

Toolkit| 10 Things Not To Do In A Funding Proposal



Note: This is an article written by a foundation program director, which shows things to avoid in fundraising from the perspective of a donor.

10 Things Not To Do In A Funding Proposal¹

By Louisa Greve

You might be surprised at some of the mistakes NGOs make when writing funding proposals. Here are ten of the more serious missteps NGOs make — and how to avoid them.

1. Don't disregard the funder's proposal guidelines. Funders ask that you follow their proposal format because this will provide the information that they need. If you don't provide that information, they cannot consider the proposal seriously. If you don't have some of the information that the guidelines request, explain honestly why you do not have it.

2. Don't ask for too much money or too little money. Look up the funder's past project lists and make sure the amount of money you request is within the range of the projects the donor has funded in the past. If your proposal asks for too much money, or too little money, compared with the funder's standard grants, the funder will not be able to grant the request. At best, the staff will ask you to revise it. At worst, the funder will simply reject the proposal.

3. Don't ask for an amount of money that does not match up with the scope of your project. Give an explanation that shows why the amount you

¹ Available at http://asiacatalyst.org/blog/2009/11/16/top_10_things_not_to_do_in_a_funding_proposal/

are requesting is the right amount to cover the real cost of the work. Usually this means that you should write a detailed budget.

4. Don't criticize other projects as a way to show that your project is superior. Other NGOs or projects may have their shortcomings, but don't criticize them. Instead, describe the challenges that all similar projects face and explain how your project will address those challenges in order to be as effective as possible.

5. Don't criticize the funder's approach or current projects. If you do not respect the decisions of the foundation's staff and board, why do you expect them to have the good judgment to fund your own project? On a more human level, you are not likely to persuade other people to trust you if you imply that you do not respect their judgment. Instead, highlight how your approach will enable you to make progress. Overall, your proposal should focus on providing good reasons why your project can make an extremely positive contribution to goals that you and the funder share.

6. Don't show disrespect for the people your project will help by dwelling on their weaknesses. Instead, describe the help that they need in a way that demonstrates your deep respect for their human dignity, focusing on the challenges they face and how your project will assist them to achieve their goals.

7. Don't promise to achieve objectives that are impossible to reach this side of heaven. ("Provide access to justice for the people of Country X," "Implement the rule of law in Country Y," "Educate the people of Country Z about..."). No single project can hope to educate the entire population of a country, or remake an entire country's legal system. Explain honestly and modestly what your project can realistically achieve after one, two, or three years of work.

8. Do provide verifiable evidence that your approach has a chance of succeeding. This can include your organization's track record, the track records of the individuals involved, success stories of other projects that have used similar models, and any other evidence that shows that your project will meet your objectives. Provide website addresses, media articles or the names of respected experts who know your work so that the people reviewing your proposal can independently check the information provided in your proposal.

9. Don't exaggerate your organization's past achievements. Funders will only entrust money to people who are trustworthy and honest. They respect people who explain realistically what they have achieved in the past and what they expect to achieve in the future.

10. Show your enthusiasm and commitment to your cause! Funders respect expertise and experience, but they also want to know that you are passionate and dedicated, and that you will work hard to achieve the noble goals that you and the funder share.

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