

# Top Ten Tips for Writing Funding Proposals

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In order to provide critically needed services to older adults, aging services and legal assistance programs must secure funding to do their important work. Writing funding proposals is a core activity for most non-profit organizations, but many of us have little formal training in this key activity. These ten tips are designed to help you apply for both outside funding and requests for internal budget allocations.

## 1. Fully Respond to the Call for Proposals or Solicitation.

- » Be sure that you are actually answering the questions in the solicitation and responding to specific requests for information. It can be helpful to create an initial checklist with the information and answers that are required. Carefully review the request for proposals or funding opportunity, read background information on the funding provider, and look at the project through the eyes and ears of the funder.

## 2. Define Your Goals, Activities, and Outcomes.

- » Early on, concisely describe what you are going to do, how you are going to do it, and what the outcome will be. Condense the initial description into three sentences, stating what you will do, why it is needed, and the expected outcome or result.

## 3. Allocate Space and Resources Based on Scoring.

- » If the request for proposals includes scoring or evaluation criteria, let the criteria be a guide for how much elaboration, space, and focus should be placed on each element. Don't overlook any element, but distribute your efforts and time in proportion to the review criteria.

## 4. Cite to Pages in the Call for Proposals.

- » Citing to page numbers in the request for proposals makes it easier for the reviewer and shows that you are being responsive to what was asked for.

## 5. Include Letters of Commitment when Collaborating.

- » Letters of commitment are critically important if the collaboration of another person, organization, or entity is required to carry out any element of the proposal. Letters of commitment are stronger than letters of support because they convey specific actions that will be taken to commit to the success of the project. However, if the solicitation does not specifically request letters of commitment or support, check the instructions to be sure that you are permitted to include letters or extra supporting documents in your proposal.

## 6. Minimize the Use of Acronyms.

- » Start by defining all acronyms or abbreviations. Beyond that, use a shortened name, if practical, instead of an acronym. For example, if you are working with "Last Chance Legal Aid of Mid-America" you could refer to it as LCLAMA, but you could also refer to them as "Legal Aid" or "Mid-America."

## 7. Define Roles and Activities.

- » Make it clear in the narrative and project work plan, who will do what, and how they plan to do it.

## 8. The Budget Counts.

- » Read and follow the directions on budget planning. The budget needs to fund the work you are proposing, not just fill budget gaps in your office. Reviewers look to see that the time and funds allocated to key people is sufficient to cover the work they are committing to and is not excessive. If you commit to travel or material costs in the narrative, describe how it will be paid for in the budget.

## 9. Submit Early!

- » The rule of thumb is to plan to submit at least two working days before the deadline. Things can go wrong, and if you are submitting your proposal a few days early, you should have time to fix any problems that may arise. Submitting late or encountering a technical issue might result in a rejection.

## 10. Don't Shortchange Evaluation.

- » Describe how you will report the work you have done and the impact of that work. Plan to report both quantitative and qualitative data showing the impact of the work in terms of experiences or changes. Build in surveys or interviews to gather information about how the work has impacted the lives of people. Consider including an independent outside evaluator (if there is a cost, cover it in your budget). It is important for evaluation to go beyond the numbers to describe how the work changed something.

## Additional Resources

- NCLER Chapter Summary: [Creating Effective Legal Outreach Programs](#)
- NCLER Issue Brief: [The Older Americans Act in Action: Building & Cultivating Your Elder Law Program](#)
- NCLER Issue Brief: [The Essential Role of the State Legal Assistance Developer](#)
- Many more trainings on program development and legal services capacity building on the [NCLER website](#)

Please contact [ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov) for free case consultation assistance. Sign up for our email list and access more resources at [NCLER.acl.gov](http://NCLER.acl.gov).