Proposal Elements

What belongs in your application? If your foundation tells you what they want to see in an application, follow those directions. If the foundation's directions are minimal or unclear, you may find this information helpful. Remember that always we're happy to ask foundations questions for you.

Summary
A summary provides a framework for your readers, helping them understand where the proposal is headed. It should contain:
- identification of the applicant, including a bit about credibility
- the reason for the grant request—issue, problem, or need
- the objectives to be achieved through this funding
- the kind of activities to be conducted to accomplish these objectives
- total cost of the project, funds committed, and amount requested

The length of a summary should be in proportion to the length of the proposal. A brief proposal should have a brief summary.

Problem Statement/Needs Assessment/Case Statement
Document the issue/problem to be addressed/solved or the need to be met by the proposed project and funding. This is the reason behind the proposal. Generally the need or problem should be phrased in terms of the client's interest, not your organization's needs. It should be supported with facts— statistics, maybe testimonials from the target group, or other information that documents the need for the project. Try to convey your organization's enthusiasm and commitment to addressing the problem.

This section both (a) identifies and explains the problem/need and (b) identifies the populations/audience to be targeted.

Goals or Objectives
The goals or objectives are obviously related to the problem statement/needs assessment. This section defines and describes what the project will accomplish to affect the problem or need. Think of it as the outcomes section of a plan, the results expected to be achieved, the "ends."

In a proposal, this section tells proposal reviewers the answers to following questions:
- Will the project accomplish something that is significant, important, timely, innovative, and worthy of support? How is this approach different from other similar projects?
- Will the proposed outcomes really solve an identified need?
- Are the outcomes achievable?

Methods
These are steps to be taken to achieve goals or objectives—a plan of action. Methods and objectives are often confused; they're closely related, but methods tell you *how* – they're the means to the end, the objectives. The methods section is often the longest part of the proposal.

Methods:
- Clearly describe program activities.
- State reasons for selection of activities. Problems can be addressed in several different ways. Why this approach?

- Describe the sequence of activities.
- Describe the staffing of the program.
- Describe the clients and client selection.
- Present a reasonable scope of activities that can be accomplished within the timeframe of the project and by the organization.

Introduction (Organizational Qualifications)
Describes the organization and its qualifications for undertaking this project. This section may go at the beginning of the proposal, follow the summary, or come after methods. It contains the following information:
- when, how, why the organization was founded
- statement of purpose, goals, philosophy
- significant events in your history
- prior and current activities
- accomplishments and impact
- size and characteristics of your constituency
- referring agencies (if you provide direct services)
- anything else that you deem important

Evaluation
This is how you determine if the project and methods are effective or successful. Are you achieving your objectives or goals?

Evaluation answers the following questions:
- What are you really trying to do in this program?
- What needs to happen so you can tell whether or not you have succeeded?
- How will you know?

There are several categories of evaluation; the two most common and applicable here are:
- **Process evaluation** produces information used to improve a project during its operation. This is especially helpful for project staff because it helps you to determine if the processes and procedures are working and if your clients are satisfied. It will help you to recognize if you need to change something in your project's design; it will tell you what works, what didn't, and why. Conducting this type of evaluation improves your project's chance of success.
- **Product evaluation** collects data for judging the ultimate success of the completed project. It documents the extent to which the objectives were achieved. Did it do what it promised? This is a useful tool, but it's most effective for an organization to use in combination with the process evaluation.

Sustainability
If the project is to continue beyond the funding period, you have to explain how you will continue to support it. Most foundations do not want to support your organization indefinitely. If you want to build a new building, renovate an existing structure, or buy some equipment, this may appear to be a one-time cost. However, the building has to be maintained, as does equipment. How will you support these costs?

Budget
The budget lists the costs of the various activities associated with your program. The budget needs to be a specific as possible, and the costs should be as real as possible. Budget items should relate clearly to the proposed activities.

Budget Discussion
This is not a standard category, but it can be helpful if there are items that need to be explained beyond a simple footnote on the actual budget.