

CHECKLIST FOR RESEARCH, SUBMISSION AND EVALUATION OF GRANT PROPOSALS

Introduction

Federal Proposals is a professional proposal consultancy providing services to companies and organizations seeking to compete for federal procurements and solicitations. We frequently receive inquiries from small businesses and small non-profit organizations seeking federal grants. For many small organizations, our services are beyond their available budgets. In an effort to provide some assistance at no cost, we have prepared this document to assist organizations in pursuing grants.

The purpose of this checklist is to aid entities seeking grant aid to: 1) formulate improved potential grant aid concepts, 2) develop and refine information required for grant acceptance and success, and 3) provide the basis for working with funding partners.

Checklist

1 Step 1: Formulate Concept

The first step is to develop a general concept for the grant aid project you envision. The general concept should include:

- The need you will attempt to meet – quantifying it as much as possible, e.g. targeted communities, number of persons with the need
- Importance of the need and the impact of not meeting the need
- How the need is currently being addressed (it may not be), and if any other agencies are attempting to meet the need
- Your concept for meeting the need and expected results
- Benefits to the community from successfully meeting the need

Put your concept on paper and have others review it with a critical eye. Finally, assess whether the envisioned project will have sufficient impact to warrant grant aid support. There are many needs, not all of which are candidates for government support.

2 Step 2: Research Federal Agency Announcements for Source of Funds

Once you have a well understood concept, it is time to find a home for it. Your targeted community and the nature of your solution will probably determine the candidate agencies that may have possible grant aid programs. In this research phase, you will probably spend a lot of time on the Internet, scrolling through government agency websites, looking for possible sources of funds.

All Federal grants have to be announced to the public. These announcements (sometimes called a “Program Announcement,” “Request for Proposal,” “Notice of Funding Availability,” or “Solicitation for Grant Applications”) are the government’s way of looking for charities and other groups to provide a Federally-funded service. Each grant announcement contains instructions on how to apply, including where to get an application packet, information the application should contain, the date the application is due, and agency contact information. Grant announcements are issued throughout the year; however, funds are often fully allocated within months of the initial announcement. Unfortunately, there is no single document that contains every Federal grant announcement and no uniform format for these announcements. Currently, most grant announcements are listed in the Federal Register, a daily publication that can be accessed on the Internet (http://www.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html) and at major public libraries. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (www.cfda.gov) also contains information about grant announcements. Review the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA). To use the CFDA,

Suggested Research Sites

- White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives www.fbc.gov
- Agency Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Department of Justice www.ojp.usdoj.gov/fbcj
- Department of Labor www.dol.gov/cfbci
- Department of Health and Human Services www.hhs.gov/fbcj
- Department of Housing and Urban Development www.hud.gov/offices/fbcj
- Department of Education www.ed.gov/faithandcommunity
- Department of Agriculture www.usda.gov/fbcj
- Agency for International Development www.usaid.gov

locate the CFDA number at the end of each listing. Enter that number into the “program number” box on the CFDA’s web site at www.cfda.gov/public/faprs.htm.

An important note. More money is available from programs administered by states and localities than from the Federal government. For example, in 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded \$25 billion directly to grant applicants. But it gave more than six times as much (\$160 billion) to states and localities, which in turn made much of this money available to non-governmental organizations. So, in addition to seeking grants from the Federal government, you may want to look into partnering with local government.

When you find possible sources, download the grant applications for review and assessment. Don’t limit your search to one source of funds, look for as many as you can find. Grant applications that leverage funds across multiple agencies or grant programs score better in Federal grant evaluation.

3 Step 3: Determine Grant Requirements, Evaluation Criteria & Eligibility

Review each grant announcement for:

- Grant requirements.** Does your envisioned project meet the grant requirements? If not, can your concept be changed or tailored to fall within the requirements?
- Evaluation criteria.** Will the merits of your project score well in relation to the grant selection or award criteria? If not, can your concept be changed or tailored to score better?
- Eligibility criteria.** Does your organization meet the eligibility criteria?

Remember, meeting the requirements and eligibility criteria only “qualifies” your proposal. You must compete against scores of other applicants for limited funds. Only a small number of applications are actually awarded grants.

Typical Evaluation Scoring

Technical approach – 40%
Organizational Qualifications/
Past Performance – 30%
Experience of Personnel – 30%

Typical Grant Selection Criteria

Applicants:

- Does applicant have prior experience and a record of success in developing and executing programs similar to the one being proposed?
- Do the credentials of the organization and key personnel (technical qualifications, professional competence, and relevant educational background) provide reasonable confidence that the program will be successful? Is there a clear organizational structure and relationships, with the management team possessing managerial, team building and communications skills to carry out the program?
- Does the applicant have relevant experience in the working environment where the program will be executed?

Proposed Program:

- Does the proposed program further the stated goals of the granting agency and the specific grant program?
- Does the methodology have the potential to yield significant results? Is it clear how these results will be measured?
- Who are the beneficiaries of the proposed program?
- Is the program socially, culturally and technically appropriate and feasible?
- Is the cost reasonable?

4 Step 4: Adjust Initial Concept To Fall Within Grant Requirements

It is very likely that the project you initially envisioned will need to be modified to fall within specific grant program requirements – and almost certainly to be positioned for successful award. Your concept may be superior, but if it is not what the government is asking for, you will not score well.

We recommend that you prepare a Table of Requirements, Compliance and Benefits to ensure that you consider each aspect of your project and tailor it to the specific grant program.

Example Table of Requirements, Compliance & Benefits

<i>Grant Requirement</i>	<i>How We Meet the Requirement</i>	<i>Benefits of Our Project in Meeting Grant Goals</i>
Requirement 1		
Requirement 2		
Requirement 3		

Be diligent in addressing each requirement, sentence by sentence if necessary.

Pay special attention to the grant announcement schedule. Your odds for award are much better if your proposal arrives in the first few weeks after the announcement is posted or opens. Many grant programs have annual announcements that may occur throughout the year.

5 Step 5: Present Concept to Grant Partners for Preliminary Evaluation (Peer Review)

Now that you have a more refined concept that falls within the requirements and criteria of one or more grant announcements, its time to think about preparing the formal proposal. In this step, ask independent experts or friends to critically review your concept for completeness and merit. If your concept has weaknesses, work to improve the concept. In the next step, we provide details for preparing the formal proposal.

6 Step 6: Develop Detailed Program Description

This checklist provides generally applicable project concepts and standards for Federal grant programs. It is provided for general guidance in refining concepts. Each announcement will have its own requirements and evaluation criteria, and they will prevail at the time of formal proposal preparation. Each section 6.1 through 6.15 provides key elements of a grant proposal that must be addressed.

6.1 Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of your envisioned project must be traceable to the goals of the grant announcement. These goals must be articulated clearly. Describe how your envisioned project will further the Federal Agencies' objectives. This section should include:

- Project goals and objectives
- How project goals and objectives support the Federal Agencies' grant goals and objectives
- How the project addresses regional or local needs
- Who the project beneficiaries are and how they will benefit from the project

6.2 Background

Provide a narrative describing the general problem your project will address. This section should contain:

- The origin and history of the problem you are addressing
- What has been done in the past to meet the problem, and why previous efforts have fallen short
- Factors that bear on the problem and potential solutions
- Alternative ways the problem might be addressed (leading to why your project is the right solution)

6.3 Identify Specific Problems to Be Addressed

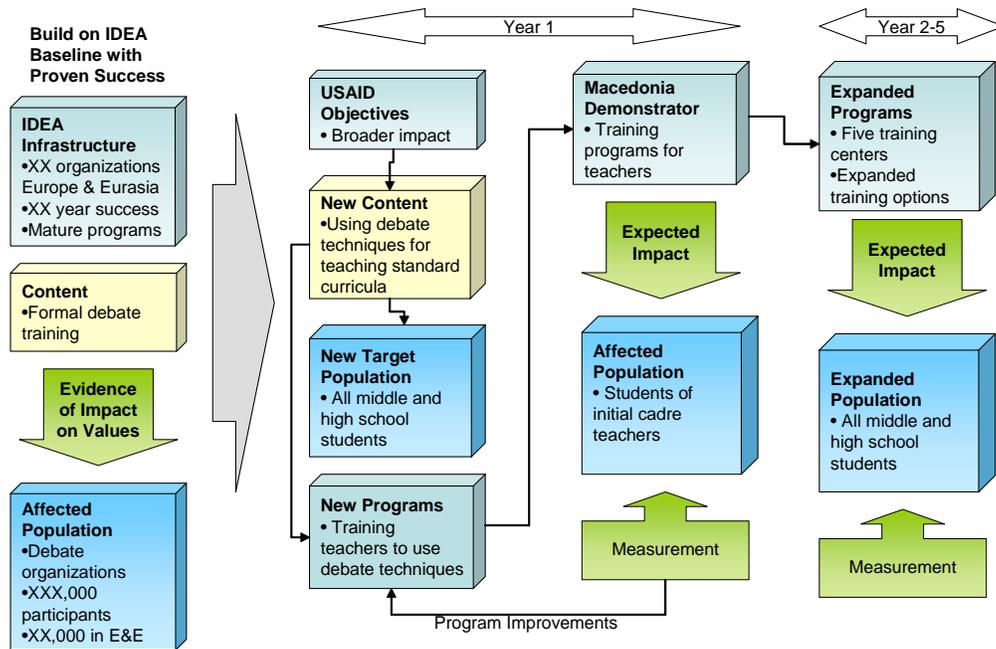
Now its time to get specific. Break your general problem into its discrete parts and address root causes and factors associated with each element of the problem. This analysis should result in a clearly stated set of problems that if successfully addressed will provide solutions to the general problem. This is probably one of the most difficult to articulate. For example, feeding the homeless is a compassionate goal, but a more attractive Federally-sponsored project is one that goes farther to resolve the greater needs of the homeless.

6.4 Define Proposed Intervention

Okay, now you get to put your vision into a more pragmatic *problem-solution* approach. Describe your overall solution and how it addresses the problems you identified in section 6.3. This is **what** you propose to do to solve the problem (as opposed to **how** you will solve the problem).

In the following Figure, we show an example of how an applicant envisioned setting up a program to meet an agency's goals. Although it may be more elaborate than one for a simple

program, it is intended to reinforce the idea that the proposed intervention must be well thought out.

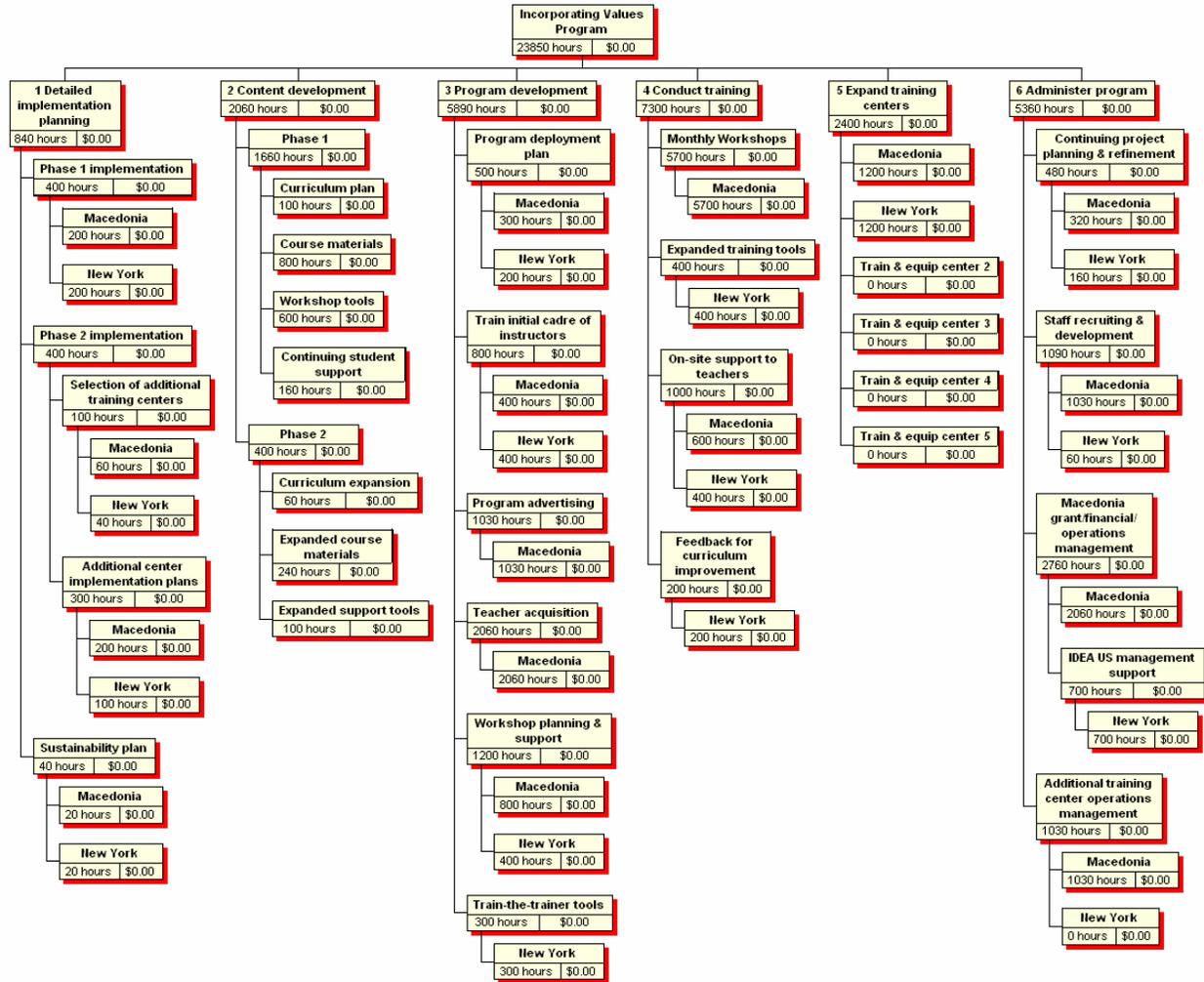


Note: graphics like these come in formal proposal preparation and are shown in this checklist only to show the level of thinking that is required in developing a credible proposal.

6.5 Define Technical Approach

Having described **what** you propose to do in section 6.4, here you provide the **hows**. Describe the way you will plan and implement the project. Break your solution into discrete measurable tasks (often called a work breakdown structure) and describe how you will do each task, what resources will be applied, and how you will manage the tasks to ensure success.

In the figure on the next page, we show you how an applicant broke their project into related tasks to show a logical approach and how resources were allocated to the various tasks – giving the evaluator the good feeling that the applicant understood their project and had a firm plan for executing it.



6.6 Define Expected Impact or Outcome

Having defined your technical approach and what and how you will accomplish the project tasks, describe the expected outcome of your approach and assess its impact in terms of meeting the project and Federal Agencies’ goals and objectives. Try to provide both qualitative and quantitative results that you expect to achieve. Here is an example of an applicant’s mapping the expected results of their program against the granting agency’s goals and objectives.

OUR EXPECTATION OF ACHIEVING USAID’S DESIRED RESULTS

USAID Example of Desired Results	Short-Term Result	Long-Term Result
Increased level and frequency of inter-religious dialogue resulting in less societal conflict	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Establishment of an ongoing dialogue of reconciliation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Establishing common goals and agreement between previously warring factions		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Promotion of responsible citizenship, democracy, human rights, and religious freedom	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Introduction of new processes or technology for greater understanding of generally-recognized values (use of the internet and mass media, for example)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Reduction in number of hate crimes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sanctions for corruption established and enforced		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Reduction in trafficking of persons		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
More transparent and accountable public sector institutions		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Establishment and enforcement of codes of conduct for professional associations, civil society organizations, private businesses, and government institutions		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Greater public understanding of ethics in business and government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Reduction of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and prejudice against people with disabilities or HIV/AIDS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

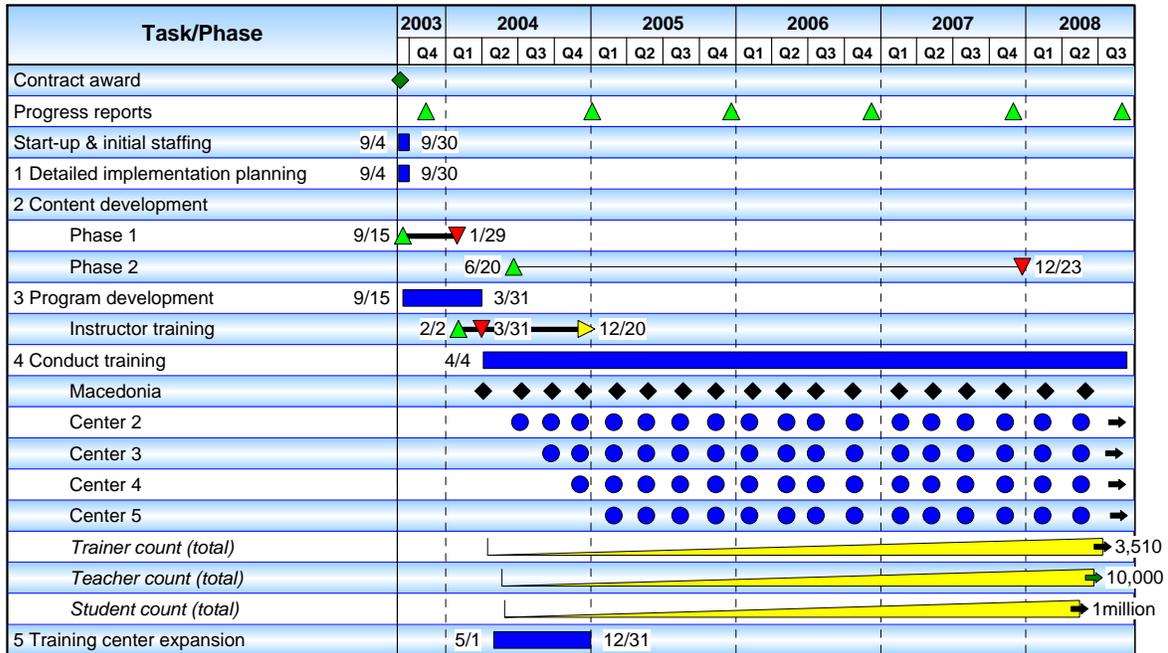
Measuring results is important. Here is an example of criteria an applicant proposed to measure project achievement.

- Number of teachers trained
- Number of students impacted
- Teacher surveys
- Middle & high school student surveys

6.7 Define Duration of Activity and Implementation Schedule

For each task you defined in section 6.5, define the expected duration of the task, and map these various tasks into an overall implementation schedule. An example of doing this is provided in the figure below (this example uses a Gantt chart, but you could use a table). You need to show that you have a plan to accomplish the tasks you have described.

**Incorporating Values Program
Schedule**



6.8 Describe How Your Program Will Be Managed

The grant evaluator will see lots of planned tasks, each with discrete activities, start and expected completion times, people and resources being applied, money being spent. You need to provide confidence that you can manage the project – keep it on schedule and on budget. Address the following:

- What your management organization will look like. Who will be responsible for managing the project and what authority they have to resolve problems?
- What management approaches and tools you will use

6.9 Describe How Your Program Will Be Monitored

You have defined tasks, schedules and resources that will be applied. Describe how you will:

- Monitor and track progress and determine if you are on plan or falling short
- What you will do if implementation gets off track
- Monitor quality and assured required quality standards

- What criteria you will apply to assess impending failure and the need to stop if it turns out that you are headed to failure
- Be a good steward of the government's funds
- Report progress to the Federal Agency
- Use interim results to modify project parameters to improve performance

6.10 Describe Your Plan for Financial Management

Granting agencies want to know that you have a clear financial plan. Describe the following:

- Your planned budget
- How you will spend the money and who will have authority to commit funds
- How you will track expenditures and do records-keeping
- How you will report expenditures to the Federal Agency
- How you will provide auditable records

It is worth noting here that proposals with cost sharing often get evaluated higher. If you will be proposing cost sharing, you will need to describe it here and show how you will track the contributions of participating entities.

Another important evaluation criterion is reasonableness of cost. If possible, the proposal should provide some measure of value vs. cost. For example, "our project will expose 100,000 students to new values at a cost of \$3 per student."

6.11 Describe Your Plan for Sustaining the Program After Completion of Federal Funding

The government sees the greatest value in programs where Federal grants are used to provide "seed funds" to projects that will become self-sustaining. Describe how your project will become self-sustaining by the end of the grant (and its option years, typically 1-3 years). Approaches include:

- Seeking sustaining funds from other agencies or non-profit organizations
- Making the project self-financing after the seed-period

6.12 Describe How You Will Work With Granting Agency

Many Federal Agencies' seek to have "partnerships" with their grant awardees. You need to describe how you are part of the "team." Describe how you will:

- Work with the agencies' grant managers to provide the best value for the grant funds. (Making your granting organization a part of the success story ensures continuing funding)
- Report progress regularly and avoid surprising the grant manger with problems
- Bring potential problems and concerns to their attention
- Solicit their advice in problem resolution

6.13 Step 6: Develop Program Staffing

Each task you have described earlier needs to have specific resources applied – people and budgets. Describe how you are going to staff the project organization to accomplish these tasks, and how they will fit within your planned budget. You should be able to complete a Table similar to the one below.

<i>Staff Member</i>	<i>Skill Requirements</i>	<i>Role/Task</i>	<i>Person-Months</i>
Jorge Gonzales		Project Manger	
Sam Smith		Senior Trainer	
TBD		Education Counselor	

6.14 Step 7: Describe Relevant Organization Experience

Describe your non-profit organization’s overall project experience, specific experience in projects similar to the one you are proposing, and projects using grant funds. Descriptions should include:

<i>Project Title</i>	<i>Project Description</i>	<i>Project Outcomes</i>	<i>Source of Funds</i>

6.15 Step 8: Describe Relevant Experience of Key Personnel

You will need to designate key personnel – those who will be responsible for project success. These can be your project manager and those with skills critical to project success. Personnel summaries should include:

- Academic credentials
- Skills and professional credentials
- Key projects
- Accomplishments
- Relevancy of skills and experience to proposed project

Many applications will also require resumes to be attached.

7 Step 7: Prepare and Submit Formal Proposal

Assemble the outputs of Step 6 into a formal proposal document that is fully compliant with the grant announcement...

Note: Provide suggested improvements for this checklist to info@federalproposals.com .