



Grant Writing, Business Development, and More

In 1,000 Words or Less? Writing a Grant Concept Paper

You've identified a serious problem in your community. You envision a program that will make a difference. There is so much to tell, and so little space to say it in! What should be included in a Concept Paper and how should it be structured?

Here-4-You Consulting recommends submitting a combination of a carefully constructed cover letter and a two- or three-page Concept Paper. A one-page budget may serve as your third page. The following guidelines recommend a structure and an order for the inclusion of relevant information about your proposed project.

The Cover Letter: Your cover letter should be written in standard business-style format on your agency letterhead. We recommend including one paragraph addressing each of the following components:

- ✔ **Introduce your agency.** Tell the funding source who you are and where you are located, as well as what you do and whom you serve. This description may be based on your organization's Mission Statement.
- ✔ **Introduce the project.** The next paragraph is a brief big-picture summary of the project you are proposing. Briefly address community needs, the program goal, and offer an overview of program activities. Pique the interest of the reader here; compel them to read the attached Concept Paper. *If you can't make them cry, at least make their eyes well up!*
- ✔ **Establish agency credibility.** Now convince the funder that you are worthy of their trust—and their money. This may be accomplished by several means: for example, mentioning your grants track record, naming your board of directors, briefly offering evidence of fiscal stability, or describing ongoing programs. *The fact is, if you are a new organization, this can be difficult. Your best bet may be to attract some local community leaders to serve on your nonprofit's board. Another tactic for new agencies is to partner with existing agencies, allowing the financially sound organization to apply for the grant.*
- ✔ **State the bottom line.** Let the funder know what the project will cost. This may be done in several ways: You may present the total project cost followed by the amount you are requesting from this funder (if seeking funds for only one component); you may state the project total and then list the amounts required for various project components (allowing the funder to choose a level of support); or you may ask for support for the entire program (perhaps mentioning in-kind agency and community support).
- ✔ **Close with a thank you.** Thank the funder for their consideration of your program and let them know you will be contacting them to discuss the possibility for funding.



The Concept Paper

The Concept Paper: Your Concept Paper is best kept to one-to-two pages in length and may include a third page delineating the budget. None of these pages should be on agency letterhead. It can be helpful to call attention to the sections of the Concept Paper with the use of section headers—after you have compelled the reader to keep reading with your inspirational opening statement. The readers who are scanning a stack of proposals will appreciate your clarity of presentation, and headers improve clarity. A concept paper or letter is still a funding proposal, so just think of it as a mini funding proposal. One paragraph should address each component.

✓ **Problem Statement:** Your opening paragraph must succinctly capture the community need you have identified while also compelling the reader to continue reading your proposal. Thus, begin with a “punch,” if possible, to pique the interest of the reader. This punch could be a dramatic statistic or a heart-rending quote. However, never rely on drama; support your problem assessment with statistics from independent sources. Include a paragraph presenting the statistics—those with the most relevance and the most impact. Be sure you have clearly explained the problem to the reader.

✓ **Goals and Objectives:** A brief, clear presentation of your project goal with an overview or synopsis of the related objectives will establish the basis for your project activities.

✓ **Project Activities:** In this section, you want to mention the major service-delivery components of the program. There is little emphasis on administrative tasks here with the exception of the planning and oversight committee or task force—which speaks to community involvement and support. This is also the section to briefly mention sustainability and evaluation, if relevant.

✓ **Management Plan:** It is helpful to include a paragraph addressing oversight of the project as well as a few key elements from the timeline, particularly when you will begin providing services. Also consider outlining your evaluation plans, i.e., who will be responsible, how information will be used, how results will be monitored.

✓ **Budget:** Typically, your budget is presented on a separate page. Or, you may prefer to limit the financial discussion to the cover letter (the “bottom line” paragraph). This will depend on the size of both your program and your request. Most of the time, an attached one-page budget will serve you well. A budget will further clarify program components and reflect positively on your planning and management skills.

Now that your Concept Paper is assembled into one document, you must analyze document length. Compare the total length and the length of each component to any maximums specified by the funder. Is it time to trim—or to return for additional writing? Just remember that content is much more important than the word count! Most private funders will forgive an extra word or two if you have told your story convincingly.