General

Elements of Successful Proposals

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When or Why Should You Propose?
Proposal (noun)

1. an act of putting forward or stating something for consideration
A More Practical Definition

A good proposal is a **good idea** that is **well expressed**, with a clear indication of methods for pursuing the idea, evaluating the findings, and **making them known to all who need to know**.
Even More Practical Definition

- The proposal is a communication process that often takes from several months to several years from the (1) initial idea to (2) identification of a sponsor who buys in to your idea to (3) signing of a contract or grant award.

- And, then, the fun (real work) begins...
Who Needs to Write a Proposal?

1. University professors
2. Company managers
3. Company employees
4. Researchers
Types of Proposal

- Solicited
  - Can your idea satisfy my specific need?

- Unsolicited
  - Any good ideas?
Various Forms of Support (1)

1. **Grant**
   - Principal purpose is to accomplish a public purpose.
   - Sponsor leaves you alone!

2. **Contract**
   - Principal purpose is for direct benefit of the sponsor.
   - Substantial involvement between sponsor and you.
Various Forms of Support (2)

3. Cooperative agreements
   - Principal purpose is to accomplish a public purpose.
   - Substantial involvement between sponsor and you.

4. Gift
   - Discretionary money!
Different Perspectives

- A proposal is
  - a good idea!
  - a marketing document
  - a legal and binding document
Different Perspectives

- An answer to (funding agency’s) prayer
- A communication process
- A relationship building exercise
Make Sure to **Clearly** Answer the Following Questions

1. What is the problem you are going to solve?
2. How else can “someone” solve that problem?
3. Why is your way better than others?
4. Is your idea feasible?
5. What are the obstacles and pitfalls?
6. Why are you the best person for this?
7. Upon success, what is the **end result** (deliverable)?
8. What are the side benefits?
Make Sure to

1. Focus

2. Avoid being vague

3. Avoid spreading yourself too thin
Framework for a Proposal

“Begin at the beginning,” the King said to the White Rabbit gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”
Executive Summary

- Different and longer than an abstract
- Convey main points in about a page
- Most important part of the proposal
- Will be read by the largest number of people
Executive Summary

- Should appeal to different classes of readers:
  - Focus on selling the idea, rather than launching into a technical write-up
  - Should be accurate, representative, seamless and smooth!
Introduction and Background -- setting the stage

- What is the problem addressed?
- What is its significance?
- What has been done before?
- Where do you fit in?
- Your proposed activities
- What will be the benefits?
- A road map to the rest of the proposal
Project Plan
(Statement of Work)

- What you are going to do
- How you are going to do it
- Why you are going to do it the way you have proposed

- Project schedule/timeline
  - 2008
  - 2011
Other Sections

- Project Management

- Your Strengths
  - Organizational Capabilities
  - Expertise
  - Facilities

- Budget and Cost Proposal with justification
Other Sections

- Project Evaluation
- Information Dissemination

Conclusions and Recommendations!

(but wait! This is not the end....)
Finishing Touches....

- Reviewers to Exclude!
- Cover Page
- Covering Letter
- Table of Contents, list of illustrations
- Acronyms, abbreviations
- Certifications
Make Sure You Belong

- READ the Request For Proposal (RFP).
- Then, READ it again!
- And again!
- Do NOT force your “idea” when it does not belong.
- Your time is too valuable to spend on a proposal that “you know” won’t be accepted.
A View from the other Side...

- See your proposal from the point of view of the funding source!
When Should You Float an Idea?

- Too early (premature), no one may buy into your idea & someone may run away with your idea!
- Too late (mature), there is no need to propose!
- Should I propose something that I have already done secretly without anyone knowing?
Do Your Homework!

- Literature search
- Study the problem
- Get to know the funding source
- Assess your competition
- Read the guidelines!
The Price is Right?

- Too expensive, no one would buy!
- Too cheap, you can’t deliver!
- Consult with senior people who have done similar magnitudes of work.
- You may need to back-off some of the promises (cool ideas) to fit within a reasonable budget.
Are you the 800 pound gorilla in this field?

Or the novice?
Make Sure You Can Deliver Your Promises!

- Think past the proposal phase.

- Do NOT promise things you can not deliver. Your reputation will be tarnished forever!
How Much Should you Reveal?

• Caution may be advisable

• Or, it may be time to throw caution to the winds!
Collaborate or Not?

- Oftentimes, grand challenges are fulfilled in collaborative groups of people.
- The outcome of a meaningful collaboration must be more than the sum of its constituents.
- Don’t get buried under someone’s name.
- Building a collaborative team takes time & energy.
A Picture is worth a 1000 words

Napoleon’s Russian campaign of 1812
--- Britannica (Charles Minard (1869))
Proofread Your Porpasol

The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, it dseno’t mtaetr in waht oerdr the ltteres in a wrod are, the olny iproamtnnt tihng is that the frsit and lsat ltter be in the rghit pclae. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. And you awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt!

But, a proposal with typos or grammatical errors will be looked down upon.
Common Mistakes

- A poor match
- Technically strong, but poorly conveyed
- Waited till the last minute
Common Mistakes

- No new ideas
- A fishing expedition
- A method in search of a problem
Common Mistakes

- Inadequate literature survey
- Sloppy
- Plagiarized!
- Lacks cohesion
It Does Not Necessarily Stop There

- Follow up!
- Keep advocating your idea.
- Start working early (within limits).
- Prepare the infrastructure, man-power, etc.
- Prepare for negotiations upon approval.

- The real work begins when the $ is in the bank!
Acknowledgement

Images shown in this presentation have been obtained using Google Image Search.
References

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