Introduction to Proposal Writing for Projects

WIEGO

Women in Informal Employment
Globalizing and Organizing

Booklet 4

Sustainability for MBOs:
Resource Books for Organizations

This series of resource books on sustainability was written in response to the expressed needs of Membership Based Organizations (MBOs) of informal workers looking for a basic guide on operational practices and achieving sustainability. The project was initiated by WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing), as part of the Inclusive Cities project, a collaboration of local/national MBOs of informal workers, international alliances of MBOs, and support organizations working together as partners to improve the situation of the working poor.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the many workers, organizers and their organizations that contributed, directly or indirectly, to the production of this series of Booklets. Special thanks are due to Davine Thaw who contributed many hours imparting her deep knowledge of the Logical Framework Approach to WIEGO and its partner organizations around the world; and to WIEGO's partner organizations Asiye eTafuleni (AeT) and the Self Employed Women's Association, Delhi (SEWA Bharat) for allowing us to share their planning processes in order to illustrate the instructions written herein. Last but not least, sincere thanks to The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their generous support.

Overview

Sustainability for MBOs: Resource Books for Organizations

The Booklets

There are currently five Booklets in the series:

1. Writing a Project Plan Part ONE:
   Developing Outcomes and Objectives

2. Writing a Project Plan Part TWO:
   Measuring and Sharing the Impact of Your Project Results

3. Writing a Project Plan Part THREE:
   Operational Planning and Activity-Based Budgets

4. **Introduction to Proposal Writing**

5. Transparent Financial Management for MBOs

Further books will be added to the series as funding allows. Check with www.wiego.org for updates.

The Aim

This series aims to assist leaders and managers of MBOs to build more sustainable organizations through strengthening administrative and financial management, as well as establishing more effective planning, monitoring and evaluation systems. The series will also look at issues related to fundraising.

Using the Booklets

These resource Booklets provide ideas, guidelines and examples that will help decision-makers in your organization address project planning and some administrative systems in your MBO. You will find the following symbols throughout:

☞ **Tips:** Quick tips to apply to day-to-day operations.

✍ **Checklists:** Quick evaluation tools to make sure you're ready to move to the next step.

💬 **Examples:** Case studies and examples showcasing practical applications.

📖 **Definitions:** Clear descriptions of key words and terms.

🖹 **Learning Activities:** Exercises to help you make the methods and strategies your own, or to help you teach them to others.

Introduction

In this Booklet

The world of development funding has become increasingly competitive over the last decade. In many cases, less than 5 per cent of Proposals submitted to a Call will be selected for further consideration, let alone funding. This means your Funding Proposals cannot just be good; they have to be excellent. Your attention to detail in meeting funder requirements is crucial, as is the impact of the story you tell about the work you do. You must also be able to reliably establish your MBO's credentials and capacities.

This resource book will provide an introduction to basic Funding Proposal writing for projects. Many of the instructions and examples will draw on materials presented in Booklets One through Three of this series (on writing Project Plans using the Logical Framework Approach). This is because every strong Funding Proposal for a project has a good Project Plan as its foundation.

☞ **Tips**

**Some Review from Booklet One
(Why the Project Plan has to Come First)**

A good Project Plan will convince anyone that your solution will work effectively and that your assessment of the situation is thorough. It's going to test your ideas about what needs to be done. A Project Plan is going to contain information regarding exactly how your members will benefit, how many people you'll be able to reach, and how much it's going to cost.

A Project Plan is also going to be a powerful tool to communicate with partners and stakeholders who may not share your knowledge and experience. If you need help from partners to accomplish the change that your project seeks to make —financial or otherwise—you'll need to be able to tell your story clearly, to prove that the need you have identified is significant, and that your project is likely to succeed in meeting that need.

Getting the Message Straight:
What a Potential Funder Should Know About You and Your Project

Every time your MBO responds to a Call for Proposals, you'll be asked to describe your project in a slightly different way. Every funder has particular requirements, application formats and language. In addition, every funder has its own particular mandate and areas of interest. Despite these differences, there are some basic things that you will always want to convey about your project:

1) What is the problem your project aims to solve?

This problem should be stated from the perspective of your Target Group (the MBO members). When you talk to them, what do they describe as significant problems in their lives? The answer to this question should also demonstrate your knowledge of the local situation, including any external forces at play.

2) How do you know this is a significant problem?

This is the evidence to support the answer to the previous question. This information will include details of how you conducted your needs assessment and/or consultation with your members or Target Group (including dates, locations, and the number of people you talked to). If you have any formal research on the proposal topic, this is where you would summarize the relevant points.

3) How do you propose to solve this problem?

This is a description of your project design. Though there are many variations in format and word counts, the majority of funders will be asking for Objectives, Outcomes, Outputs, Activities, etc.—all components of the Logical Framework or Log Frame.[1] The description of your solution will also need to include cost estimates in a Budget.

4) How do you know your solution will work?

The answer to this question will include either experience (what has been proven to work for your MBO in the past) and/or research (what has worked well in similar situations and contexts). This answer will also establish the authority of your MBO to do the work, including your major achievements.

5) How will you know that the problem has been solved?

This is your Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.[2]

6) Why should we care?

How does this problem fit in to the mission and mandate not only of your MBO, but also that of the funder? To be successful in fundraising, you need to be able to connect the needs of your MBO members with the mandate of the donor.

This Booklet will walk through some different ways to answer these questions, how to match your project description with the funder's interests and guidelines, and details to consider while doing so.

---

[1] Using the Logical Framework Approach to write a Project Plan is covered in detail in Booklets One through Three of this series.

[2] Writing a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan is covered in more detail in Booklet Two of this series.

Proposal Elements

What needs to be in place before you start to write a proposal?

In addition to a description of your Project Plan, funders often require descriptions and documents that demonstrate that your MBO is a good risk – i.e. that it has the strength and resources necessary to successfully carry out the project. To follow is a list of things that should be prepared prior to proposal writing:

❏ **Organization's History**

What is your organization's founding story? When did its work begin, who were the players, and how did the original need for the organization arise? When was your organization incorporated?

What has happened since then? Mention any major changes to or expansions of service, increases in membership, etc. Make it short and compelling.

❏ **Track Record/List of Achievements (highlights from past 3 – 5 years, rolling)**

Unlike the history of the organization, this paragraph and/or list should describe activities. These activities could include programming, awards, major accomplishments, or changes to the organization. It should be brief and include highlights of accomplishments and the dates when they took place. Point form is fine. This information will also help to paint a portrait of your organization for funders that may not be familiar with the work you do.

❏ **A Contextual Analysis**

This statement shows that you know who else is working in your field and in your location (the 'competition'), as well as what they're doing. It should also describe how your work is unique (not duplicating the work of other organizations), and how your work complements or creates synergies with existing services. This statement should also demonstrate your knowledge of the project's context by describing any countervailing or external forces: Things that affect your work, but over which you have no control.

❏ **Target Group**

This should be a short description (e.g. 200 words) of your primary Target Group (i.e. your membership), with some demographic information such as age ranges, gender breakdown, income, education level, languages spoken, quality of life, key issues faced, etc. Try to estimate the total number of people you reach with your programmes—both members, non-members (if applicable) and their families.

❏ **Vision and Mission**

You should have a brief vision statement, which explains the ideal world your organization seeks to create, as well as a brief mission statement, which explains how your organization intends to contribute towards creating that ideal world. These statements should be brief; ideally not more than one or two sentences each.

❏ **Theory of Change Schematic**

A theory of change schematic can be a powerful tool for visually describing your project action and the countervailing or external forces that affect it. Instruction on the use of Theory of Change is beyond the scope of this booklet; but there are many easily-searchable resources available on the Internet to guide you through the process.

❑ **Governance**

Explain how your Board and its related bodies (Executive, Council, Committees, etc.) function. As an MBO, mention your Constitution and how it enables the participation of your membership in the strategic decisions of your organization. Outline when elections are held and some brief notes on process. Explain what processes are in place to demonstrate how the elected body is able to provide responsible oversight of your organization.

❑ **Finance and Administration**

Provide a detailed explanation of your finance systems and procedures with an emphasis on demonstrating that your accounts are both accurate and—importantly—that the systems are in place to prevent fraud and corruption (please refer to Booklet Five in this series for detailed information regarding transparent financial management for MBOs).

❑ **Policies and Procedures**

If you have policies and procedures other than those related to finance, you could note those as well. For example, some funders will want to see Conflict of Interest policies, (which prevent those on the elected body from seeking personal gain), while others may want you to have a formal policy for procurement or how you handle purchasing equipment and resources for your organization.

❑ **Monitoring and Evaluation**

This statement will describe your method for monitoring the progress of projects and programmes, and for evaluating results (please refer to Booklet Two in this series for detailed information regarding Monitoring and Evaluation Plans).

❑ **Promotional Materials**

These materials demonstrate not only a public record of your activity, but also your organization's ability to communicate effectively with members and stakeholders. This folder contains anything that was created recently (in the last year or two) to promote your MBO's programmes or products to your members or the general public, including:

- Newsletters, brochures and posters

- Media releases, including a copy of the article as it appeared when published (with the date and publication), or—if information was disseminated digitally—a digital file with publication dates or a screen capture should suffice

If your organization has a regular publication or newsletter, include a publication schedule with a listing of featured highlights if applicable.

❑ **Staff and Board List, Governance Structure, and Organizational Chart**

The Staff and Board List should include the name and title of each individual with a brief biography (one or two sentences). This list indicates not only who is on your team, but also how competent they are to guide your organization and its projects. Occasionally, a funder may require the CVs of your project leaders. An *Organigram* or *Organizational Chart* tells the reader how the hierarchy of the organization works and demonstrates the efficiency of your team.

❑ **Risk Management Statement**

This Statement should demonstrate that your organization has reviewed potential risks and is prepared for them (please see Booklet Two in this series for more detailed information on Risk Management Plans).

These items are commonly required as attachments to Grant Applications and Funding Proposals. To ease the application process it will be helpful to assemble these in one place—both in hard copy (unbound photocopies allow for easy duplication and leave your originals in official files) and in digital form (PDFs or scanned images). This grant support document folder should include the following:

- Articles of Incorporation/Letters Patent (including Constitution and Bylaws)/registration documents

- Partnership Agreements, Memorandums of Understanding, or Letters of Support, where required (if you will take on partners to complete your project, where support of an external stakeholder is crucial, or to meet funder requirements)

- Strategic Plan (if you have one that's current)

- Audited Financial Statements from the previous two years, and year-to-date financial reports (including Income statement and Balance Sheet at the very least)

- Final Reports for any projects completed in the last two fiscal years and a schedule of any Final Reports pending

- Organizational Budget, including any Forecast Budgets[3]

- Proof of permission to accept foreign funds (such as the FCRA in India), whenever applicable

---

[3] For more information on some organizational finance systems, including creating forecast budgets, please see Booklet Five in this series.

Proposal Writing Step-by-Step

The instructions to follow are based on the assumption that donor research has already been done, and some potential donors have been identified. It also assumes that proposals have been invited—either through an open or restricted call for proposals, an ongoing invitation to submit, or by invitation from the funding agency. Step 1 begins with a detailed consideration of one of those calls or invitations.

Step 1: Check for a Good Match

Writing Funding Proposals is a lot of work. Even a Concept Note or a Letter of Interest requires a huge amount of background work and planning, including consultation with many members of your team. Before committing to this work it's important to make absolutely sure that it will be worthwhile.

Start by doing a close reading of the Call for Proposals and Programme Guidelines from start to finish, and then answer the following questions:

1. Do the goals or areas of interest of this Call match the project Objectives, and the expressed needs of your members?

2. Is the award amount (often expressed as a minimum and maximum) appropriate for your project and your MBO? For example, if the minimum grant awarded will be 500,000 Euros, and your Project Budget is 20,000 Euros, this is not a good fit. Further, if this amount exceeds your MBO's entire Operating Budget for the year, it is also not a good fit. On the other hand, a maximum award of 5,000 Euros may be too small to meet your project needs. Considering that you will have to seek other funders, do the application and potential reporting requirements outweigh the benefits of applying for a smaller amount?

3. Is your project going to take place in the geographical area that the funder is interested in?

4. Does your MBO meet all the statutory and legal requirements listed in the Call?

5. Is the deadline manageable?

If the answer is yes to all of the above, it's time to move on to Step 2.

Step 2: Know Your Audience

In order to have the biggest impact possible, your Funding Proposal is going to need to make sense to your most important audience: the evaluators that either recommend or deny funding. Your Proposal needs to capture their interest and be easy to read, while appearing to fit with their programme goals and legal requirements. Using the funder's language to explain your project will increase the chances of your words being understood. Demonstrating links between the funder's goals and the goals of your project will increase the likelihood of an evaluator taking interest.

Most Calls for Proposals include guidelines and an application form. Less formal Calls will include instructions (usually found on the funder's web site) on how to apply for grants. In either case, it's crucial that all relevant information is reviewed with the utmost care before you start writing. As you go, make notes on language hooks (or key words and phrases) used by the funder (so you can 'speak their language' when writing your Proposal), the funder's focus areas (or priorities, thematic interests and objectives), and all application requirements (submission instructions, deadlines, required documentation, etc.).

For example, what your MBO calls an 'informal worker' might be called a 'micro entrepreneur' by the funder. What you call a 'recycler' may be called a 'waste picker' elsewhere. In cases like these (and the examples are endless), substituting the funder language for your own can help ensure your success. By the same token, if a funder programme uses the words 'Women's Empowerment' to describe a thematic focus, while your Project Plan dwells on 'Livelihood Enhancement', the language used in the Proposal should make the link between the two. For example: 'Livelihood Enhancement' could become 'Women's Economic Empowerment'.

Last but not least, your notes should include the Objectives (or Aims), and Outcomes (or Expected Results) of the funder programme. In many cases, it may be helpful to create a separate table or set of notes or diagrams that directly link the funder Objectives and Outcomes with those of your project, echoing the language of the funder throughout. Once you have completed a careful scan of the funder information, it's time to match your project Objectives and Outcomes with those of the funder.

☞ Tip

Using the Correct Terms for Proposal Elements

The majority of international development funders will require your project description in a Log Frame format. While this is a very standardized and commonly understood matrix, there are some variations in the terms used:

The Overall Objective is also sometimes called…	…the Development Goal or the Project Aim
The Immediate Objective is also sometimes called…	…the Project Purpose
Outcomes are also known as	…Results or Expected Results
The Target Group is also known as…	…the Direct Beneficiaries
Beneficiaries are also sometimes called…	…Indirect Beneficiaries

When and if the funder's term differs from your own, use the funder's term instead.

An Illustration of Thematic Trends

This example illustrates the kind of information that can be found in a careful review of Funder Guidelines and Calls for Proposals. The table below is a summary of five common areas of funder interest based on an informal scan of current programmes and Calls for Proposals. The table information includes:

a) Language Hooks: Words commonly used by funders to describe work in the thematic area

b) Focus Areas for Projects: The kinds of work funders are interested in

Thematic Area	Language Hooks	Focus Area for Projects	Notes
Climate Change/ Environment	• Conservation • Sustainable • Economy • Green enterprises • Biodiversity	• Green jobs (environmental protection, social development, economic development) • Conservation • Addressing deforestation • Land rights (ownership, management) • Protecting biodiversity • Climate change adaption strategies (e.g. farming during droughts) • Sustainable resource management • Sustainable development • Clean energy (protecting health) • Drinking water • Disaster risk reduction • Policy	Foundations note connection between conserving the environment and protecting the livelihoods/survival of the poor. Several foundations also connect the creation of quality jobs to protecting the environment.

Thematic Area	Language Hooks	Focus Area for Projects	Notes
Human Rights	• Women's rights • Democracy • Accountable/ transparent and inclusive government • Corruption • Inclusive development	• Freedom of speech • Right to organize • Labour laws (rights at work) • Equality (gender, ethnicity, immigrant status) • Voice with governing authorities • Corruption (transparency, fair elections) • Democracy • Independent civil society groups • Inclusion of minorities (women, ethnic, etc.) • Increase political participation • Promoting justice and legal actions • Anti-slavery (workers' rights, fair trade) • Freedom from torture • Planning and design (policy, developing democracy) • Basic rights for women (sexual and reproductive rights, LGBTQI, property ownership, political voice, ending violence)	In most projects/ funding areas, human rights (and women's rights in particular) are integrated into the framework. Addressing human rights is named as the root problem for many foundations.

Thematic Area	Language Hooks	Focus Area for Projects	Notes
Livelihoods	• Social protection • Sustainable development/growth • Long-term • Resources • Trade	• Decent work (security—employment and personal—fair pay, dignity, addressing human trafficking and slavery) • Fair trade • Green jobs (climate change, sustainable development) • Education • Women's rights/empowerment in the workplace • Renewable energy • Bolster economic growth (sustainable, long-term development, pro-poor not pro-rich) • Fighting corruption • Self-sufficiency for impoverished workers • Empowering entrepreneurs (and small enterprises) • Access (to markets, resources) • Improving infrastructure (roads, water, electricity) • Government and policy • Informal economy (ILO) • Financial instruments (e.g. micro-finance) • Youth (education, job preparation, addressing child-labour) • Research (social impact analysis)	Many foundations have a multi-faceted approach that takes into account women's rights, environment, education, governance and policy, and so on. No projects address only one side of this issue. Foundation approaches to this vary greatly. Some focus on working from the bottom-up by strengthening the capacities of the impoverished workers themselves, while others work with the governments in establishing frameworks to create growth and development in a sustainable way. Several foundations emphasize job quality over quantity through the creation of social protection systems.

Thematic Area	Language Hooks	Focus Area for Projects	Notes
Voice and Democracy	• Human rights • Accountable/transparent government • Inclusive development • Corruption	• Gender equality (women's voice, representation, right to vote, political participation) • Civil society and non-state actors • Public administration reform • Social dialogue • Fair, free elections • Education (how to organize, how to approach government, etc.) • Freedom of speech (media, etc.) • Inclusion of minorities (women, ethnic minorities, etc.)	"Voice" is not mentioned as such in the language of most foundations, but can be found under civil society groups and the creation of organizations so that women/others can be heard by their governments.
Women's Security	• Gender equality • Equal opportunities • Social protection (maternity) • Women's rights • Empowerment • Health and reproductive rights	• Freedom (fair trade, slavery) • Rights (sexual/reproductive, property, labour, political voice) • Organizing (political voice) • Access to technology • Access to resources (basic services—medical, etc.) • Education (capacity building) • Decreasing the gender gap • Leadership • Ending violence against women • Economic empowerment	Most foundations emphasize the need to have women be heard by their governing authorities and by society as a whole. Most of the project focuses have this aim in mind.

Step 3: Making a Work Plan

A strong Proposal is going to require input from many members of your team as well as input from external reviewers. Given that many Calls for Proposals have a short turnaround time (usually six weeks or less) giving advance notice to everyone as soon as possible will increase your likelihood of completing an excellent Proposal in advance of the deadline.

Part of creating a work plan is building your team. The ideal scenario is that one staff member oversees the completion of the Proposal, including gathering all necessary inputs, information and documents. The ideal candidate will have an aptitude for writing clearly in the language of the funder and knowledge of the project for which funds are sought. However, this person may need help and input from other team members either due to their expertise in a certain area of operations, or to get assistance in meeting a tight deadline. An important part of oversight, then, is keeping the team members up-to-date on what is needed, and when.

In addition to staff members, your team will need to include individuals who will review the first draft of your Proposal. This is a crucial step to success, and *must not be overlooked under any circumstances*. The ideal review panel includes two or three individuals who have the time and resources necessary to read your Proposal and give feedback and comments. Contact these reviewers early on, and let them know when you will be sending them the draft, how much time you anticipate they will need to read it, and when you need it back from them. The review process will be covered in more detail in Step 6.

☞ Tip

Recruiting a Review Team for Your Proposal

Ideally, you will need to find two or three people to review your Proposal; at least one of whom is an 'outsider': someone who is not familiar with the work of your MBO. 'Insiders' are sometimes so familiar with your jargon and practices that they don't even know they're making assumptions while reading through your work. However, if an outsider understands your project after reading the Proposal, then you know it's described well.

Further, make sure that at least one of the reviewers is a native speaker of the language used to write the Funding Proposal—particularly in cases where the proposal writer is not working in their first language.

Another thing to be aware of when creating your work plan is who will eventually be signing off on your final draft. Make sure that those people will be available (and not out of town!) to sign when you need them to; and that you build in some time for them to read the Proposal before signing it. If the funder requires a board or Executive Council motion to submit the Proposal, this has to be factored into the process as well.

A Funding Proposal Writing Timeline

This is a sample timeline for an MBO that learned of a Call for Proposals on September 15th, and started working toward an October 31st submission deadline. As you can see, team members are given plenty of notice so that they can clear time for contributing and for review. In this case, the team leader Sanvi is also allowing for a few extra days for the delivery of hard copies. Delivery time is not as much of an issue with online application submissions, but sometimes registration is, so make sure that these requirements are met as soon as possible. Also read all guidelines carefully as sometimes online applications require you to receive an acknowledgement by e-mail, and will not be registered as received—and will not be reviewed!—if this doesn't happen.

Do You Need to Register with a Funder?

Some large government funding agencies require registration within their online systems before you can submit an application (for example, the European Commission requires a PADOR registration number). These application processes can be complicated and time-consuming, so it's recommended that they be dealt with as soon as possible. If this kind of registration is necessary, it should be one of the first items on your work plan. Getting caught with a time crunch and unforeseen registration delays at the last minute could kill your Proposal and render weeks of work worthless.

Task	Person Responsible	Deadline
Get agreement from 3 person review team and send time line info (send 1st draft by Oct. 13, need back by Oct. 17, will take a half day to read)	Sanvi	Agreement by Sept 19th
Send request to Pari for completion of budget sheets and financial review; to Myra to write sections on organizational history and mandate sections; to Anika to complete Monitoring and Evaluation section	Sanvi	September 15th
Adapt project plan (Log Frame) to match funder language	Sanvi	September 19th
Write first draft of proposal (excluding sections being written by team members as per above)	Sanvi	October 8th
Completed budget sections (first draft) delivered to checker	Pari	October 7th
Double check addition of all figures in budget and deliver to Sanvi	Checker (coordinate with Pari)	October 8th
Completed history and mandate sections (first draft) delivered to Sanvi	Myra	October 8th
Completed monitoring and evaluation sections (first draft) delivered to Sanvi	Anika	October 8th
Compile first draft, proof read, and send to reviewers	Sanvi	October 13th
First draft of proposal returned to Sanvi with comments	3 reviewers	October 17th
Compile required attachments as per checklist	Sanvi with admin.	Complete by October 24th

Task	Person Responsible	Deadline
Create 2nd draft, incorporating reviewers' comments and submit to board president and secretary general	Sanvi	October 20th
2nd draft returned to Sanvi with comments	Board Chair + Secretary General	October 23rd
Incorporate comments from Board President and Secretary General to produce final draft	Sanvi	October 24th
Signatures on final draft	Sanvi oversees	October 25th
Compiled final draft with all attachments as per checklist	Sanvi with admin.	October 26th
Final is submitted via courier, with copy of complete application (as submitted) filed for future reference.	Sanvi	October 27th

💬 **Example**

Giving a Heads Up

Consider who will be involved in creating and reviewing your Proposal. To avoid bottlenecks, give them ample notice. The example given here is the text of the e-mail that Sanvi (as per the timeline shown previously) sent to the proposal reviewers, but Sanvi would send similar e-mails to signatories (Board Chair or Secretary General) as well as any other contributors. If these individuals have a clear idea of your expectations with plenty of lead-time, the chances of getting a good response are much higher.

Dear reviewers:

Thank you for agreeing to help us out with our Funding Proposal. Your comments and feedback are crucial to our success. The funder's Programme Guidelines are attached for your reference.

As discussed, I will have the first draft to you no later than October 10th, and will need to have your comments back to me by October 13th. I anticipate it will take about 2 hours of your time to review the proposal.

Talk to you soon,

-Sanvi

Step 4: Writing the Proposal

A Funding Proposal can take many forms. If you're responding to a Call for Proposals, chances are the funder will provide an application form. On other occasions, however, you may be asked to submit a Letter of Interest or a Concept Note before being invited to make a full proposal. Your first reader could be someone who makes decisions about funding, or a third party assessor that makes recommendations to decision-makers regarding which Proposals to consider for funding. Either way, the document you produce must persuade them to keep reading.

The best way to persuade is with clear prose based on facts. Remember that you'll be describing things for someone who may be completely unfamiliar with your organization, with the work that you do, and even with the country and context in which the work takes place. Your prose must tell a compelling story while supplying enough fact to convince a skeptic.

The reader likely has to evaluate many other Proposals in addition to yours. Keep this person in mind when you're writing. If you make their job too difficult or unpleasant, your Proposal might get filed in the recycling bin.
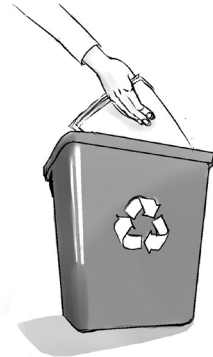
Making Contact with the Programme Officer

After reading the Guidelines and information, you may still have questions regarding the funding programme. For example, you may need help interpreting one of the application questions, clarification on the eligibility of an expense, or about some other requirement. When in doubt, contact the donor to ask for more information. Look for relevant contact information, or for your local (country) Programme Officer. Make sure you include the name of the programme that you're applying for in the subject line for easy reference.

Making a professionally natured contact with a real person before submitting your application is always advisable. Sometimes a question or request for clarification is an excellent way to initiate this contact.

Writing a Proposal from Your Own Format

As already mentioned, many funding organizations have their own formats or application forms. Occasionally, however, you will be called upon to write a Full Proposal, a Letter of Interest (sometimes called a Letter of Inquiry or an Expression of Interest), or a Concept Note from scratch using your own format.

☞ **Tip**

Just a little desk-top research will lead you to hundreds of examples of successfully written Funding Proposals, Letters of Interest and Concept Notes—a great way to warm up and get some great ideas for writing your own.

Format for a Full Proposal

The following is a possible outline for your Funding Proposal. Whether you're creating the proposal from scratch, or fitting the content into a funder's format, all of these components should be included to create a compelling case for funding your project:

a. Cover Page or Introduction

- The title of the project

- The funding agency you are submitting the Proposal to including the name of your contact

- The date sent

- The contact person in your organization and all contact info

b. Executive Summary

- Write this section last—after the rest of the Proposal is complete.

- Begin with a short statement describing the purpose of Proposal. For example:

"XYZ organization is pleased to present this Proposal for your consideration. Our efforts to support women working in the informal economy in country A are an excellent fit for your funding programme X [Name of Programme]. We seek $xxx to support new efforts to create skills training and market linkages to our members in order to increase livelihoods and quality of life for ## women informal workers."

- Write the remainder of this section as a quick summary of the Proposal at a glance, including all essential information (the problem, your project or solution, your Objective, and the credibility of your MBO).

Ideally, the Executive Summary is one paragraph, but no more than one page *maximum*.

☞ Tip

Writing an Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is crucial to catching your reader's attention, and persuading them to read the rest of your Proposal. When writing the Executive Summary, imagine that this is the only part of the Proposal your reader will look at, and make decisions about what needs to be included based on that assumption. Make your points with as few words as possible, use clear language, and avoid jargon. The Executive Summary does not need to include any of your data or evidence—but the reader will look for those in the body of the Proposal if the claims in the Summary catch their attention.

One way to write an Executive Summary that ensures you've covered all of the important points is to copy and paste your *entire Proposal* into another document, and delete all but the most essential points from each section. This editing process should reduce your proposal to one or two sentences per section.

c. The Problem and the Context

- Start with a narrative description of the Focal Problem based on your Problem Analysis (see Booklet One in this series). This should describe a significant problem faced in the lives of your members, from their point of view.

- Include information regarding how and when you conducted your needs assessment and what your findings were.

- Include detailed information on how you consulted with your Target Group when designing the project (what methods were used, when and where, and how many people).

- Include the Contextual Analysis for the project (as per the Proposal Elements Checklist in this Booklet).

- If this is a continuation of an existing project, explain what is changing. For example, is it expanding to reach more members? Expanding to reach a larger or different geographical location? Is a new service or method being added to improve the project?

d. Describe the Project

- Provide a description of the project based on your Log Frame (developed in Booklets One through Three of this series) including Objectives, Outcomes, and a summary of your Activities.

- Exclude the Indicators, Means of Verification, or details regarding Activities (such as Timelines and Inputs), as these items will be covered in summary under Parts 'f.' and 'h.' below.

- Indicate that the full Log Frame is attached as an Appendix to the Proposal.

e. Justify Your Strategy

- Convince the reader that this project's design is going to work, and that your organization can achieve the described Outcomes.

- Describe how you know this solution will work in the first section/ paragraph (this is based on your own experience or by researching what has worked in other situations that are similar to yours).

- Introduce the history of your organization in the second section/ paragraph, including recent achievements and awards. Include details regarding your track record with similar work, with attention to Outcomes successfully achieved in the recent past.

f. Monitoring, Evaluation and Risks

- Summarize your Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (see Booklet Two for details on developing this plan). Monitoring and Evaluation Plans need to tell your reader not only how you will measure results, but how you will use, share and learn from what is measured. Attach a copy of the full plan as an Appendix.

- Include your Risk Management Plan in full, or as a summary with the full document attached as an Appendix. A potential funder will want to know that you've carefully considered all external forces that could affect your project Outcomes and Objectives and that you have made plans to monitor or mitigate them.

g. Innovation, Cost-Effectiveness, and Upscaling

Many funders are interested in non-traditional solutions to development problems, so it's a good idea to include a section that describes these aspects of your project.

- Innovation includes any new method, device or process being used to meet existing needs more efficiently, or to meet new needs. In some cases it's important to explain what the innovation is replacing, and why the old solution was not working.

- Cost-effectiveness is another form of innovation. Here you would explain any situations where you have found a way to reduce costs or increase service delivery for the same cost.

- Upscaling refers to any plans you have to expand the project after the current project period. For example, an MBO might have plans to expand a service into five new states, or to another country, after the initial pilot project is completed.

h. Budget

- Adapting Project Budgets for Funding Proposals will be covered in more detail in Step 5 (a detailed guide to drafting an Activities-based Project Budget appears in Booklet Three of this series).

i. Conclusion

- Summarize what you are asking for, express gratitude for the reader's consideration, and repeat your contact information—in detail.

Format for a Concept Note

Like an Executive Summary, a Concept Note needs to catch the reader's attention. Think of it as the sales pitch for your project. The hope is that you 'sell' the idea of your project to a potential funder so that they will invite you to make a Full Proposal. Many donors have formats for Concept Notes, but occasionally you will need to draft your own. Some general rules are as follows:

- The shorter the better (no more than three or four pages).
- All of the items included in the Format for a Full Proposal (in the previous section of this Booklet) should be included, but be very brief. It's acceptable to give a budget estimate or request amount instead of a full budget (but this number must be based on an actual budget).

Format for a Letter of Interest

A Letter of Interest (LOI) is exactly what the title implies: you're writing a letter to a funding agency in order to express interest in working with them as a potential funding partner. Some funders may supply a Letter of Interest form, but more often than not the format will be up to you. Remember that this is an actual *letter* (specifically, a business letter), and so it should look like one. A Letter of Interest should be shorter than a Concept Note—ideally one to two pages, but no more than three at the absolute most.

💬 **Example**

A Sample Letter of Interest Format

Your name
The name of your organization
Complete organization mailing address
Telephone and e-mail

Date

Name of funding agency
Complete mailing address of funding agency
Telephone number and e-mail of contact agency

Attention: [Contact person at funding agency]

Dear [name of contact person at funding agency]:

Re: Expression of Interest in [name of funding programme, or equivalent]

First paragraph: States the purpose of the letter, which is to express interest in the possibility of working with this funding agency. You could also mention how you heard about this funder and/or this programme, and reference any contact you have had with the reader of the letter (e.g. "Further to our phone conversation of September 10th, 2014…"). Finally, this paragraph should close with one sentence introducing your project, and why it is a good fit with the funder and/or a particular funding programme.

Second paragraph: Describe your members or Target Group, what their needs are, and how your project addresses that need.

Third paragraph: Write a brief introduction to your organization, and establish your authority by listing a few recent successes and achievements. Make sure you include a sentence confirming that you can complete the project successfully, based on your track record.

Fourth paragraph: Mention any attachments or additional information that you're including with the letter.

Fifth paragraph: This is your conclusion. For example:

"Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you require any further information or clarification at this time I would be happy to hear from you. I look forward to your feedback, and to discussing this matter with you in person in the near future, etc.".

Yours truly,
Signature

Your name
Your title,

Your e-mail address if necessary

Enclosures (if there are attachments)

Writing a Proposal from an Application Form:

If you are working from a funder-supplied form, whether it be for a Concept Note, and Letter of Interest, or a full Application, add the following steps to the proposal writing process above:

1) Create a working draft of the Proposal format. Copy and paste or type each of the application questions (including the numbers) into a separate document. This will give you an easy format to work and collaborate in, and will also help you to familiarize yourself with each of the questions in the form.

2) Before you begin to write the answer to any question, retype exactly what is being asked for right in your answer block, and write an outline for your answer based on those key words (see the Tip box to follow: *Dissecting the Application Form Questions*).

3) For questions regarding project description, note the corresponding Project Elements from your Log Frame. You want to make sure that all elements of your Project Plan are represented, so decide where each Project Element fits.

4) Ensure that you've included all the important points from your proposal.

☞ **Tip**

Dissecting the Application Form Questions

To illustrate Point 2 above, we have taken some sample questions from actual application forms. For each, you would copy and paste the actual question into the body of the text and use the key words to outline exactly what the question is asking, and what your answer will tell the reader.

Sample Question 1:

Describe the composition of the project team including key personnel, discussing the skills and experience they contribute to the proposed objectives.[4]

Dissection of Sample Question 1:

Describe *the composition of the* ***project team*** *including* ***key personnel****, discussing the* ***skills and experience they contribute to the proposed objectives***.

Note: This question is asking for a *description*—not a list!

Outline for Answer to Sample Question 1:

For each of the project's key personnel write:

1. Name and project title;
2. A very brief bio of relevant skills and experience; and
3. How that experience will contribute to specific project Objectives.

Sample Question 2:

Tell us how you consulted with your project beneficiaries, including how many beneficiaries were involved and in which locations the consultation took place. We are particularly interested in consultations you have undertaken over the last two years.[5]

Dissection of Sample Question 2:

Tell us ***how you consulted*** *with your project beneficiaries, including* ***how many*** *beneficiaries were involved and* ***in which locations*** *the consultation took place. We are particularly interested in consultations you have undertaken over the* ***last two years.***

---

⁴ From USAID DIV Letter of Interest APS 4.0.
⁵   From the Big Lottery Fund Stage 1 Application form, 2014.

Outline for Answer to Sample Question 2:

For each consultation with beneficiaries over the last two years (or as recent as possible), describe the following:

1. The consultation method (how);
2. The *specific* numbers of beneficiaries consulted with; and
3. The specific locations where the consultations took place.

Sample Question 3:

How will you and your partner(s) gather and use information to monitor, evaluate and learn from this work?[6]

Dissection of Sample Question 3:

How will you and your partner(s) ***gather*** *and* ***use*** *information to* ***monitor****,* ***evaluate*** *and* ***learn*** *from this work?*

Note: This question obviously refers to a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, so the answer should correspond with the Outcome numbers from your Log Frame (for more information on creating a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan please see Booklet Two in this series).

Outline for Answer to Sample Question 3:

For each indicator in your Project Plan, the funder wants to know:

1. How you will gather the information;
2. How you will use the information (in what format, etc.); and
3. Which of these will be used for monitoring the project (that the project is on time and on budget, and maintaining the quality of project delivery), for evaluating the project (creating expected impact for your Target Group), and learning (how the MBO's knowledge and experience is strengthened).

---

⁶ From the Comic Relief International Communities Programme Stage 1 Application from, 2014.

Proposal Writing Dos and Don'ts

Use acronyms carefully. If you must use them, make sure you spell them out the first time with the acronym to follow in brackets. For example, in this booklet the first time the acronym 'MBO' is used, it appears like this: Membership-Based Organization (MBO).

Avoid the use of jargon (words or phrases that are used by a particular profession or group) whenever possible; and—if you must use it—do so with care. For example, if you mention 'capacity-building' you must explain specifically which 'capacity' is being 'built'. If you mention 'dissemination' you must explain what is being 'disseminated' and how. Make sure you use clear language that anyone could understand regardless of whether they are familiar with your MBO's work or not.

Use active voice. Using active instead of passive voice allows for shorter and clearer sentences. Simply put, an active voice sentence is one where the subject performs the action, rather than being acted upon. For example:

✗ PASSIVE	✓ ACTIVE
The training will be led by MBO leaders.	MBO leaders will lead the training.
Advocacy campaigns will be participated in by MBO members.	MBO members will participate in advocacy campaigns.
By 2018, 20 advocacy campaigns will have been conducted by the MBO members.	By 2018, MBO members will conduct 20 advocacy campaigns.

Present observable fact, backed up by evidence, and cite your references. Don't exaggerate or make general references based on feelings or common knowledge.

Don't omit critical details. Make sure that all of the important facts—things you need to say—are included somewhere.

Tricks for Reducing Character Counts

More and more, application forms are written and submitted online, with very strict character count limits (usually including spaces!).[7]

It's very important to *write your text before considering these limits* and worry about reducing the counts later. If you worry about the character counts while you're writing, you might be tempted to leave out important information and details. Better to say what you want to say as clearly as possible, and then bring your character and/or word count down during the editing process using the following tricks:

1. Eliminate unnecessary articles

Example: The poor women will have increased their access to the market linkages. (71 characters with spaces)

Becomes: Poor women will have increased access to market linkages. (57 characters with spaces)

2. Eliminate unnecessary adverbs and adjectives

Example: The extremely poor women will have immensely increased their unfettered access to thriving market linkages. (107 characters with spaces)

Becomes: Poor women will have increased access to market linkages. (57 characters with spaces)

---

[7] If you are using Microsoft Word to write your draft, you can use the Word Count function under the Tools dropdown menu in order to monitor your progress (including your character counts with or without spaces).

3. Eliminate prepositions

Example: Workers in the informal economy (31 characters with spaces)

Becomes: Informal economy workers (25 characters with spaces)

4. Eliminate redundant words

Example: The organization's past history… (31 characters with spaces)

Becomes: The organization's history… (26 characters with spaces)

5. Use contractions

Is not = isn't; could not = couldn't; did not = didn't; do not = don't; etc.

6. Use complex verbs:

She will = she'll; he will = he'll; they will = they'll; etc.

7. Replace long words with shorter synonyms

Demonstrate = show; groundbreaking = new; completion = end; etc.

8. Consider eliminating the word 'that'

Often it can be removed without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

Step 5: The Proposal Budget

A Funding Proposal Budget must be based on the actual estimated costs of your project (including associated core costs), not on the budget of a funder. Even in cases where budget details are not required (for example, a Concept Note or Letter of Interest) the summarized request amount included must agree with your Project Budget.

During your initial research you will have learned what the usual grant sizes are for the funder in question. Keep this in mind when you're making your application, and make sure that your request amount is in line with the funder's history.

Ideally, you will be able to include your entire Activities-Based Project Budget. However, in some cases you will have to make some adjustments in order to fit information into an application form. If this is the case, make sure you keep detailed notes regarding the changes and adaptations so that you can answer questions from the funder at a future time—sometimes up to a year from the application date.

Make it clear what you are asking the funder to cover in terms of expense. If the funder is covering only a portion of the project's expenses, this should be clear in the Revenue section of your Budget—including what the other sources of revenue are (see the Example: *Building the Revenue Side of the Budget* in Booklet Three for a more detailed explanation).

☞ Tip

Including Overhead Costs in Funding Requests

A well-written Activity-based Budget should account for all administrative costs that can be expensed to a given project. However, many funding agencies encourage NGOs to calculate an additional Overhead Cost covering expenses to do with financial management, maintaining good governance, and unforeseen burdens on the organization's systems that can't be determined upfront. Unless the funding agency has a fixed number, an Overhead Cost allocation for roughly 10% of the total project expense should be added to your request. (More than this may seem too much, and less then 10% may not truly cover your full overhead expenses.)

For a detailed guide to writing an Activities-based Project Budget, please refer to Booklet Three in this series.

Step 6: REVIEW

The review process is critical to completing your Funding Proposal. As mentioned above, you must budget time for peer review of the completed first draft, as well as the time to incorporate the edits and comments that come in from the reviewers. This is particularly important in cases where the language of the Funding Proposal is not the first language of the proposal writer.

Reviewers should feel encouraged to offer any comments or feedback that come to mind. The reviewer should be asked to pay attention to language, spelling and grammar. Additionally—and keeping in mind that some or all of your reviewers may not be familiar with development jargon or Log Frame terminology—guidelines for review could include the following:

1. Is the goal (Overall Objective) of the project clear?
2. Does the project seem necessary?
3. Is there enough background given to describe the problem?
4. Does the solution seem to fit the problem?
5. Is there a logical flow between the Outcomes and the Objectives?
6. Based on the information in the Proposal, does the organization seem qualified to carry out the project?
7. Does the project fit the mission and/or vision of the organization?
8. Does the overall project seem likely to succeed? Do the Outcomes seem attainable?

☞ Tip

Use Caution when Using Track Changes

Track Changes (found in the Reviewing toolbar of Microsoft Word) is a great tool for collaborating on a document, allowing reviewers to include their comments, edits and corrections in your original document without erasing your original text. This function is widely used among all kinds of organizations for reviewing documents. Consider Track Changes as a great tool for your MBO, but take care! Believe it or not, funders have received Funding Proposals containing track changes bubbles, including notes between reviewers!

Once Track Changes comments and edits have been incorporated into a final document you must follow these five important steps:

1. Scan the entire document to ensure that all added text (appears in a different colour) is acceptable.
2. Reject any changes that do not improve the Proposal.
3. Accept all changes in the document (using the dropdown toolbar).[8]
4. TURN OFF Track Changes using the button in the toolbar.
5. Carefully read the document through one more time to make sure everything is clean and that nothing was seriously displaced during the Track Changes/reviewing process.

---

[8] See the Microsoft Word help menu for more information on how to use Track Changes.

Step 7: Finalize

> ### ✎ Checklist
>
> **Finalize Your Proposal Before Submitting**
>
> In addition to the Checklist created in Step 1, make sure your proposal meets each of the following criteria:
>
> ❑ Is the proposal going to be submitted on time?
>
> ❑ Is the proposal going to the right contact person in the right format?
>
> ❑ Are all the required documents attached? Review the Guidelines one more time and make sure you have all required materials, such as:
>
> > **Required Documents**
> >
> > • Reference letters
> > • Certification of non-profit or tax-exempt status
> > • CVs for project leaders
> > • Bibliographies
> > • Tables/charts outlining project milestones
> > • Budget spreadsheets
> > • Tapes, videos
> > • Previous evaluation reports
> >
> > Make sure you include those documents specifically requested by the donor, and resist the urge to include too many.

> ❑ Are all the required signatures included?
>
> ❑ Are all the character and/or word count and/or page limits adhered to?
>
> ❑ Has the proposal been reviewed by at least three peers, and have those comments been incorporated?
>
> ❑ Is the submission free of typos?
>
> ❑ Have all editing notes, comments, and Track Changes balloons been taken out of the document?
>
> ❑ Does the Budget add up (check the math!)?
>
> ❑ Some funders may ask for total Operating Expenses from previous years. If so, do the figures provided match the Audit Reports?
>
> ❑ Does your Project Budget meet all other requirements in the detailed budget Checklist in *Booklet Three: Reviewing Your Project Budget*?

Step 8: Receiving Confirmation of Receipt and Filing Your Proposal Records

Once you've submitted your proposal, make sure you receive confirmation of receipt from the funder (and request the confirmation right away if it is not received). Once you have this confirmation in-hand the proposal submission is complete, and the wait for a response begins.

In many cases, and particularly with competitive bids, it could be three to six months before you get any feedback. Even if the lapse is only a few weeks, the details of different aspects of the proposal may have faded from your memory. If the funder contacts you with requests for clarification or more information you must have a copy of your submission—*exactly*

as it was submitted—at your fingertips. Further, if you're awarded a grant you will need to activate your Project Plan—including your Project Budget and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan—as the project begins. The best time to sort and file the proposal information (and file it for future reference) is immediately after the submission has been completed.

To be safe, keep hard and electronic copies of the submission complete with all attachments and appendices and checklists in a separate Funding Proposal file (one for each year).

☞ **Tips**

Folder Systems for Storing Funding Proposal Records

In the example below, you can see that in each year a separate folder is kept for each funder. Within each funder folder is a sub-folder for working drafts and notes, and one reserved for the final submission only. The contents of this folder should include a copy of every document that was submitted, as well as a copy of the confirmation of receipt.
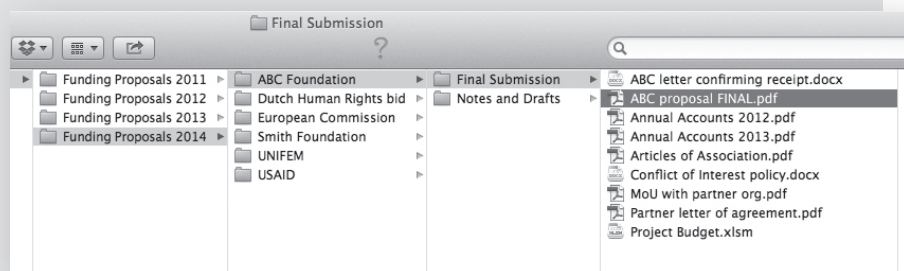
In this way, when the time comes to negotiate with funders, clarify details, or actually begin the project, there is no guesswork involved in what may or may not have been originally submitted.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset of this Booklet, successful proposal writing can only begin when a good Project Plan has been designed and written. That is why you are strongly encouraged to work through Booklets One through Three in this series, which will guide you through the process of creating a Log Frame, an Activities-based Budget, a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, and a Risk Register.

Booklet Five will focus on transparent financial management for MBOs, including internal controls, and creating rolling forecasts for financial monitoring and planning.

About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information see **www.wiego.org**.

WIEGOGlobal   @WIEGOGlobal

W I E G O

Women in Informal Employment
Globalizing and Organizing