

How To Write A Funding Proposal (322)

Organisations that rely on donations or sponsorships need to become experts in writing good funding proposals – they are your life-blood. It is easy to assume that everyone understands and appreciates the importance of your work, but routes need to explain this again and again to donors and sponsors so that the message is clear.

It is a message that you will have to repeat time and time again – so make sure you get good at it. A funding proposal is the ideal place for you to sharpen your value statement to society, so that you build your profile with every fundraising effort. It is also a vital, early step in building relationships with other stakeholders whose support could be life-changing for the members of your route.

This Guide will explain what information and tone needs to go into a funding proposal, and how it should be structured so that it tells the funder what they need to know to make an informed decision on whether or not to fund your project or route.

The main message of this Guide is that, while the proposal and its contents are important, it is also vital that you have identified the right kind of funder for your organisation. In fact, identifying the right funders is the first step in the process; once you have found a funder whose aims and mandate fit in with yours, then you can start to craft the proposal.

Also look at the Guides on [How To Identify Grant-Givers and Funders](#), [How To Develop A Project Budget](#), and [How To Develop A Project Idea](#).

Why is a proper funding proposal important?

A funding proposal is like an advertisement for your route. In it, you are trying to convince a funder to buy into your concept, services and products. So it is very important that the proposal shows you in a good light: professional, well-researched, clear and passionate.

The way you write the proposal can indeed do this. It can show that you understand your mission clearly, and that you are embarking upon projects that fit in well with that mission. The proposal can also show that you are well organised, that you have planned ahead, and that you know how you will turn this plan into action. Ideally, you will also be able to show that your organisation has experience in this field, and has the right people and skills to do it well.

A good funding proposal will also be clear about what the funder will get out of this project – in other words, what outputs or benefits they will be able to see and record. Remember that they will need to justify their decision to fund you, so they will be looking for evidence of your success. That is why a good proposal always includes how you will assess the impact of what you have done.

What is a funding proposal and how do you write one?

A funding proposal is simply a document that asks for funds for a specific project or organisation, so that it can perform certain activities and achieve certain goals. The proposal needs to detail what these activities will be, what they will cost to implement, who will carry them out (and when), and what the benefits will be.

First find the right funders

Each funding proposal needs to be targeted at a particular funder. If possible, don't send the same proposal to different funders. Rather, examine the focus of each funder (they will all have their own special mandate that guides who they give funding to), and then tailor your argument accordingly. This does not mean that you divert from your own focus to suit that of the funder. It simply means that you need to emphasise those aspects of your project that most interest the funder.

So start with some careful research on the funders available. Choose those whose goals and areas of interest look most in line with your own. Then, in your proposal, make it clear why your needs fit in with their agenda; the funder must understand clearly why you are targeting them. Also find out:

- The name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and title of the right person to talk to at the funding organisation.
- Their specific funding criteria – does the funder only deal with certain countries, provinces or geographical areas; do they have a gender focus (women only?) or age restriction (youth only?).
- Limitations on the size (amount in rand) of grants that the funder usually gives? Do you need more than this?
- The donor's decision-making process – how long does it take, and do you need to follow up regularly?
- Deadlines for proposals, and dates when proposals are considered.

How should your proposal be structured?

The proposal has to do many things. It must establish your credentials, passion and past performance. It must show how you will make a difference and how you will measure this. It must also show the human side of your project and the impact it will have. So, when you are writing it, remember that you

need to not just describe – you need to persuade!

After you have read the information below, we have also provided a [Template For A Funding Proposal](#) into which you can insert your own text.

Start with a neat cover page, including your route's name and contact details, your name (as the writer) and position in the Route Forum, the project's name, the funding organisation and the person (if relevant) at the funder who must receive the document.

Executive summary

The first part of the proposal needs to summarise everything you're going to say, so that the funder gets a quick overview before getting into the detail. This helps to create a good first impression and assures the funder that the project is indeed of interest and relevance to their funding mandate.

Briefly describe the project and its aims, outlining quickly the problem or opportunity that the project is addressing. Use this part to make it clear what your vision is and how your strategy works to achieve that vision. Discuss the community that you serve and how you are linked to this community.

Outline your governance structures, so that the funder can see that you are rooted in your constituency and governed by that constituency in an organised way. Say what impact you have already had along your route (or project), and how your organisation manages its finances to continue contributing to the goals and objectives of the route (or project) in a sustainable manner.

The route and its members

Now you can go into more detail about your route's mission and goals; explain why it exists, who benefits (and how), and give more information on your links to your community. Say who is

on the board or council (this is to reinforce the governance issue), and give a short biography of each board member – emphasising their experience, ability and community links. Photographs also help bring a reader closer to the organisation.

If your route has patrons, list them too (these are usually well-respected and well-known people who are willing to lend their name and support to your work, but are not able to be involved very often). Write about your key Route Forum members and volunteers, with brief biographies of each.

The aim of all this is to present a sound, accountable and competent organisation.

The project and its context

Now describe the project in more detail, including a discussion about the context – in other words, the problem to be solved. This usually needs you to discuss the region you are in, with details about its location and its demographics (how many people live in your area, what are their ages, gender, race, schooling, income, etc.) – where relevant.

Provide as much information as you can on the issue that your project addresses. For instance, if your project is about bringing more visitors to your area, then find as much information as you can on how many visitors you currently get and what they do in your area. Perhaps compare this information to other areas to highlight the point that more can be attracted – and predict what the effect of more visitors may be on the route and its members.

Describe in detail what you want your project to achieve; use some targets (actual figures) if you can – such as, 1 000 new visitors by the end of the year. Base your targets on something (such as the number of beds your whole route offers) and ensure that they are realistic. It is not a disaster if

you do not quite reach your target, but funders will want to know that your target figure at least represents a substantial improvement and that every effort was taken to reach the target.

As noted, emphasise here how your aims match those of the funder.

Talk about your strategy in achieving your goals. In the next section, you will write about your actual plans, but here you can highlight your approach to the problem. For instance, if the quality of life in your town is declining because it gets fewer visitors, then your strategy may be to: (a) attracts more tourists from a particular highway that now passes by your town, (b) upgrades the quality of accommodation that is available to them, and (c) creates new attractions for them to stay longer and spend more money during their visit.

Again, use supporting information (even statistics) to support what you say, so that you can demonstrate that the targets or proposed plans are realistic and achievable.

Discuss in detail who the beneficiaries of the project will be (include numbers if you can), where they live, how they will benefit, and what the overall impact of this will be for the community.

The plan

Now comes the detailed plan of how you will turn this strategy into action. This should cover:

- What will you do? Prepare a project plan that summarises everything that needs to be done, in order of when it must happen.
- Where will you do this? (Places)
- How will you do it? (Resources)
- Who will be involved? (People)
- What will the outputs be? Describe the actual activities

or products that will result – such as training, workshops, publications, reports.

- When will the activities and outputs happen? (Timeframe)
- How will progress be monitored? Explain how you will keep track of all the activities to ensure they are done according to plan.
- How will the project be evaluated? In this process, you will look at the activities and their impact, and judge whether they have achieved what you hoped; you need a plan of how you will do this evaluation.
- What resources will be needed to carry out the activities? The resources are mainly about the money you will need, so use the information in the project plan to prepare a budget – that is, how much needs to be spent, when, and on what.

Your request

By now, you will have described all the activities and what they will cost to implement. Now summarise exactly how much (in rand) you are asking the funder to contribute.

Then summarise again what it will be spent on and what the result will be (who it will benefit).

If you can show that the funding will lead to longer-term sustainability (that is, the route or project may become more self-sufficient), then explain this here. Depending on your area and your focus, funders may want to see that their funding is making you less dependent on donations and more self-supporting.

This concludes the main body of your proposal.

Appendices

There is plenty of other information that a funder may be interested in seeing, but too much detail in the main body of

your proposal will make it harder to read and will disturb the flow of your argument. So put it at the back of your proposal, as appendices.

Here are a few of the items that you can include as appendices, if you have them:

- Your route's most recent annual report or newsletters
- Detailed budget of your organisation and, if possible, the most recent audited statements
- Photographs of the context and/or project
- A more detailed technical description of the project
- A detailed timeline
- Past evaluation reports.

Who is involved with writing the funding proposal?

The Route Forum will usually supervise any funding proposal that comes out of the organisation, but the task of writing it will usually be delegated to one or more people. If there is a project manager in charge of the proposed project, they may be central to the process of finding funds for it. The treasurer and administrator will also play a role, with the close involvement of the chairperson – especially if the project is a large one.

It might even be a good idea for the forum to appoint a subcommittee or project committee from among the forum members and the broader members of the route. Wherever there are relevant skills, they should be brought in, but one or two people need to manage the proposal to ensure that all contributions are coordinated and that the proposal is ready on time. It will be important for the Route Forum to sign off on the proposal (officially authorise it) before it goes to the funder.

How does a funding proposal affect the route?

A funding proposal needs to be carefully controlled and managed by the Route Forum, since it contains written statements about what the route claims to be, what it does, and what it plans (indeed, what it promises!) to do. While any well-managed and well-written proposal can bring life-changing funds to a route and its projects, a proposal that is misleading or overambitious can lead to a breakdown in the trust relationship with stakeholders – and can cause great distress and conflict within the organisation.

So a Route Forum really needs to decide how it will process any funding proposals, so that it can have full control over what is said and proposed at every step – and can stop or change the direction of a proposal if necessary. This process should also ensure that those writing the proposals are given some support (training if necessary) and expert guidance.

Practical tips

- Write simply and avoid jargon, using short sentences
- Check for spelling and grammar errors, and get someone else to edit and check it
- Do not exaggerate
- Use consistent headings and subheadings to keep your layout neat and easy to follow
- Include a contents page at the beginning, and number your pages
- Use white space, have wide margins, and don't crowd the text
- Include photos or visuals if you can
- Explain any abbreviations or acronyms that you use
- Keep it short – not more than 10 pages for the main body.

Use of this Guide

Route Forum members can use this guide, since the operations of the route itself often need funding when it starts up. It can also be used by other route members who are managing or involved in a project that may need funding.

Other Resources

There are plenty of other Resources that relate to funding; these include:

- Guide: [How To Identify And Approach Potential Grant-Givers And Funders](#)
- Template: [Funding Proposal](#)
- Guide: [How To Identify Income Streams For The Route](#)
- Guide: [How To Unite Your Route Behind A Shared Purpose or Vision](#)
- Guide: [How To Compile Your Annual Route Plan](#)
- Guide: [How To Develop A Project Idea](#)
- Guide: [How To Develop A Project Plan For a Short-Term Project](#)
- Guide: [How To Manage A Short-Term Project](#)
- Guide: [How To Develop A Project Budget](#)

Further resources to use

Inyathelo, the South African Institute for Advancement, works to build democracy in South Africa by strengthening civil society organisations and higher education institutions, and to develop a philanthropic movement rooted in the African cultural heritage of sharing.

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