Contents of A Proposal

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Summary: Provides suggested guidelines for proposal development for extramural funding.

Many sponsors will indicate the format in which they want proposals to them submitted. The sections are called different names in materials from various sponsoring agencies. Whatever the names used, they usually include similar basic information. The following are items which are typically included by funders. The most basic would include a plan or scope of work section and a budget. The format requested and the names for the categories may vary, but the components remain basically the same.

Cover Page, Title Page

This page contains major details in connection with the project and the agency to which the award will be made. Items commonly found include the title of the project, the name of entity to which the award will be made (University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service), their mailing address, the principal investigator's (P.I.) or project director's (P.D.) name, the length of the project (X date – X date; x months; or x years), the funds required, the signatures of the P.I./P.D. and the authorized organizational representative (the Associate VP for Agriculture – Extension and Director, Cooperative Extension Service) and the date submitted.

Project Abstract

This section provides an overview of the project. It briefly includes the goals, objectives, project plan, time frame and follow-up in a concise manner. This section is very important, as it provides the proposal reviewer with their first impression of the project and often determines whether they will read the rest. Many funding sources limit the number of words and/or characters in this section, thus making the words selected to convey the message very important. A restriction of 200 words or less is not uncommon.

Statement of the Problem, Needs Assessment

This section of the proposal explains the current situation and the reason there is a need for any action to be taken. It will include statistical data about the condition and a review of the significant work of others in the field. The closer the data mirrors the area of the proposed project the better. For example, for a national project, national level data would be appropriate. For an Arkansas project, the average per capita income of residents in Arkansas would be much more appropriate than the national per capita income level. However, this national level data may still be used in comparing the situation in Arkansas versus what it is in the country as a whole. It may be helpful in further establishing the urgency of the situation in a given location. The review of work in the area conducted by others in the field has some similarities with the review of literature section of a thesis or dissertation. A link between these conditions and the results of previous work and the proposed project can be established. Commonalities between the funding agency's interests and the proposed program can be identified. Results of a pilot project by the principal investigator (P.I.) or project director (P.D.) can be included in this section as well. This is an excellent place to include the needs identified by the County Extension Council, Sub-Committees, and/or Focus Groups. This helps establish the credibility of the need and that it is broadly recognized. The importance of stakeholder input has grown significantly in recent years and close attention is paid to this aspect by reviewers. The information given the reviewer in this section is building the case as to why the proposed program is needed.

Goals and Objectives

Measurable goals and objectives should be included in the project proposal. The method for accomplishing these goals and objectives will be explained in the work plan and the evaluation plan will show how you will know when you have accomplished what you set out to do in the program.

Description of the Work, Program Narrative, Work Plan, Plan of Work

This section includes information on the details of the proposed program or research. Enough detail should be provided that someone unfamiliar with the proposed work has a clear idea of what will be done as part of the plan. Most funders like seeing a proposed timeline as an aspect of the proposal. If there is not a specific section for a time frame, it should be included as part of this section. Since the exact start date for the project may not be known when a proposal is being submitted, the timeline frequently will be set up by *Month 1- Month whatever* rather than by specific dates. Tables, Pert or Gantt charts can be used for this purpose and to help break up the amount of text in the document. A clear connection should be shown between the need stated in the previous section and the work plan. A connection also will need to be found between what is included in this section and what is included in the budget section. For example, an LCD projector should not appear suddenly in the

project budget, when there has not been a mention of numerous public meetings or some other need for having such a projector clearly included in the plan of work. The two pieces should flow seamlessly with the program narrative/work plan directing what will be included in the budget.

Evaluation and Sustainability

The evaluation measures how successful you were in accomplishing the goals of the program through the work that was described during the work plan or program narrative. Funders are interested in how the grant recipient will be able to determine if their project has been successful or not. There may be multiple types of evaluation that will be used in the program. This section provides the opportunity to give the reviewer details of these plans, as well as plans for data analysis. The evaluation should be closely linked to the objectives identified earlier.

More and more funders are also wanting to know how the program will continue beyond the period in which they are investing resources (sustainability). Many Extension programs purchase educational curriculum and materials through grants which the organization receives. These materials will continue to be used and offer an element of program sustainability long after the conclusion of funding received from the outside source. Other programs may become fee based and continue through the program income generated by these fees. Whatever the plan, how and in what form the program will continue past the current funding period should be addressed in the sustainability section of the proposal. Sometimes funders request this information as a separate section, while others want it included in the program or work plan.

Dissemination

This section indicates plans for sharing the results of the project with others. Dissemination can be as varied as publishing in journals to presenting a seminar or poster session on the program results at a professional meeting or conference. A program specific web site may be developed and information shared through it. Some program deliverables may be tangible products, such as a computer program or audio visual. Whether addressed as a separate section or as part of the work plan, this section allows reviewers to see how results will be shared with others.

Collaborators and/or Partners

Many Extension programs are conducted with the collaboration of outside groups. In these cases, letters of commitment on the other organizations' letterhead indicating their roles and commitment to fulfilling these roles should the project receive funding are important. Such letters allow reviewers a clear understanding of the breadth of commitment already received for the project and the ability to determine if additional players must be agreeable before the project

can be successful. When the commitment of others is essential to the successful completion of certain aspects of the program design, such letters also allow reviewers to be assured that all parties are in agreement prior to awarding a grant.

Time Line

This section provides the sequential order in which things will take place as parts of the project. The steps should have a logical flow in the process and have realistic time expectations. Timely report submission to the funder on program progress is also an aspect of the timeline. The actual timeline may be in terms of a narrative, table or chart as mention earlier and can appear as a separate section or as part of the plan of work, depending upon the funder.

Budget Form

Most funders provide a form to indicate the amount of money requested by common categories. Ones normally included are salaries and wages, fringe benefits, non-expendable equipment (purchase price of $5,000 or more and a useful life of a year or more by state of Arkansas guidelines), travel, participant costs, material and supplies, printing and publications, all other direct costs, indirect or F&A costs, and grand total. On some forms, material and supplies and printing are separate categories while on others, they are sub-categories under all other direct costs. Other items that might be included as other direct costs include subcontracts, postage, sample analysis, etc. The budget also is divided into columns showing the amount of grant dollars and matching dollars, if matching is required. These numbers should be closely checked. Mathematical errors in this section can indicated sloppy work habits to a potential funder.

Budget Narrative

The written explanation of what is included in each of the budget category totals provided on the budget form is called the budget narrative. It will contain additional detail about the number of FTEs (full-time equivalents) that are included, the fringe benefit rate, what items comprise each of the categories of equipment, material and supplies and other direct costs. While these costs are not broken down to the level shown on the spreadsheet used to develop the total, the narrative does allow the reviewer to know what items were planned into the category as it was developed. It is an opportunity to establish that charges, such as travel were based on the state allowable rates for mileage and meals and lodging or based on past experience with similar types of projects and are not exorbitant. It also provides an opportunity to show any costs which qualify as "unlike circumstances" expenses (example: postage, secretaries, long distance phone charges, field demonstration materials) and must be shown in the proposal budget. Another area which needs to be addressed in this section, if it applies, is program income. Program income is any registration fees, money from publications sold, etc. in connection with the program. If these costs are not

included in the proposal and indicated as being over and above the costs included in the proposal and proposal budget, the revenue may be subtracted from the grant funds awarded. Once again, care should be used so any dollar amounts referenced exactly match what is included on the budget form. Budget narratives that do not match budget forms also indicate sloppy work habits and lack of attention to detail to a potential funder, just as math errors do. Either can commonly result in rejection of the proposal.

Current and Pending Support

This form contains a listing of projects that support is currently being received for work of the P.I. or other key individuals listed on the project, the percentage of time being devoted to that project, the funder, the dollar amount of the project and the award period for such support. The pending section is similar information for projects for which support has been requested, but a funding decision has not been made. The project currently being proposed in this proposal should be shown in the pending section of this form. Care should be given to insure that the percentages shown accurately reflect current commitments, just as the same current commitments must be reflected in Banner.

Certifications

Some funders require certain certifications be included with the project application, such as lobbying, drug-free workplace, environmental impact and debarment. If such certifications are required, they will be indicated in the grant application guidelines.