# GUIDE TO
# Proposal Writing

**THIRD EDITION**

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## 5

# Developing the Master Proposal: The Project Description

In this section, describe the nuts and bolts of the project in a way that gets the reader excited about it, while making a compelling case for the approach you have adopted. It is worth stating right up front that your plan is not written in stone. It might change based on feedback on your proposal and the experience you gain through implementation. It is not worth putting your organization in a defensive position in negotiating with grantmakers, and you certainly don't want to surprise a funder if in the project's final report, you state that you changed your approach.

This section of your proposal should have five subsections: objectives, methods, staffing/administration, evaluation, and sustainability. Together, objectives and methods dictate staffing and administrative requirements. They then become the focus of the evaluation

to assess the results of the project. The project's sustainability flows directly from its success, hence its ability to attract other support. The five subsections present an interlocking picture of the total project.

## Objectives

Objectives are the measurable outcomes of the program. They help delineate your methods. Your objectives must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable, and achievable in a specified time period. Grantseekers often confuse objectives with goals, which are conceptual and more abstract. For the purpose of illustration, here is the goal of a project with a subsidiary objective:

> *Goal:* Our afterschool program will help children read better.
>
> *Objective:* Our afterschool remedial education program will assist 50 children in improving their reading scores by one grade level as demonstrated on standardized reading tests administered after participating in the program for six months.

The goal in this case is abstract: improving reading, while the objective is much more specific. It is achievable in the short term (six months) and measurable (improving 50 children's reading scores by one grade level).

With competition for dollars so great, well-articulated objectives are increasingly critical to a proposal's success.

Calling upon a different example, there are at least four types of objectives:

1. Behavioral—A human action is anticipated.
   *Example:* Fifty of the 70 children participating will learn to swim.
2. Performance—A specific time frame within which a behavior will occur, at an expected proficiency level, is anticipated.
   *Example:* Fifty of the 70 children will learn to swim within six months and will pass a basic swimming

proficiency test administered by a Red Cross–certified lifeguard.

3. Process—The manner in which something occurs is an end in itself.
   *Example:* We will document the teaching methods utilized, identifying those with the greatest success.
4. Product—A tangible item will result.
   *Example:* A manual will be created to be used in teaching swimming to this age and proficiency group in the future.

In any given proposal, you will find yourself setting forth one or more of these types of objectives, depending on the nature of your project. Be certain to present the objectives very clearly. Make sure that they do not become lost in verbiage and that they stand out on the page. You might, for example, use numbers, bullets, or indentations to denote the objectives in the text. Above all, be realistic in setting objectives. Don't promise what you can't deliver. Remember, the funder will want to be told in the final report that the project actually accomplished these objectives.

The example that follows is from a proposal to the Henry Luce Foundation from the San Francisco Theological Seminary. It is a brief statement of the proposed project's objectives, presented in outline form.

> **Expected Outcomes**
>
> With partnership support from The Henry Luce Foundation, San Francisco Theological Seminary looks forward to the following:
>
> A. An established network for recruiting students, financial contributions, and other forms of support for the Seminary in Southern California from among its diverse constituencies.
>
> B. An increase in SFTS/SC student enrollment by 100 percent by academic year 2004, reflecting the breadth of racial/ethnic and cultural constituencies in the region.

C. A carefully developed and secure funding base for SFTS/SC and its programs within the overall Seminary community, as demonstrated by a 20 percent yearly increase in the SFTS Annual Giving campaign resulting from new individual donors in Southern California.

D. A refined system of delivering theological education in multilingual settings, balancing the needs of those training for church leadership today with the needs of congregations of the future. Some experimentation with techniques of translation, tutoring in "theological English," distance learning, and the like will occur.

E. The continued evolution of a creative curriculum for training church leaders especially geared to service in a multicultural urban context. This will include the SFTS emphasis on spiritual formation and solid grounding in stewardship education. We seek a careful balance between theological understanding and disciplines and the practical skills for ministry that will equip leaders for the church of the future.

Another example is from the Madison School District proposal. It delivers a clear statement of objectives for a project.

### Purpose and Goals

To address the needs described in the previous section, this project will achieve the following purpose and goals:

#### Purpose
The purpose of this project is to take the Madison School District HIV/AIDS education program to the logical next step by integrating with our 7th and 8th grade curriculum across the board and expanding the knowledge base of our professional staff and community.

During the planning period for which funding is requested, our proposed project will target the following goals:

### Goals

I. Integrate HIV instruction in all areas of the curriculum by building a model that could be used in math, literature, writing, science, social studies, and life skills. This would expand HIV/AIDS classroom instruction over a period of six weeks from the current two hours in 7th and 8th grade.

II. Extend teacher training to ensure positive attitudes and commitment to the goal of HIV education.

III. Promote parent/family education, which would allow noted speakers to address student behavior, media impact on our adolescents, and skills to provide the courage to say "no" as teens begin their journey into adulthood. Central to this project is the basic premise that parents, in any culture or situation, have the greatest influence and opportunity to teach HIV infection prevention to their children.

These three goals, when fully achieved, will provide for an integrated, in-depth HIV/AIDS curriculum, which is meaningful to our students and integrated in the healthy lifestyle of our community.

## Methods

By means of the objectives, you have explained to the funder what will be achieved by the project. The methods section describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve the objectives. It might be helpful to divide our discussion of methods into the following: how, when, and why.

*How:* This is the detailed description of what will occur from the time the project begins until it is completed. Your methods should match the previously stated objectives. In our example about teaching 50 children to swim, appropriate methods would describe: 1) how the youngsters will be recruited, 2) how they will be taught to enhance their skills, and 3) how their swimming skills will be measured. There would be no reason to describe an extraneous activity like helping the parents learn to enjoy swimming with their children,

because using swimming to bring the family together in wholesome exercise is not a stated objective of the project.

The Community Projects Foundation proposal to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation briefly describes an audience development project.

The CPF requests funding to conduct and implement a collaborative audience research and development effort among the organizations involved in the Challenge that can also act as a model for similar organizations in small- to mid-sized cities. In addition to the CPF, the nine organizations involved are: the Coca-Cola Space Science Center, the Columbus Museum, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, the Historic Columbus Foundation, the Liberty Theatre Cultural Center, Port Columbus Civil War Naval Center, the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts, the Schwob Department of Music of Columbus State University, and the Springer Opera House. This project is not unlike the efforts being taken by the collaborative efforts in Long Beach and San Jose, California, and we will share information with these communities.

This project involves three phases: audience research, marketing plan development, and plan implementation. Knight funds are being requested to make possible the first and second phases, which will be carried out by a market research firm specializing in research and marketing counseling for arts, culture, and history organizations.

Phase One consists of a thorough analysis of the existing and potential arts, culture, and history audiences in our area and, for organizations whose audience might be primarily tourist visitors, outside our area. The analysis will involve both general research and research specific to each organization. Phase Two consists of the development of marketing plans for each organization, identifying every possible avenue for collaborative efforts among one or more of the other participating organizations. Phase Three, the implementation phase, will implement, for purposes of this project, only the collaborative efforts identified in Phase Two. Components of each group's plan that are specific only to that group will be carried out on a funds-available basis at the discretion of the group, outside of this project.

Implementation of the project will probably take 24 months, broken down as follows: three months to identify and hire the consulting firm, six months for them to design and conduct their research, two months for them to design and present their marketing plans, and 12 months for the organizations to implement the resulting collaborative marketing efforts. In addition to regular evaluation meetings among the organization principals during the project period, at the conclusion of the project, one month of follow-up evaluation will be conducted, and a case study will be written and submitted to Knight Foundation.

In addition to the case study prepared for Knight Foundation, results and conclusions of the project will be shared with other arts, culture, and history groups in our area, involving each of them in efforts to offer services to a maximum number of people as well as other Knight communities.

Another application to the Knight Foundation from the Museum of Science in Boston, Massachusetts, lays out detailed plans for a touring exhibit. For the sake of brevity, we have shortened it here.

The Museum of Science is planning, developing, and implementing a major new interdisciplinary traveling exhibition entitled *The Secrets of Aging,* which examines the processes and effects of human aging from scientific, social, humanistic, and cultural perspectives. *The Secrets of Aging* is scheduled to open at the Museum of Science in April 2000, and it will tour nationally (the tour will include the *Journey with Me* component) during the following three years to the other five museums making up the Science Museum Exhibit Collaborative. After that time, the exhibition will be available to travel to additional sites. Two of the six SMEC museums to which the exhibition will travel are located in Knight communities of interest: The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia and the Science Museum of Minnesota in St. Paul; a third museum directly serves a Knight community of interest: the California Science Center in Los Angeles, which serves Long Beach; and a fourth museum, the Center of Science and Industry, is within 125 miles of the Knight community of interest of Akron, Ohio.

The general purpose of the exhibition is to explore the most recent findings and research about aging and to look at how aging is interpreted by a wide range of cultures and individuals. One component of this exhibition is a multimedia piece entitled *Journey with Me: Stories of Growing Older*, which is a compilation of narrative stories and experiences related to the aging process, as told by individuals from different backgrounds and cultures. The narratives will be overlaid onto a variety of visual and aural effects, including an interpretive, intergenerational dance/movement piece choreographed specifically in conjunction with the narratives. *Journey with Me: Stories of Growing Older* will be installed within *The Secrets of Aging* as a conceptual centerpiece of the overall exhibition experience, helping to merge the personal and humanistic aspects of the subject of aging with the scientific aspects.

While *The Secrets of Aging* exhibition as a whole will look comprehensively at physical changes associated with aging, the social and psychological impact of aging, and myths and attitudes about the aging process, *Journey with Me: Stories of Growing Older* will widen the scope with a personal touch presented in a multimedia, oral history format. *Stories of Growing Older* will incorporate personal reflections of those who are aging, and they will strike a balance between the state of mind and the state of body of aging people. And in keeping with the general theme of the exhibition, this component will also include examples of aging with dignity and grace.

The multimedia piece *Journey with Me: Stories of Growing Older* is the specific component of the *Secrets of Aging* exhibition for which the Museum of Science is requesting funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. *Journey with Me* is a multimedia experience that will be a centerpiece of the exhibition and is critical to making *The Secrets of Aging* a well-rounded experience for visitors. With its focus on individual experience, it will serve as contrast, counterpoint, and reinforcement to some of the other elements of the exhibition. The mix of humanistic, scientific, social, and cultural contexts make *The Secret of Aging* a very ambitious exhibition but also one that can be extremely rewarding to museum visitors.

The work to create *Journey with Me: Stories of Growing Older* will be a collaboration among a writer/exhibit developer, a videographer, a choreographer and dancers, photographers,

musicians, the storytellers, and technical people. The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange has been selected to work with the Museum because of Ms. Lerman's renowned work with life stories, older dancers, and intergenerational dance. Roberta Cooks, the writer/developer for this piece, has also used life stories extensively in developing major traveling and permanent exhibits for museums on subjects including *The Brain*, *AIDS*, and *The Powers of Nature*. The *Journey with Me* component, in all its facets, will act as an exhibit centerpiece that conveys the drama, humor, and enormous possibilities for growth and change as we age.

Think about how you can most readily construct a logical sequence from each objective to its relevant method. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, some relating simply to visual placement on the page.

One means of organizing this section is to write out each objective and to list beneath it the method(s) that will make the objective possible. For example, it might look like this:

*Objective:* to recruit 70 children

*Methods:*

- Put up signs in the Y.
- Go to each school and address classes on the fun of swimming.
- Put ads in the local paper.
- Enclose a flyer about the program with the next mailer sent out to each family in the community.

The methods should match the magnitude of the objectives. Once you are sure that each objective has related methods that describe how the objective will be achieved, you should check that the emphasis given each method matches the importance of the related objective. In our swimming example, recruitment of 70 children is probably the least important objective; demonstrating that 50 of them can pass the Red Cross test is more critical. To match the magnitude of the objectives with appropriate detail about the project, more emphasis should be placed on the testing than on recruiting.