

INTRODUCTION TO GRANT WRITING

Grants can be a key step in assisting value added agriculture groups on the road from idea to development to marketing, and finally to business. However, good proposals contain good writing backed up by a process of planning, research and outreach.

ISU Extension has outlined a step-by-step process in the search for grant dollars. However, it takes time and persistence to succeed. After you have written a proposal, it could take as long as a year to hear back if you will receive the requested funds to move forward. Even well written proposals are often rejected at any time for any number of reasons.

The following steps are NOT a strict formula. You must carefully read through the grant application for which you are applying and strictly follow their information and format requirements. However, the following information can usually be adapted to fit the needs of the grant for which you are applying.

For additional information, contact the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC) at www.AgMRC.org, phone toll-free at 866-277-5567 or email us at AgMRC@iastate.edu.

Step 1: Background Information

The first step in writing your proposal is to determine why you need a grant. Don't write a grant unless you have clearly defined why you need the money. Remember grant assistance will not carry a project if it is not based on sound principles. You are doing a great disservice to others by denying them the money if your business idea is not built on sound business and market practices. Secondly, gather information. The information will need to come from three key areas – concept, program and expenses.

Determine who will be responsible for gathering the information and delegate to the appropriate person as necessary. This information gathering makes the actual writing of your proposal much easier when it is time to write..

Concept

What is your idea? How does it fit into the current agriculture structure? What is unique about your idea? What specific problem does this grant address and how does it meet the goals of the funding source? How will it help producers beyond those directly related to the grant project? The need that the proposal is addressing must be documented here. You need to convince your funding source that your need is a compelling one. Collect background data on your organization, statistical information (if any is available) on your idea and your agriculture sector in general.

Program

The following checklist covers the program information you will need:

- The nature of the project

- How it will be conducted
- The timetable for the project
- The anticipated outcomes
- Evaluating the results
- Staffing, volunteer needs

Expenses

You will need to have a broad, preliminary budget to show justification for the grant funds. Make sure your costs are in proportion to the outcomes you anticipate.

Step 2: Typical Components of a Proposal

Be sure to check each grant source carefully for any specific format or content requirements.

Component	Summary Description
Executive Summary	Overall summary of your proposal and your project.
Statement of Need	Why is this project needed? Who will it benefit?
Project Description	Details on the project itself. How will the project be implemented? How will the project be evaluated?
Budget	Broad financial description.
Organization Information	Background of group. Why formed? Group's activities and services.
Conclusion	Summary of main points. Solid closing argument for receiving funding.
Support	Letters of support or stories of clients helped.

Executive Summary

This is the most important part of your document. It is on this page that you provide the reader with an overall summary of your project and convince the reader that your project deserves the funding you are asking for. Be sure to include the following:

- Problem – brief statement about the need for this project.
- Goal - clear and concise statement of the goal(s) of the project
- Solution – a short description of the project including what will take place, how people will benefit from the project, etc.
- Funding Requirements – the request for the grant money, how it will be used and how the project will be funded in the future.
- Organization History – a brief statement of the history of the organization, its purpose, activities and the ability to carry out this project.

Statement of Need

Your statement of need enables your reviewers to learn more about the details of your project and the issues behind it. This section is your opportunity to present your side of the debate. Line up all your arguments and present your case logically and convincingly for the reader. Consider the following points:

- Find current facts or statistics to support your argument.
- Give the reader hope. Don't lead your reader to believe that investing in agriculture is a grim prospect, but rather, present how your project will be a viable solution to the problem producers are facing.
- Decide if you want to put your project forward as a model or pilot. This could expand your funding options, but it also leads the funder to believe that you are willing to establish this project in other areas. Models only work for certain value added ag projects.
- Does this problem occur in other areas? What additional opportunities or benefit might occur for others as a result of this proposals success?
- Determine your level of need. You are asking the funding source to believe that your project is needed more than somebody else, or your solution to the problem is better than another person's and therefore, fully fund yours. Is it? Make sure you can support your need.
- Demonstrate that your project addresses the need differently or better than preceding projects. Without being critical of your competition, describe how your project complements and enhances, but does not duplicate, the work of others.
- Be more persuasive and to the point. Avoid circular reasoning – this presents an absence of confidence that your solution will solve the problem. Discuss what this project would mean to your community, your area and agriculture in general.

Project Description

This section of your proposal includes the following five sections – objectives, methods, staffing, evaluation and sustainability. Your objectives, combined with your methods, will dictate your staffing needs and will then become a basis for your evaluation. Sustaining the project will come after its success and its ability to survive without a grant source. Together, the five sections give a solid picture of your entire project.

- Objectives must be tangible, specific, measurable and achievable within your specified time frame. Goals are conceptual and show the big picture – objectives are detailed and measurable.
- Methods describe the specific actions your group will take to achieve the objectives. It might be helpful to divide your methods into how, when and why.
- Staffing needs to be covered as specifically as possible. How many staff, their qualifications, specific assignments, etc. Describe your plans to administer the project, salary and benefits, etc.
- Evaluation should be built into the project and not something done once the project is complete. There are two types of evaluation – one measures the product and one measures the process. Consider both in this section.

- Sustainability is critical to the proposal reader. You need to demonstrate a plan for your value added ag venture that includes how the project will survive long-term and without grant funding. Be specific about current and projected funding streams and the base of financial support for your organization.

Budget

Your budget section is dependent on your project itself. Your proposal may be as simple as a one-page statement of projected expenses, or you may have a complex document of projected support and revenue and various items of expense.

Organization Information

At this point in your proposal, you will want to include a resume for your value added ag institution and/or the staff members involved in the project. It is not necessary to overwhelm the reader with pages of facts – the information can easily be conveyed by a brochure or other prepared statement about your project. Explain why your organization came into existence, your mission, your goals and your organizational structure. Discuss your board of directors, if applicable and your activities.

Conclusion

It is important to leave the reader of your proposal with a good feeling about your project and sum up your need for the funding. Call attention to the future – underline some activities that you plan to begin following the funding award or state how you might continue, or not continue, without the funding support.

Make a final appeal for your project. Re-state why your value added ag project is important and what you want to accomplish. Why do you need funding to accomplish your goals?

Support

Attach letters of support or testimonials of need/assistance from affected publics for your business idea.

Helpful Tips for Grant Writing

- Carefully review the grant requirements to ensure you are applying with an appropriate funding source.
- Carefully read and follow all directions and adhere to specific limits on content.
- Develop a plan and timeline for completing the grant application.
- Write clearly and concisely. DO NOT use wordy jargon, abbreviations and acronyms.
- Clearly identify the problem you are addressing.
- Clearly identify the goals and objectives of the proposal for solving the problem.
- Collaborate with other to show support and commitment from other sources to help solve the problem.
- Include appropriate evaluation methods to provide accountability.
- Proof read several times. Have someone unfamiliar with the project read the application for clarity.
- Follow-up. Determine why the application was or was not successful. Identifying the applications strengths and weaknesses will help in your next grant writing effort.