

# **Funding Your Own Research: How to write a winning proposal**

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# **A Presentation in Four Parts**

- 🐼 Part I: Writing Tips and Types**
- 🐼 Part II: Who the Donors Are**
- 🐼 Part III: Designing a Project, and Writing a Concept Note**
- 🐼 Part IV: Writing a Full Proposal**

# **Part I: Writing Tips and Types**

- **General Writing Tips**
- **Types of Writing**
- **Writing to Persuade**

The single most important thing about writing  
is.....

**Think about your reader --  
before you write, and while  
you write.**

The second most important thing about writing is.....

**Spoon-feed your reader.**

**Make your writing as easy to read as possible.**

The third most important thing about writing  
is.....

**Plan before you write.**

Because the single most important thing about writing is to think about your reader before and while you write, this means:

**the more you know about your reader, the better your writing will be.**

This in turn means, that when writing to donors.....

**You need to know as much as possible about your donor before starting to write.**

Here's how you can spoon-feed your reader: :

- 👉 **Use simple words**
- 👉 **Use simple, direct sentences**
- 👉 **Use short paragraphs**
- 👉 **Use sub-heads and bullets**
- 👉 **Use the active voice**
- 👉 **Choose verbs over nouns**
- 👉 **Put points positively**
- 👉 **Use charts, graphs, pictures**
- 👉 **Re-read and edit your own work**

# Use Simple Words

## Use Often

**Do**

**Part**

**Help**

**Long**

**Use**

**So**

**Find out**

## Use Rarely

**Accomplish**

**Component**

**Facilitate**

**Lengthy**

**Utilize**

**Accordingly**

**Ascertain**

# Words and phrases to avoid completely:

- 👉 **Aforementioned**
- 👉 **Hereunder**
- 👉 **Notwithstanding the fact that**
- 👉 **At this point in time**
- 👉 **It should be pointed out that**
- 👉 **Howsoever**

## Use simple, direct sentences:

Which is easier to read?

*Quite soon, a majority of the world's population of six billion people will be living in urban areas. This historical milestone will probably be passed within less than a decade after the turn into a new millennium, or around 2006.*

Or

*By 2006, a majority of the world's six billion people will, for the first time, be living in urban areas.*

**Note: Exactly the same meaning has been conveyed with exactly half the words!**

## Use Bullets

Which is clearer and easier to read?

***A. The organizers of the event should try to achieve greater safety by ensuring that the bonfire itself does not contain any unacceptably dangerous materials such as aerosol cans or discarded furniture, and by ensuring the letting-off of fireworks in the designated area, with easily identifiable wardens to be available during the event to prevent people indiscriminately letting off fireworks, to the possible danger of people attending the event.***

Or

***B. The event organizers should try to achieve greater safety by ensuring that:***

- the bonfire does not contain any dangerous materials, such as aerosol cans or furniture***
- fireworks are let off only in the designated area.***

## Use the Active Voice

Which is clearer?

A. *An examination of the maintenance records of the plant was carried out by Mr Patel.*

B. *Mr Patel examined the plant maintenance records.*

A. *A recommendation was made by the inspectors that consideration be given by the university to lengthening the examination period by one hour.*

B. *The inspectors recommended that the university consider making the exam one hour longer.*

## Put Points Positively

Which is easier to understand?

**A. *Vote for not more than one candidate.***

**B. *Vote for one candidate only.***

**A. *"Dependent relative" includes a member's child or adopted child who has not attained the age of 18 or has not ceased to receive full time education or training.***

**B. *"Dependent relative" includes a member's child who is aged 17 or under, and is in full time education or training.***

## Re-read and Revise Exercise

Everyone makes mistakes. Revise these sentences to mean what the author intended.

- 1. The dent was caused when I was reversing the car into a parking space that wasn't there.*
- 2. The population of London is the same as that of Sweden.*
- 3. Nervously opening the cupboard, a corpse in an advanced state of decomposition fell out.*
- 4. If the baby does not thrive on fresh milk, boil it.*

The third most important thing about writing is....

## **Plan before you write**

So, when preparing a concept note or proposal, you need to have (a) a format and (b) a fair idea about what you are going to say, before you start writing any particular section. You also need to know as much as possible about who is going to read it.

# **Types of Writing: Writing to Inform, Writing to Persuade**

Writing to inform is what researchers, students and scientists do most often.

Example: term paper, exam, thesis.

Purpose: to inform.

Goal: to pass the course, get an A, get a degree.

Example: journal article

Purpose: to inform.

Goal: to get comments, become famous, get tenure, add to CV.

All writing has a goal as well as a purpose:

**Example:** love letter

**Purpose:** to let loved one know how you feel.

**Goal:** win love, express feeling, relieve stress.

Writing to persuade also has a goal as well as a purpose:

**Example:** Marlboro Man advertisement

**Purpose:** to get people to buy Marlboro cigarettes

**Goal:** to make directors and shareholders rich.

**Writing a project proposal also has a goal as well as a purpose:**

**Example: your project proposal**

**Purpose: to get money to do research**

**Goal: fame, fortune, burning interest, keep your job, get a new one.**

## Writing to Persuade

- ❧ **Facts may interest a reader, but will not change attitudes.**
- ❧ **People are mostly intellectually lazy, and tend to resist new information.**
- ❧ **You have to show the reader why they should be interested in your project -- what's in it for them!**
- ❧ **"Self-interest is at the center of what makes us tick. It is what, at the deepest level, motivates us to most of our actions. If you are to persuade your audience, you need to know enough about them to discover their self interest, their needs, their fears, their motivations." [George Allen]**

**So, the most important thing about writing to persuade is to...**

**Appeal to the Self-Interest of Your Reader**

this means

**the more you know about your reader, the more you can appeal to their self-interest, and the more interested they will be in your ideas.**

## **Write with Passion!**

In writing **to inform**, as in term papers, journal articles or theses, it is crucial to get your facts right, and to calmly and logically lay out the issues, to make your meaning crystal clear.

In writing **to persuade**, as in concept notes and proposals, you need to write with *emotion*. You want to convey your *enthusiasm* and *excitement* about your subject. You want to convey the *urgency* of what you are proposing to do.

## **In a concept note or proposal...**

**You need to convey to your readers what is *immediate, urgent, vital, essential, new, desperately needed* about the problem your research is going to address.**

**[Part II of this presentation will provide information to help you understand the self-interest of donors. Part III will provide you with outlines for concept notes and Part IV for a full proposal. You will learn in which sections you can make your emotional appeals.]**

## Tips on Writing with Passion

- ❧ Use strong, emotion-laden words, like *urgent and vital*.
- ❧ Use short sentences. They convey urgency. Long sentences, that go on and on, tend to put the reader to sleep.
- ❧ Avoid weasel words and phrases (beloved by cautious scientists) like *under certain circumstances, ceteris paribus, possibly*.
- ❧ Get your message across as quickly as possible, and in the fewest possible words. A short, punchy paragraph conveys more emotion than a longer piece, no matter how well-written or strongly felt.

## Also useful in conveying passion...

Try to use an arresting or topical word, phrase or metaphor:

- 🐛 “Politicians cannot assume that this potentially catastrophic problem will somehow disappear in a day, like the Millennium Bug.”
- 🐛 “The West African devil weevil has the power to kill as many children as in the Sierra Leone conflict -- but more slowly, first through malnutrition, then through famine.”

# Part II: Who the Donors Are

- 👉 **Types of Donors/Investors**
- 👉 **Donors and their Goals**
- 👉 **Partnerships**
- 👉 **Learning about Donors**

## Types of Donors

- ❧ **Publicly Funded vs Privately Funded**
- ❧ **Bilateral vs Multilateral**
- ❧ **Institutional vs Individual**
- ❧ **Development Focus vs Research Focus**

[Note: The word “donor” implies giving. Many donors today prefer the term “investor”, underlining the fact that they expect a return for their money in terms of impact achieved.]

# Examples of Publicly-Funded Bilateral Development Donors

- ❧ **AusAid: Australian Aid Agency**
- ❧ **BADC: Belgian Administration for Devel. Coop.**
- ❧ **CIDA: Canadian Int'l Development Agency**
- ❧ **Danida: Danish Int'l Development Assistance**
- ❧ **BMZ: Federal German Ministry for Econ. Coop.**
- ❧ **SIDA: Swedish Int'l Devel. Coop. Agency**
- ❧ **SDC: Swiss Agency for Devel. And Coop.**
- ❧ **DfID: British Dept. for Int'l Development**
- ❧ **USAID: United States Agency for Int'l Devel.**

# Publicly-Funded Multilateral Development Agencies

- 🐼 **AfDB: African Development Bank**
- 🐼 **AFESD: Arab Fund for Econ. and Social Devel.**
- 🐼 **ADB: Asian Development Bank**
- 🐼 **EC: European Commission**
- 🐼 **IDB: Inter-American Development Bank**
- 🐼 **IFAD: International Fund for Ag. Development**
- 🐼 **IBRD: World Bank**

**[UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, FAO, WHO) used to be donors, but ever-tightening budgets have turned them into multilaterals without funds!]**

# Privately Funded Foundations

- 🐼 **The Ford Foundation**
- 🐼 **The Rockefeller Foundation**
- 🐼 **The McArthur Foundation**
- 🐼 **The Toyota Foundation**
- 🐼 **The Packard Foundation**
- 🐼 **The Ebert Naumann Stiftung**

**Most foundations are based in the US, or Japan or Western Europe. The Foundation Center in New York has facilities for researching the interests, contact persons and previous grants of hundreds of thousands of US Foundations.**

## **About Donors: Office Locations**

*Headquarters, in country capital. Field offices in host country capitals. Some field offices have regional responsibilities. Key regional centers include: Nairobi, Accra, Abidjan, Bangkok, Delhi, Mexico City, Santiago.*

## **About Donors: Staffing**

*Most senior staff at HQ, but much power now devolved to field. Sector specialists often work at HQ. Field offices headed by Resident Representatives (Res. Reps.) or Directors. First people to receive proposals usually have title like Program Officer, Project Officer or Grant Officer.*

## **About Donors: Goals and Objectives**

***Most agencies have development goals, supporting projects in such areas as health, education, environment, agriculture, energy, natural resource management and conservation, housing and transportation.***

***Objectives are developed in collaboration with host country, but goals are developed at home, and strongly influenced by national politics. There are fashions in donor goals.***

***Climate prediction can be related to many of these development sectors, and for some donors (e.g. Scandinavians?) may be an agency goal.***

# Current Development Donor Goals

**Most agencies provide overseas development assistance (ODA) with one of more of the following goals:**

- > Eliminating Poverty (#1)**
- > Preserving the Environment**
- > Protecting Biodiversity**
- > Improving Human Health.**

**Objectives vary:**

**Swiss: mountain development and livestock**

**Scandinavians, Dutch: gender and environment**

**French: franco-phone countries**

**McArthur: bio-diversity**

## Some Donor Constraints

- ❧ **Most donor agencies prefer to fund individuals and groups from their own country**
- ❧ **World Bank does not make grants, but often out-sources research of relevance to its projects. It will do this through requests for proposals (RFPs).**
- ❧ **Regional development banks only fund projects and research in their geographic regions, and will only make grants to member country organizations.**
- ❧ **The EU only funds projects that are a priority of the host country.**

## **Defining Terms**

**Competitive Grants Programs are becoming increasingly popular, as donors have found that this approach improves the quality of the proposals they receive. These programs usually have fairly wide topic limits, but provide structure in terms of proposal format, funding levels and deadlines. Individuals as well as groups are included.**

**Many developing country governments are funding research through their own competitive grants programs. The World Bank and other donors are supporting this trend.**

## **Defining Terms**

**Sole source proposals are written without invitation from the donor. The writer (individual or group) proposes the project on the assumption that they have a comparative advantage -- i.e. they are the sole source for the work.**

**Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are issued by donor agencies when they know what they want to "buy". RFPs are advertised in publications and on the Net. Most RFPs are aimed at groups rather than individuals.**

## Partnerships

- ❧ **Very few projects are designed or implemented by one person. Partnership projects are the norm.**
- ❧ **Partnership should be widely defined.**
- ❧ **Participatory research, in which beneficiaries help to design and implement projects, has been shown to be highly effective in achieving impact. .**
- ❧ **Projects designed by teams of people with diverse backgrounds have been shown to be more innovative and have a higher chance of success than projects designed by people of a single discipline.**

## **More About Partnerships**

**Donors like to fund partnership projects. They feel such projects have a higher chance of success. Funding several groups spreads their money, influence and linkages. As noted earlier, donors like to fund their own nationals; projects that link national entities with groups in host countries are especially welcomed.**

**For all these reasons, think carefully before deciding to go it alone!**

## Learning About Donors

- 🐼 In your agency, everyone needs to share donor information with each other. A central donor relations office is essential if much of your work is going to be externally funded.*
- 🐼 You need to research (meet, talk with, try to understand) the donor representatives in your country. Your goal is to identify those who share your interests, and who might support your approach for funds.*
- 🐼 Remember that the person you are talking to is probably not a scientist. Describe your work as you would to a non-scientist in your family.*

## **More on Learning about Donors**

***When talking to donors, remember to find out about them. Listening is as important as talking. You are trying to find out such useful things as:***

- ***Are they interested in climate prediction?***
- ***What aspect of climate variability and prediction interests them?***
- ***What size of grants does the donor make?***
- ***Does the donor have limits on indirect costs?***
- ***Who evaluates proposals? Will it be read by any scientific personnel?***
- ***How long does it take for a donor to decide yes or no about a project?***

## Yet More on Learning about Donors

- ❖ *The Program Officers you are likely to meet will be generalists, perhaps with liberal arts education. Treat donors with respect, even if they do not fully understand your science. They are typically bright people, who care about the development of your country and people.*
- ❖ *Try to see them as partners in your project. No donor wants to be seen as merely a source of money. Would you?*
- ❖ *Remember, you are trying to understand the self-interest of the people who are going to read your proposal.*

# Part III: Designing a Project, and Writing a Concept Note

- 👉 **What is a project?**
- 👉 **Picking a topic**
- 👉 **A Generic CN Format**
- 👉 **10 Steps to Preparing a CN**

# What is a Project?

- ❧ To get funding for your research you need to put your ideas in the form of a project.
- ❧ Here's one definition: *A project is a set of activities that yield desired results in a limited amount of time, with limited resources.*
- ❧ Here's another definition: *A project is a combination of inputs, managed in a certain way, to achieve one or more desired outputs, and ultimately one or more desired impacts.*
- ❧ [Note: several projects, with a common goal, and related objectives is often called a program.]

# Essential Elements of a Project

When you design a project, you must specify your:

- ❧ goals and objectives (why and what you want to do)
- ❧ inputs (the resources you are going to need)
- ❧ management plan (how you are going to combine your resources)
- ❧ activities (what you intend to do, when, and for how long)
- ❧ outputs (what you expect to achieve at the end of the project)
- ❧ budget (what the project will cost)

## **More about Projects**

**All projects contribute to a higher goal. A goal is a large target (like poverty eradication) which will require many projects to achieve.**

**The project contributes to the goal through its objectives. These objectives are always limited in time and space, and should be obtainable within the life of the project.**

## **More about Projects**

**The project is implemented to achieve outputs.**

**Outputs may be tangible, like a new technology or piece of equipment, or a research report.**

**Outputs may also be intangible, like information or knowledge.**

**A successful project will also have a positive impact on some individuals or groups or both. That impact should be described in terms of the project goal.**

**Impact is usually defined as people being better off in some way.**

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## **Still More about Projects**

**The most likely duration for a fundable project is two to four years. Longer projects are usually divided into *phases* of between one to four years, for easier funding**

**It is difficult to generalize about project size. Each donor has specific financial limits. However, in general, small projects take almost as much time as large ones to design, and as much effort for the donor to approve. So, small isn't always beautiful in project development.**

## **Think of it this way....**

***Cooks are constantly designing and implementing projects.***

***Ingredients (inputs) are cooked (managed) according to a recipe (work plan) to achieve a warm, balanced meal (output) and leaving behind a happy feeling of fullness and well-being (impact).***

## Picking the Right Topic

Picking a fundable research topic is a little like picking a good thesis topic. You should look for something that:

- is important enough to be worth doing
- will be approved by your supervisor
- is seen as useful and valuable by others
- is manageable -- i.e. can be achieved in a reasonable amount of time, with readily available and reasonably priced inputs
- has the right balance of risks and returns
- will attract partners
- you and your partners have a comparative advantage to undertake.

# The Importance of Concept Notes

**A concept note (of 3 - 5 pages) can be used to:**

- 👉 get internal approval from your supervisor**
- 👉 get partners interested in joining your project**
- 👉 getting preliminary approval from a potential donor**

**Because preparing a concept note (CN) takes a fraction of the time needed to prepare a full proposal (usually 10 - 25 pages), it makes sense to prepare a CN first.**

**Everybody is getting busier and busier, so sometimes you can get a grant on the basis of a CN alone, and won't even need to prepare a detailed proposal.**

# Generic Concept Note Format

- 🐼 **Project Title:.....**
- 🐼 **Expected Budget and Duration:.....**
- 🐼 **Partners:.....**
- 🐼 **Location and Sites:.....**
- 🐼 **Related Donor Projects:.....**

**The Problem, and Why It is Urgent**

**What Has Already Been Done**

**Project Objectives and Activities**

**Inputs and Project Management Issues**

**Beneficiaries, Outputs and Impacts**

**Budget**

## **Preparing a Concept Note**

**Prepare the concept note in the following order:**

- 1. Objectives**
- 2. Inputs**
- 3. Activities and Duration**
- 4. Outputs**
- 5. Beneficiaries and Impacts**
- 6. Project Management**
- 7. Budget**
- 8. Why the Problem is Urgent**
- 9. What Has Already Been Done**

## **Step 1: Goal and Objectives**

(What do you want your project to achieve? Why?)

- ❧ The **goal** of a project is the reason why you are doing it; because in some way it will contribute to the betterment of life for some people. It is the “so what” of your project.
- ❧ The **objectives** of a project describe specifically you want to achieve.
- ❧ If a donor funds your project, you are committed to **delivering** all your objectives, but only **contributing** to your project’s goal.

## Preparing Objectives for the CM

- ✿ With your design team (ideally 3 - 5 people from different disciplines), take 1 - 2 hours to brainstorm your project's goals and objectives.
- ✿ Remember, objectives should be **SMART**
  - Specific**
  - Measurable**
  - Achievable**
  - Realistic**
  - Time-bound**

## Objectives Exercise

Are the following objectives SMART? If necessary, revise to to make them SMARTer:

- 1. To develop and implement a training course for 30 agricultural scientists in Zambia and Uganda in planning, computer-aided experimental design, analysis and interpretation of data.*
- 2. To develop high-yielding pigeon pea varieties, suitable for planting by small farmers in Vietnam and the Philippines.*
- 3. To reduce aflatoxin contamination in existing groundnut varieties to less than 20 ppb by introducing novel crop management practices.*

## **Step 2: Inputs**

(what do you need to achieve the objectives?)

- ❧ **People** (the time of everyone involved in the project)
- ❧ **Travel costs** (tickets, hotel stays, per diem, etc.)
- ❧ **Vehicles**
- ❧ **Equipment** (computers, scientific, office)
- ❧ **Supplies** (paper, printer cartridges, etc) and **Services** (phone, fax, e-mail, etc)
- ❧ **Facilities** (offices, library, training center, demonstration plots)

## Inputs in a CN

- ❧ *In a CN you need only one or two paragraphs of narrative, summarizing your proposed inputs.*
- ❧ *But you will need to cost out all inputs to arrive at an estimated budget.*
- ❧ *Remember to make allowances for the inputs needed for all partners, and refer to these in the CN.*
- ❧ *Depending on your project, inputs may come from your beneficiaries -- farmers, poor families, students, etc.*

## **Step 3: Activities and Duration**

(What will you do? How long will it take?)

- ❖ **Summarize what you and your partners plan to do to achieve the project objectives.**
- ❖ **Be brief.**
- ❖ **Use the active voice and “will”.**
- ❖ **Do not use “we” -- be specific.**
- ❖ **In the full proposal, every sentence in the **Activities** section will tell who will do what, when, where and for how long. [Note: Do not explain why in this section -- that discussion belongs in the Background section.]**
- ❖ **It’s a good idea to include an activities time line.**

## **Step 4: Outputs**

(What will be achieved by project's end?)

- ❧ **The outputs of a project relate to its objectives.**
  
- ❧ **Outputs may include:**
  - events (workshops, training sessions)
  - intangible things, like decisions
  - tangible things, like buildings, weather stations
  - information, perhaps as publications, radio programs
  
- ❧ **Brainstorm with colleagues to list all possible outputs.**
  
- ❧ **Key outputs achieved during the project (e.g. end of Year 1, Year 2) are your project's milestones.**

## **Step 5: Beneficiaries and Impact**

(Who will benefit from the project, and how?)

- ❧ Remember, the **impact** of a project relates to its **goal** -- the reason why you are doing the project.
- ❧ Impact is what the donor is “buying”; most donors are not interested in your research for its **output** (research results, publications, etc.) but for its **impact** -- its contribution to the improved well-being of group(s) of people.
- ❧ In the CN you need to briefly describe the benefits you expect, how much of them you expect, and when they will occur.

## Possible Beneficiary Groups

- You need to develop you own checklist of beneficiary groups, by thinking about everyone your work could possibly help.
- Some examples:
  - consumers, especially the poor in urban areas
  - small farmers
  - potential malaria victims
  - other researchers (although donors won't care much about them!)
  - refugees

## Writing About Beneficiaries

- ❧ **Most donors (and all development donors) want their money to be spent on making some disadvantaged group(s) in target countries better off.**
- ❧ **To make them “buy” your project, you need to make your projects and its likely impact on the project beneficiaries come alive.**
- ❧ **So the Beneficiaries and Impacts section of your CN or proposal is a place where you are writing to persuade. You should therefore take care to write with passion in this section!**

## **Develop an On-Going Impact Checklist**

**Develop your own checklist, for all projects you work on. For example, will your project result in:**

- **higher farm family incomes (because of improved access to climate information)?**
- **Improved health services (because governments have access to needed climate data)?**
- **Cheaper commodity prices in the dry season (because farmers are more productive, because of access to new information)?**
- **Fewer climate-related fatalities (because of improved government planning)?**

## **Step 6: Project Management**

(How will you manage the inputs to achieve the outputs?)

- ❖ **The full proposal will need much detail on this topic, perhaps including “corporate capability statements” for each of the partners, CVs of key personnel, an management chart, etc.**
- ❖ **For the CN you need only to briefly describe describe the various roles of the partners, identify the project leader, and show who will be responsible for the main project tasks. Do include an organogram if you feel this would be useful.**

## **Step 7: Budget**

**(How much will your project cost?)**

- ☛ In a CN, you need only a summary budget. Roughly cost the project inputs, and round, generously. Remember to make an equally generous allowance for the cost of your partners inputs, and include indirect costs for both your organization and partners. [More later.]**
- ☛ Under “Budget Issues”, you may wish to discuss sources of funds, if more than the donor will be involved, or highlight any particularly expensive or unusual budget line items.**

## Tips on CN Budgets

- 🐸 **Donors love it if others contribute, so highlight any contributions from other sources, even if in-kind.**
- 🐸 **Don't be greedy: donors can read budgets well! !**
- 🐸 **Do't under-budget. Everyone loses if you don't have enough money to achieve your objectives.**
- 🐸 **The smaller the bottom line (usually), the quicker you can get your project funded; most donor agencies allow field staff to approve to a certain dollar limit. Find out what that limit is.**
- 🐸 **However, paperwork and meetings are much the same for all projects, regardless of size, so donors usually don't like very small projects.**

## **Step 8: The Problem and Why it is Urgent**

- ❧ **This background material should be short, lively and convey the urgency of the problem.**
- ❧ **You can do this positively by showing the good outputs and impacts likely from your work, or negatively by describing how bad things will be if your research is not done. You can also do both.**
- ❧ **This is another section for writing with passion.**
- ❧ **Keep the reader in mind!**
- ❧ **By all means use statistics, graphs, diagrams, even pictures to illustrate your work.**
- ❧ **A useful writing model is the Economist magazine.**

## **Step 9: What Has Already Been Done?**

- ❧ **Show what you, your partners, and others have already achieve, as these achievements underlie the research you will be doing. They are the justification for your work.**
- ❧ **Write a short narrative. This is not a literature review, and in a CN (and most full proposals) you won't need elaborate footnotes or references.**
- ❧ **If the donor has previously funded projects in the same or a related area, this should be highlighted here.**

## Step 10: Re-read and Revise

- 🐸 **Now your CN is finished! Sleep on it at least 24 hours, if deadlines permit.**
- 🐸 **Get a few colleagues to read it and give you comments. [Ideally have an in-house Concept Review.]**
- 🐸 **With comments, now re-read your draft.**
- 🐸 **Edit, to improve the content, and to spoon-feed your reader: substitute short words for long; eliminate passives; cut long sentences into two; drop a few more emotive words into your sections on Why the Project is Urgent and Beneficiaries. Read the budget carefully, to check it is neither greedy, nor under-cost.**



# Part IV: Writing a Full Proposal

- 🐼 **When to prepare a full proposal**
- 🐼 **Winning titles**
- 🐼 **Proposal reviews**
- 🐼 **What makes a good budget**
- 🐼 **A generic proposal format**
- 🐼 **10 Steps to preparing a proposal**

## Preparing a Full Proposal

- ❧ **If a donor likes your concept note, you may be asked to write a full proposal.**
- ❧ **Many donors want you to use their preferred format. Find out before you write.**
- ❧ **If the donor does not have a preference, use the format provided below.**
- ❧ **Get the CN design team together; be sure to involve all partners.**
- ❧ **Before you submit the proposal, you need to have it discussed and approved in-house at a Proposal Review.**

## Proposal Reviews

- ❧ **Convene a group that includes partners, supervisors, financial staff, and peers.**
- ❧ **Hold a one-hour Review, chaired by a senior staff person.**
- ❧ **Write notes of the decisions made.**
- ❧ **The Review is designed to make the proposal as good as it can be, and to:**
  - **confirm its technical and research quality**
  - **approve the work plan**
  - **discuss and approve the budget and other resources**
  - **lay out a strategy for follow-up with the donor.**

## Qualities of a Winning Proposal

All good proposals convey this message:

\*Something important needs doing right away!

\* If we do it, many currently under-privileged people will be much better off; if we don't, these people are going to suffer.

\* We have a sensible and cost-effective way of doing it; we (with our partners) are staffed, equipped and eager to do the job!

\* All we need is your support!

## Winning Titles

- ❧ **Titles need to be catchy, informative and distinctive.**
- ❧ **One useful approach is to use a two-part title, separated by a colon.**
- ❧ **Pre-colon -- short, snappy, easy to remember**
- ❧ **Post-colon -- serious and informative.**
  
- ❧ **E.g.: *Fishes for the Future:* identification and characterization of endangered aquatic species in selected tropical sites**

## More Examples of Good Titles

- ❧ ***More Beans for Africa:*** sustainable bean productivity through germplasm enhancement and input use efficiency
- ❧ ***Why Do the Chickens Die?--*** Developing low-cost and simple technologies for aflatoxin estimation in foods and feeds
- ❧ ***Did We Make a Difference? --*** Assessment of the impact of XXX's work in the 1990s.

# The Logical Matrix Framework (Log Frame)

- ❧ The Log Frame is one way to describe a project. It is often used to design or compare projects.
- ❧ The Log Frame was popular in the 1970s, but fell out of favor in the 80s. Now it's back, and many donors require it in their proposals.
- ❧ Log Frame strengths: inclusion of *assumptions*, and *methods of verification*. Log Frame weakness: lack of section on project *management*.
- ❧ You will be able to fill in a Log Frame, once you have prepared a proposal using the format that follows.

## Basic Proposal Format

- I. **Summary** (What is this proposal all about?)
- II. **Background** (Why should it be done?)
- III. **Objectives** (What do you hope to achieve?)
- IV. **Activities** (What will you do?)
- V. **Work Plan** (How will you achieve your outputs?)
- VI. **Outputs and Impacts** (What will you achieve?  
Who will be better off and why?)
- VII. **Evaluation** (How will you measure the progress  
of your project, and its impact?)
- VIII. **Budget** (How much will it cost?)

# Writing the Proposal

**Please follow the following 10 steps in this order:**

- 1. Objectives**
- 2. Activities**
- 3. Work Plan**
- 4. Outputs and Impacts**
- 5. Budget**
- 6. Background**
- 7. Evaluation**
- 8. Summary**
- 9. Review and Editing**
- 10. Cover Letter**

## Concept Note to Proposal

- ❧ **A good concept note is the ideal basis for preparing a winning proposal.**
- ❧ **However, some sections need to be considerably expanded.**
- ❧ **You also have the opportunity to re-think different aspects of the project (e.g. sites, scope of activities, inclusion of different elements), and to strengthen linkages with partners.**
- ❧ **You can also update your design to take in changing internal and external realities – it will have taken some time from having the first project idea to getting the nod from a donor to proceed to the proposal stage.**

## Proposal Step 1: Objectives

- ❧ **Assemble your design team to review the CN objectives. Have comment from the donor or others given you ideas for how to improve the objectives?**
- ❧ **Are the objectives easily measurable? If not, can you reformulate them, to make future evaluation easier?**
- ❧ **Set aside an hour or so to review one more time the substance and the wording of the proposal objectives.**

## Proposal Step 2: Activities

- ❧ You will need to expand the CN Activities section considerably and include an activities time line.
- ❧ For each activity, spell out exactly who will do what, when and where, and for how long.
- ❧ Remember to use the active voice and short, clear, sentences. These will convey the urgency of the problem and your passionate desire to start work right away.

## **Proposal Step 3: Work Plan**

- ❧ **You will need much more than in the CN. Use graphs and charts whenever you can.**
  
- ❧ **You will need sections on:**
  - **Project Management Arrangements**
  - **Inputs and Level of Effort**
  - **Reporting Plan**
  
- ❧ **You may also need sections on:**
  - **Site Selection**
  - **Training Plan**
  - **Workshop Plan**
  - **Computer Purchase Plan**

# Work Plan Details

## Project Management Arrangements

- 🐼 **This section will outline who will do what in terms of managing the project. Will there be project meetings? How often? Who will chair?**
- 🐼 **Talk about what you expect from:**
  - **people in your organization**
  - **people from your partner groups**
  - **beneficiaries (if not partners)**
  - **others (e.g. government officials)**

# **More Work Plan Details**

## **Inputs and Level of Effort**

**Specify how much of each input you will need.**

- Staffing (type, number of person months)**
- Consultants**
- Beneficiary/Participants**
- Equipment (vehicles, computers, space,...)**
- Supplies and Services**

## **Reporting Plan**

- Check for donor requirements -- if none, suggest annual, plus final report**

## **Why provide work plan details?**

***The more details you provide, the more the donor will feel you have thought the project through, are competent to implement it, and are indeed ready and eager to begin, needing only the donor funding to get going.***

## **Proposal Step 4: Outputs and Impact**

- With colleagues brainstorm on how to improve on CN outputs and impacts. Remember, you are promising to deliver all the outputs. Impact will come more slowly, and will depend on external factors: you need to explain your impact assumptions carefully in your proposal.**
- Explain how you plan to measure impact.**
- To make these sections readable, you need to organize your outputs and impacts by categories. You may choose to show the effects on different groups of people, or to show outputs and impacts by objective, by site, or by project component.**

## Proposal Step 5: Budget

- ❖ **Every proposal needs, at a minimum, a summary project budget, showing the costs of each line item for each year of the project, and a total column and row.**
- ❖ **For a complex project, you may need back-up budgets: one for each partner, or one for foreign exchange and one for local currency. You may also wish to show separate costs per site, or per objective.**
- ❖ **Your budget should be as easy to read as the text of your proposal.**

## Budget Tips

- ❖ **Always footnote budgets with unit costs.**
- ❖ **Never charge less than you know the project will cost. No-one wins in an under-funded project. If a donor offers less money than you request, *revise the objectives of the project.* Never promise more than you can deliver.**
- ❖ **Always include the indirect costs of all participating partners. *Indirect costs are as legitimate as direct costs. They are real costs, and not a management trick!***

## More Budget Tips

- ❧ **Include inflation and contingency in all budgets of more than 18 months.**
- ❧ **Find out if your donor has a preferred budget format. If not, use your organization's normal proposal budget format.**
- ❧ **The next slide gives an illustrative list of line items you will need in a proposal summary budget.**

## Illustrative Budget Line Items

- I. Personnel
- II. Travel
- III. Supplies and Services
- IV. Training, Workshops, Evaluations
- VI. Vehicles, Equipment and Capital Costs
- VII. Indirect Costs
- VIII. Contract Research
- IX. Inflation
- X. Contingency

***Grand Total***

## Bay Windows

- 🐼 **The finance officers in donor agencies love to cut proposal budgets! So it's a good idea to include in your project design a bay window or two -- something that would add to your project, but is not completely essential. You can "give away" your bay windows without affecting your main project objectives.**
- 🐼 **Examples of project bay windows might be:**
  - \* an additional project site
  - \* another partner
  - \* an extra workshop
  - \* a further year of activities
  - \* a second training program.

## More Budget Tips

- ❖ **Every line in a proposal budget must be footnoted with unit costs of each item and the number of items (person months, person years, number of trips, number of vehicles, etc) that will be required. [You will already have this data in the “Inputs and Level of Effort” section of the Work Plan.]**
- ❖ **The details in the budget should reflect details in the narrative of the proposal. Check!**
- ❖ **Be sure your partner(s) are happy with their share of the budget before submitting a proposal.**

## Proposal Step 6: Background

- 🦋 You may wish to add to the CN material, e.g., by writing briefly about the comparative advantage of you and your partners to do the project.
- 🦋 If you do, use a soft approach -- do not oversell or over-praise yourselves!
- 🦋 Do not write too much, and turn your reader off!
- 🦋 About 2-3 pages in a short proposal and 3 -5 in a major proposal are good limits. Everything else should go in an annex.
- 🦋 Use short words, sentences and subheadings to break up the material.

## Proposal Step 7: Evaluation and Milestones

- ❧ Here you describe how you will monitor the project to ensure that it is working as planned, and is likely to achieve the desired outputs and impacts.
- ❧ Include a brief description here of how projects are usually evaluated in your organization.
- ❧ Donors will be looking for *milestones*, key project achievements which allow you, your partners and donors to ensure that progress is being made towards attaining outputs and impacts at regular intervals in the project's life.

## More on Milestones

- 🦋 You should specify “Milestones” for all projects over 18 months in duration.
- 🦋 The ideal milestone is something worthwhile and tangible. A good milestone early in the project, helps to keep donors, beneficiaries and project staff enthusiastic and on track.
- 🦋 Note: USAID uses the terms *activity-level indicators or measures of success or failure* in its evaluation language. Check the terms your donor uses.
- 🦋 Explain that you will consider project redesign if your milestones/indicators are not achieved.

## Proposal Step 8: Summary

- 🐼 This section is a vital selling tool for the project, since it comes first in presentation, and may be the only part that some people read.
- 🐼 Always write this section last!
- 🐼 Take great care with the wording.
- 🐼 Refer to all other sections of the proposal.
- 🐼 Be very brief. Two pages is the absolute maximum.
- 🐼 Highlight any known donor interests.
- 🐼 Write simply and in a straight-forward way.

## Sample Summary (Part 1)

**This proposal requests ...(donor) to provide \$ ... for you and ...(partners) to ... (project objectives summarized) in ...(country, site). The proposed project will take ... years and involve ... person years or months of your and ... (partners) time.**

**The need for this project is pressing; (tell why in one or two sentences). The interested parties (name them) are anxious to achieve the desired outputs and impacts as soon as possible; ... (tell what the various partners will do in the project in one or two sentences).**

## Sample Summary (Part 2)

**The project will benefit ... (tell who) by .. (tell what.)  
As a result, impact on .. (tell which goal)... is  
expected in ... (site? nation? region? sector?)  
by....(date -- tell how soon after the project is  
over).**

**This project builds on previous work by your  
organization and others that ... (tell what has  
already been done). You and your partners are  
ideally suited to conduct the follow-on activities  
because ... (tell why.)**

## **Proposal Step 9: Review and Editing**

- ❧ **Before submitting the proposal to a donor, share it with someone (ideally not a scientist) who has never read it before, and get comments.**
- ❧ **Armed with these, edit to clarify, and eliminate errors, repetitions and inconsistencies.**
- ❧ **Try to substantially shorten the proposal, making it more crisp, clear, punchy, appealing.**
- ❧ **Do not omit this step! It can make the difference between a winning and losing proposal!**
- ❧ **Do not expect someone else to do this for you -- learn to do it for yourself!**

## Proposal Step 10: Cover Letter

- ❧ **As with all letters, write with the recipient in mind, and refer to donor interests; show how your project builds on any related previous donors projects.**
- ❧ **Refer to any previous interaction with the donor.**
- ❧ **Highlight the urgency of the problem.**
- ❧ **Describe the partners and express their eagerness to begin work soon.**
- ❧ **Conclude with a *hook* -- e.g. “ If we have not heard from you by next month, we propose to email for your impressions and suggestions for how the proposal could be improved.”**