this document discusses the technical aspects of a comprehensive human resources planning process. Available through the ICN Bookshop: www.icn.ch

ICN (1996). ***Practical Guide for Nursing Research***. This guide is useful for nurses beginning to learn about nursing research. It provides helpful strategies for nurses working to improve the quality of their practice through research. This text can be useful for nurses writing research grant proposals. Available through the ICN Bookshop: www.icn.ch

WORLDWIDE WEB SITES AND RESOURCES

International Council of Nurses: www.icn.ch

International Grants and Funders: www.fundsnetservices.com

Non-profit guides, grant writing tools for non-profit organisations: www.npguides.org

University of Wisconsin: www.grants.library.wisc.edu/organisations/proposalwebsites.html and www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/Memorial/grants/proposal.htm

World Health Organization and its regional offices: www.who.int

CHECKLIST FOR THE GRANT APPLICATION

This document will help you organise the final grant application to be sent to the funder. It lists the basic components discussed in the *Guidelines for Writing Grant Proposals* and is designed to ensure you have included all information requested in the application.

Grant Application Title and Key Contact Person(s):

- Name of the project.
- Contact person(s) name, credentials, job title, department and institution.
- Corresponding address, phone, fax and e-mail.

Proposal:

- Introduction.
- Background.
- Significance.
- Collaboration.
- Goals and objectives.
- Methods-key strategies, targets, activities and timeline.
- Evaluation and sustainability.
- Dissemination.
- Budget and budget justification.
- Supporting documents – letters of support and other relevant evidence.

Grant Proposal Formatting Considerations:

- Space according to application guidelines on all pages including charts, figures, tables, appendices, etc.
- All pages numbered.
- Margins and font as specified by funder.
- Heading and subheadings identifying sections of the proposal.
- Spelling, punctuation, grammar and structure are correct.
- Abbreviations defined at all times – always spell out organisational acronyms, e.g. Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO).
- Fits the required page length.

Figures, Tables, Charts, Illustrations

- Each figure, table and chart is presented according to application guidelines, with a caption.
- Numbered consecutively and referred to in the text.

References

- On separate page and in alphabetical order.
- Conforms to application guidelines.
- Reference list contains only references found in the text. Determine if you need a special section for recommendations for other references related to the topic discussed.

Appendices

- Each appendix numbered correctly, according to order of first mention in the proposal text.
- Each appendix begins on separate page.

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