

Writing Winning Proposals

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Warm Up:

What is the most difficult part about proposal writing for your organization right now?



Agenda:

1. Look at a great proposal.
2. Identify the components of a great proposal.
3. Practice evaluating a sample proposal based on those components.
4. Clarify one new method you will try in the future.



A winning proposal
hinges on clarity more
than persuasion.

Types of proposals

- Grant Letters of Intent
- Grant Applications
- Collaborative Grant Applications
- Contract Applications
- Major Gift Proposals
- Impact Investor Proposals

Components of a winning proposal

1. **CLARITY:** You are clear who you are and what you will do with the money.
1. **BOLD IMPACT:** You are making a definitive change in the world, not just a dent in the problem.
1. **EXPERIENCE:** You can prove your team is the right team for the job.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

CLARITY: You are clear who you are.

You make a bold line between the problem and solution

A dotted line between the problem and solution requires readers to know the content area, understand complexity of your field, or use their imagination.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

CLARITY: You are clear who you are.

Your idea is so clear that your grandmother understands it and shares it with her friends who also understand it.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

CLARITY: You are clear who you are.

Ex: Airbnb is the first online marketplace that lets travelers book rooms with locals, instead of hotels.

Ex: Dropbox. Synchronizes files across your or your team's computers.

Ex: Justice Defenders trains paralegals and lawyers within defenseless communities to provide legal services for themselves and others.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

CLARITY: You are clear what you will do with the money.

It can be to achieve your organization's outcome goals. It can be for a specific project.

**Do not invent a new project for the donor.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

BOLD IMPACT: You are making a definitive change in the world, not just a dent in the problem.

A definitive change begins with an impact statement.

- **Charity: Water:** We will solve the water crisis within our lifetime
- **EMERGE Minnesota:** We will double the earning power for all BIPOC entry level employees in the Twin Cities by 2040.
- **Sister Hearts:** A decarceration program to accompany every institution that incarcerates.
- **CoBuild:** Youth who lived in affordable housing will run the companies that build the homes the next generation can afford and be proud of.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

BOLD IMPACT: You are making a definitive change in the world, not just a dent in the problem.

A definitive change uses *outcome* language more than *output* language.

- *Outcome:* How effective you've been.
- *Output:* How busy you've been.



key ingredients

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BOLD IMPACT: You are making a definitive change in the world, not just a dent in the problem.

Outcome Examples:

- By 2026, 68% of formerly incarcerated individuals completing our program will return to serve and mentor others.
- By 2026, we will provide decarceration programming in 10 additional prisons.
- By 2026, 85% of the individuals we serve will increase earning power.
- By 2026, 85% of the individuals we serve will exit cycles of poverty.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

EXPERIENCE: You can prove your team is the right team for the job.

When you are selling a *product*, people are buying an identity.

When you are proposing an *investment or a gift*, people are buying a promise. They need to trust that your team will do what it says it will do.



key ingredients

CLARITY BOLD IMPACT EXPERIENCE

EXPERIENCE: You can prove your team is the right team for the job.

Use any opportunity to describe your organization's track record of success, evidence-based practices, awards, nominations, community credibility.

Credibility isn't earned through a strong staff bio section or "meet the team." It's based on how you answer other questions throughout the proposal.



key ingredients

CLARITY
BOLD IMPACT
EXPERIENCE

EXPERIENCE: You can prove your team is the right team for the job.

Describe your stage of growth as an organization. Make a graph that shows where you've been and how this funding will only improve your experience and maturity.



key ingredients

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EXPERIENCE: You can prove your team is the right team for the job.

Ex:

- Our founder, Maryam Henderson Uloho is asked to speak on the topic of decarceration and the SisterHearts program to a national audience on a monthly basis.
- (Organization's) trust-based approach is evidence-based. (Organization) has over 110 years of experience working with Colorado's kids in need. This history has grounded us in the real challenges families face.
- Sample Nonprofit has been asked to inform the work of national partners serving opportunity youth by speaking to attendees at the Sample Forum alongside panelist from x Organization, x Organization, and x Organization.

Your turn.

- Use the proposal checklist to evaluate your own proposal focusing on the “Clarity” section.
- Discuss your results with each other.
 - Ask your partner if they could help you increase clarity in a particular area.

Question.

What questions came up while working through the checklist?

Reflect.

What element of the checklist requires additional conversation with other members of your team?

Next steps.

Identify one change you can make that will improve future proposals.

Summary.

Winning proposals need:

- **CLARITY:** You are clear who you are and what you will do with the money.
- **BOLD IMPACT:** You are making a definitive change in the world, not just a dent in the problem.
- **EXPERIENCE:** You can prove your team is the right team for the job.

Podcast

Ideas Fueling Nonprofit Innovators
and Social Entrepreneurs.

Episode 6: How to know
when you're ready for your
next fundraising strategy

