

Short Guide to Grant Writing for Researchers

The Grant Proposal

The proposal is the crucial entrée to obtaining a grant for your research project. It is also a departure point for future conversations with the grantor. As such, it requires a nuanced grounding of the value of your research in the context of the grantor's specific criteria. The proposal prioritizes the value of your research in the overall scholarly landscape and telegraphs the methodology to communicate your authority as a researcher and emerging expert in your field.

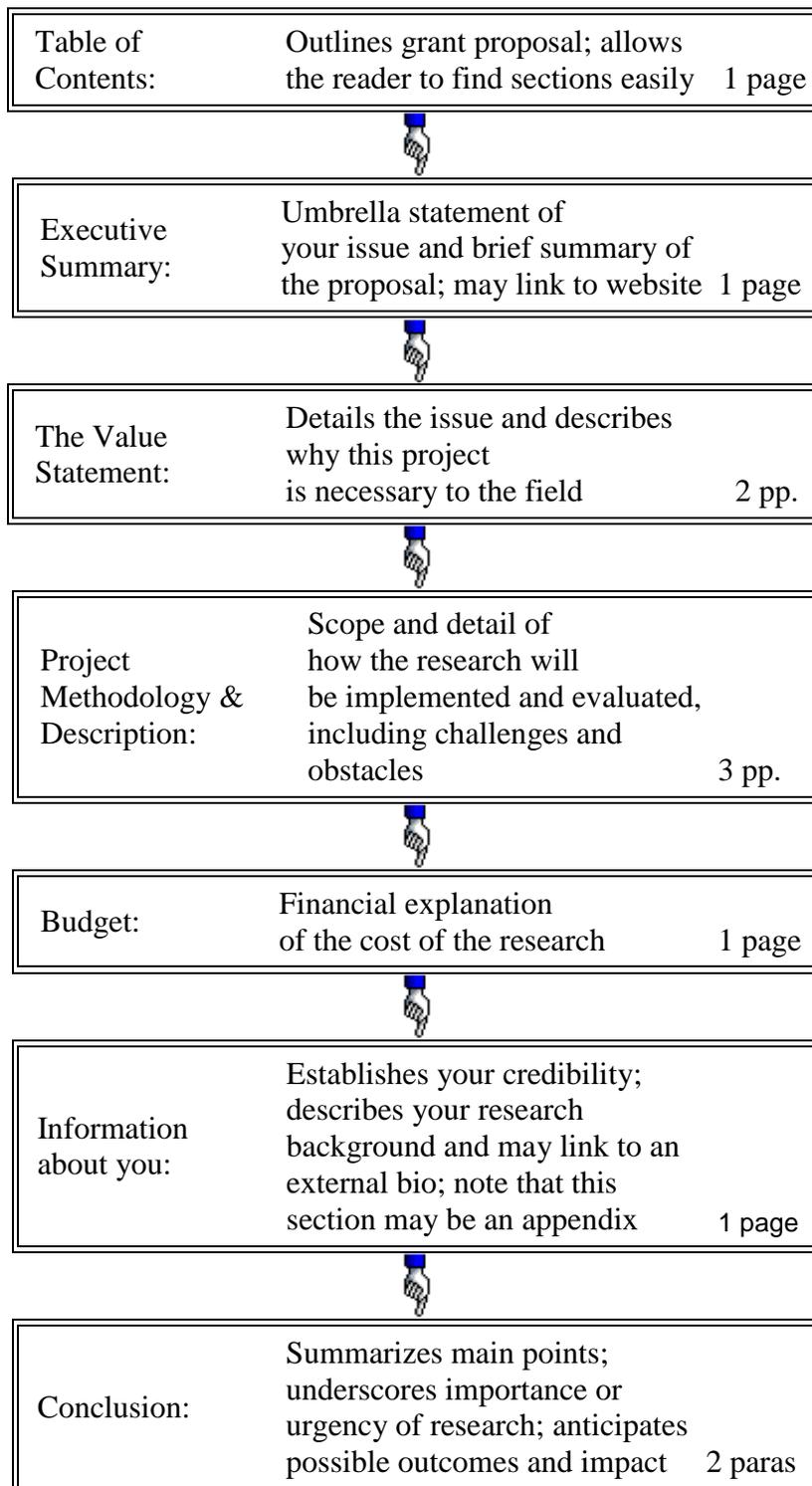
Background Research on the Grantor

Your proposal should reflect your understanding of the grantor's approach and expectations. Most grantors rely on fairly formulaic structure but with unique aspects. To adequately represent the value of your research, you'll want to understand the grantor's underlying ethos and expectations. Think about how the value system motivating your research fits within the expectations and values of the grantor's. How does your research fit within the grantor's value system?

Key Questions:

1. Who is your target grantor? How does your research approach align with the grantor's values and expectations? Success will depend on a good fit.
2. What is the problem / issue / topic you are examining? How does it fit in the context of other grants the funder has awarded? What value does your research bring to scholarship in the field?
3. What is the context of the issue you are researching? Who are the interest groups involved? Is there an external variable that has contributed to or caused a problem—for example, an economic crisis, a new regulatory environment, a new model of governance?
4. What do key stakeholders see as the cause of the problem? What are their long-term goals? How does your research navigate the perspectives of competing stakeholders?
5. What are the obstacles / barriers to your research issue?
6. Are there opportunities that you are leveraging in your research? For example, are there emerging policy shifts, new technologies, new modes of scoping issues, new or emerging interest in the field?
7. What is the time frame for your research? What is your anticipated budget? (You can come back to this question once your grant proposal is complete in that your anticipated amounts may not be reasonable.)
8. What are the possible outcomes from your research? Emphasize the positive but do not neglect the negative.
9. As appropriate, what value might your research have to new policy or regulatory frameworks?

Generic Structure for a Grant Proposal (8-10 pp.) – but keep in mind the specific formula your grantor uses and expects



(Adapted from "Proposal Writing Short Course," The Foundation Center, <https://learning.candid.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/>)

The Executive Summary or Abstract: *This is the most important part of your proposal*

In many instances your prospective grantor will read only two parts of your proposal—the Executive Summary / Abstract and the Budget—before making a decision to go further into your analysis and supporting data. Thus, it is crucial to emphasize a succinct account of the issue, the possible solutions, and your likely recommendations.

If you have a website for your project, link it in a footnote or via a hyperlink.

At the beginning of your application, in telegraphic style, explain the scholarly value of your research, contextualizing it briefly in the overall landscape of existing work. Highlight the main points that the grantor should know about your research. This section serves as a road map for your application, briefly highlighting key themes, methodology, and expected outcomes.

Seven core characteristics of the Executive Summary / Abstract for a Grant Proposal:

1. Acknowledgement of the scholarly value and the intended use/s for the research
2. Concise statement of the issue
3. Goal in scoping, describing, analyzing the issue (for policy this may also include the goal for developing potential interventions that solve the problem you are researching)
4. Methodology in brief, including possible barriers or shortcomings
5. Primary or expected findings or categories in your research
6. Why your research is right for funding

The Value Statement for your Project

Describes the issue in detail and the reasons it should be researched in full. Be as specific as possible and avoid the inclination for scope-creep. Keep your eye on target with the issue so that the grantor's expectations of your work are consistent with your own. If the issue statement changes or expands, you may need to resubmit or amend your proposal.

Project Description: This is the guide to how you are managing the project

The Project Description identifies how you will accomplish the objectives of your research.

1. Tightly describe the broad vision of the research. This is the big picture.
 - For example: The goal of this research is to scope the use of virtual court proceedings in response the pandemic and surface practices that may support access to justice for low-resourced litigants.
2. Outline the objective/s.
 - For example: This project analyzes the effectiveness of three aspects of virtual court proceedings – guided online intake via a chatbot, short meeting with legal advocate via video, and full virtual court proceeding – to assess potential drawbacks and benefits of emerging online practices and technologies.
3. What is your methodology? What kind of data will you implement? Qualitative interviews? Statistical data? Do you need the grantor to fund technology or access to certain kinds of data essential to your research?

4. What are the challenges or obstacles you are likely to encounter?
5. What is your timeline for completing the research? Sometimes you'll apply for a grant for a part of the research. (Be realistic! Do *not* underestimate!) What are the key deadlines within the longer frame for the research?

Budget: This is the second most important part of your proposal

1. What is the projected cost?
2. What expenses do you anticipate? Are you asking for your own salary? Are you asking for funding to hire data analysts? Will you need to hire new space, tools, computer or administrative support services directly relevant to the project?
3. Have you applied for / received other grants that may complement your request? Do you have other sources of funding?

Your Expertise

1. Describe your expertise in the area. What does your experience and/or training demonstrate?
2. You might link to your LinkedIn profile or to your SLS profile.

Conclusion: So what?

This is your opportunity to remind the grantor of the value of your research and, as appropriate, highlight unique opportunity or urgency. Think about the value of your work through the frame of two questions: what will happen if the grantor does *not* fund your research and what could happen if they *do* fund it? Don't answer these questions literally; rather, use them to frame your thinking about how best to present the value of your research. Return to the broader goals of the research, contextualizing those goals in terms that resonate with the values, ethos, and expectations of the funder. This is your final pitch that reminds your funder why the research is important to address in this particular way and why you are the right one to do it.

Resources:

- Willa Pequegnat, et al., *How to Write a Successful Research Grant Application for Social and Behavioral Scientists*, Springer Press, 2011.
- Candid Learning (formerly the Foundation Center), <https://learning.candid.org/training/introduction-to-proposal-writing/>. This site offers online tutorials and webinars for proposal and grant writing. While its mission focuses on grant-writing for nonprofits, the tools for grant writing are transferable to academic research. There is an extensive annotated bibliography of books for grant and proposal writing in a variety of fields.