

The *Quick* Wise Guide to Writing Grant Proposals

HOW TO WRITE A PERSUASIVE PROPOSAL

Waddy Thompson

Stitch-in-Time Books

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Introduction

The grant-seeking process can cover several months, encompassing researching and contacting potential funders; interviewing staff who will carry out the project; collecting staff bios, financial reports, and other supporting materials; and developing a budget.¹ With so many things to do, the actual writing of a persuasive narrative description of your project can get shortchanged. That's why I have written this short guide: to focus on helping you improve your writing and organizational skills so that you can create a convincing narrative that tells your story and wins grants.

The narrative (also referred to as the proposal) is equally important no matter what type of funder you are approaching: foundations, corporations, government agencies, or even individuals.

A good narrative presents the case for support by immediately capturing the reader's imagination. It goes on to describe the problem you plan to solve, how your charity will work to solve it, and your qualifications for doing this work. It must also convey a feeling of urgency to make the reader want to give you the grant right now. The case for support is the essential part of any funding request.

Good cases for support bear a strong relationship to other types of persuasive writing. In their book *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, Chip Heath and Dan Heath sum up the elements of successful writing with the mnemonic "SUCCES," which stands for "simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and stories." That's the best summary of how to create good fundraising copy I've ever seen. As you read on, think about how each part of the narrative fulfills one or more aspects of the "SUCCES" principle.

I recommend following a simple three-part structure for organizing most proposals:

1. **Articulate the Problem:** What problem or issue do you seek to address? Your funder will most likely know something (or possibly a lot) about the issue, but be clear about how you see the problem.

¹If you would like to learn about the different types of funders, researching funders, organizing your grant-seeking efforts, developing convincing budgets, and freelance grant writing, take a look at my comprehensive book on the subject, *The Wise Guide to Winning Grants* (Stitch-in-Time Books, 2017), which is available in paperback and in all e-book formats. (This book is a considerable expansion of that book's Chapter 13.)

2. **Present Your Credentials:** Why are you the right nonprofit to carry out this program? Have you conducted similar programs in the past? What experience does the leadership of your organization contribute to your ability to carry out the program? What endorsements do you have?
3. **Describe How You Will Fix the Problem:** This is where you get into the details about what you plan to do. You will also demonstrate how organized your thinking is and how well you understand the issue.

The following chapters will help you convincingly describe your program, putting you well on your way to receiving funding. At the end of the book is a sample of a complete proposal narrative, as well as a reference to where you can find other helpful samples.