



Real Fundraising

... real solutions ... real results

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“From No to Yes”: Top Ten Flaws That Doom Your Requests to the Reject Pile

1. Does not address funder's priorities.

Proposal Tips

- Don't just 'parrot back' their language.
- Demonstrate the 'fit' by showing, not just telling.

2. Does not follow logical order.

Proposal Tips

- Follow the funder's outline if they give one.
- Use standard format if they don't.
- Use headings.

3. Does not show the 'need'.

Proposal Tips

- Don't assume the funder already knows; show them that you know.
- Use statistics.
- Quote authorities.
- Cite sources.

4. Overwhelms with too many statistics.

Proposal Tips

- Too many dilutes their effectiveness.
- Choose the most compelling - just a few!
- Use local statistics for local programs.

5. Relies too much on client stories or testimonials instead of just giving the facts.

Proposal Tips

- Use a client story only if that is the best way to illustrate your case.
- Choose just one or two and keep them brief.
- Avoid obvious manipulation of reader emotion.

6. *Uses poor objectives and/or evaluation.*

Proposal Tips

- *Remember: objectives do not tell how the work will get done - that goes in the methods section.*
- *Good objectives indicate desired level of change.*
- *Good evaluation measures change.*

7. *Includes a bad budget.*

Budget Tips

- *The budget numbers must agree with the words in the proposal.*
- *Use budget notes to explain formulas and components of individual line items.*
- *A good budget includes income as well as expenses.*
- *Be sure to give the status of your grant requests.*
- *Do a final check – use a calculator to re-check the math!*

8. *Is written ‘by committee’.*

Style Tips

- *In a collaboration, choose the best writer to assemble and edit the final document.*
- *Watch for inconsistencies between different sections of the proposal.*

9. *Uses overblown, florid language.*

Style Tips

- *Adjectives and adverbs are effective communicators – but only when used sparingly.*
- *Too many superlatives can plant doubt in the reader’s mind about your credibility.*
- *Saying your agency’s work is “unique” and “innovative” doesn’t make it so.*

10. *Uses vague, abstract language.*

Style Tips

- *Anticipate questions about your project and try to answer them in your proposal.*
- *Use language that is*
 - *specific, not general,*
 - *concrete, not abstract.*
- *Write as you speak!*
 - *Read aloud to test your language.*

*Cheryl A. Clarke and Susan P. Fox are the authors of **Grant Proposal Makeover: Transform Your Request From No to Yes** published by JosseyBass, a division of John Wiley. With more than 40 years of nonprofit and fundraising experience between them, Clarke and Fox use *Makeover* to provide detailed solutions to common mistakes in proposals. Each chapter transforms an “ugly duckling” into a “beautiful swan”. The book also incorporates helpful tips and quotes from “the other side of the desk” gleaned from an extensive survey of grantmaking professionals throughout North America conducted by the authors in preparation for the book.*

Grant Proposal Makeover

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