Grant Writing Tips & Forms for Tarrant County (TCPH) Public Health Personnel

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General Informational tips and examples of common forms used in RFP's along with TCPH guidelines for RFP requests.

Brought to You By:
TCPH Health Planning & Policy Division

Included in this document are suggestions and tips that relate to the TCPH business processes and requests for proposals.

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Eligibility

Eligibility to submit a grant application often involves geography, experience with a specific population or type of entity (i.e. nonprofit organizations, county governments, small businesses, institutions of higher learning, Native American tribal governments, etc.). Determining eligibility should be one of the first steps when reviewing an RFP.

TCPH is a government entity; it is a 170(c) (1), not a 501(c) (3). While contributions may be tax deductible, many grantors are only interested in giving grants to charitable (501(c) (3)) organizations. Some grantors are unclear on the difference between a 501(c) (3) and a tax exempt organization so it may be worth contacting the grantor to verify whether TCPH is eligible. If the grantor is unclear, they should talk with their tax advisor.

Commissioner's Court
Before a grant proposal is submitted to a funder, a request must be submitted to Commissioner's Court for approval. The Commissioner's Court meets every week but the request needs to be submitted at least two weeks before it is needed in order for it to be put on the court agenda and presented.

Letter of Intent/Letter of Inquiry
A Letter of Intent or Inquiry (LOI) is a brief description (2-3 paragraphs) of the proposal that is intended to be submitted. The LOI not only makes the funder aware of the intention to submit a proposal, but also provides contact information to the funder in the event of any updates, modifications or extensions. The letter should include the amount requested, a brief description of the project, and any other prospective funders for the project. Sometimes the LOI is required while at other times it is optional.

Cultivating Relationships/Utilizing Technical Assistance
Having direct contact with the grant funders can be an invaluable opportunity to establish a rapport with them and gain insights into the evaluation process. Even better, does the grant maker have an existing relationship with anyone at TCPH? If so, take advantage of that connection. Grant funders do not meet with applicants during the application process. Even if a proposal is declined it is worthwhile to contact the grant funder and ask for their frank feedback on the proposal. The feedback in itself is useful but it is also for good positioning for the next grant cycle.

General Content
Foundations and funding agencies want to support projects that are in alignment with their interests. It is therefore important to articulate the priorities common to both the proposal and the funder. Funders also want their dollars to have an impact - they want as much "bang" as they can get for their "buck"- so elucidating the potential impact is likewise important. Nonetheless, space is limited so content needs to be deliberate, organized and concise. The proposal needs to be easy to read, understand, and should be presented in an exciting, yet specific manner.

Research
It is important to research a funding source thoroughly before determining whether to submit a proposal. Oftentimes, a funding source limits its giving to specific geographic areas. It is best to familiarize yourself about the funding source's assets, the size of grants previously awarded, and who they have been awarded to can be very telling. Not only does this information help determine whether submitting a proposal is practical, it can help to develop the tone or angle of the grant.

Abstract/Summary
It is generally held that the abstract and/or summary should not be written until the proposal is otherwise complete so that all of the key points of the proposal are developed. It is this piece that becomes the cornerstone of the proposal and the impression it gives is critical to its success. If the grant reader has a good idea of the direction of your proposal from reading the abstract or summary, a strong first impression has been created. This is often the only piece of a proposal that is shared with all evaluators on panel and the only piece that is forwarded to legislators so it must be able to stand alone. It needs to be both concise - perhaps 2-3 paragraphs - and compelling.

Introduction
The introduction, while not always required or scored, is critical because it establishes the tone for the entire proposal. Novice proposal writers will state their need in the introductory section while seasoned grant writers will capitalize on the opportunity to communicate the correlation between the funder's interests and the proposed effort.

Need/Problem
The Need or Problem section is where the funder becomes convinced the issue at hand is critical and that TCPH is an expert on the issue. The RFP and all its components must meet the criteria.

Here are some tips:

- **TCPH must analyze does this funding opportunity meet the current Mission of the agency? Where will it be managed? What about sustainability.**

- **Don't assume the funder knows much about the issue. Most grant-making staff people are generalists. They will probably know something about the issue but do not assumed that they are versed in it. If the issue is complex, adding an informative article in the appendix may be prudent.**

- **What research has been done on the issue? If the issue is a longstanding one, why has it not been addressed before and if it has, why have previous efforts not been effective?**
- **Describe the issue both factual *and* human interest terms, if possible. Grant writing is part science, part art. Providing good data *justifies* funders awarding a grant; conveying the human side of the issue *compels* funders to award a grant.**
- **Describe the issue in the context of Tarrant County rather than the State of Texas or USA whenever possible**

Objectives

Objectives are born of the needs detailed in the previous section. The objectives must correlate to those objectives. It is very important to articulate the objectives of the proposed effort in a clear and comprehensive manner. In a sense, the objectives are the "product" the funder is "buying".

Objectives are the groundwork for the evaluation process; they should be either S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed-specific) or S.I.M.P.L.E. (specific, immediate, measurable, practical, logical and evaluative).

It is important to distinguish between goals (long-term) and objectives (short-term). It is likewise important to make a distinction between objectives (ends) and methods (means).

Methodology/Program Design

The methodology section details the means to achieve the stated objectives. A chronological description of the implementation process of the proposal is generally most effective. The methodology should serve as a bridge from the "problem" to the objectives. The scope of activities should be detailed and the reasoning behind that course of action should be justified. This is in the narrative section and critical to outline exactly how your program will work according to the grant specifications.

This is often presented in a logic model format: Inputs → Activities/Processes → Outputs → Outcomes.

Budget

A budget is more than a budget. It is the total picture of your services in number terms. A grant reviewer may assign more weight to a budget. Grant readers review the budget first. Therefore be as specific and detailed as possible – numbers should not be rounded off. All expenditures should be clearly and immediately related to the

implementation of the proposed project in the budget narrative. Include with whom and how much you will be sharing monies with in the community. Very Important!

If a position is listed under the personnel section of the budget then include a statement of at least 2-3 sentences telling why the position is absolutely essential to the success of the proposal. The same degree of justification is needed for subcontracted personnel.

- **More detail is better than less.**
- **Don't automatically go for the maximum amount available. If the maximum is less than what is needed, explain so and how the project has been scaled back to fit within the constraints of that amount.**
- **Don't round out if possible. Use bids and estimates whenever you can get them - even if they are informal quotes.**
- **Don't pad your budget. Competent reviewers will know the cost of goods and services, and will understand prevailing wages. If they know you are trying to deceive them on budget, what else will they suspect you of trying to deceive them about?**
- **Do include all sources of support - including volunteer time, donated space and borrowed equipment.**
- **Direct cost is very important to consider; Visit with Marsha Gillespie regarding this information; Federal grants have different amounts in this category.**

Evaluation

While this part of a proposal may seem insignificant or irrelevant, many funders pay particular attention to it as it affords them the opportunity to "see" what they are "buying". This is usually subcontracted out with UNTHSC or other university partners by TCPH.

How replication of the proposal will be fostered and supported is important because it communicates to funders that the effort may continue to have life beyond the funding period.

Essentially, this section details what will serve as proof that the goals of the proposal have been met. The evaluation process is easier when the objectives are well thought out and articulated. Who will be conducting the evaluation, their experience and credentials should be detailed as should how the evaluation will drive future improvements. A separate evaluation component should be written for each project objective, each of which should:

- **Define the evaluation criteria**
- **Detail how data will be collected**
- **Describe any tools or instruments that will be used**
- **Explain the data analysis process**

Format/Language

Language should be clear, concise, and devoid of jargon. Acronyms should be kept to a minimum as they disrupt the flow of the proposal.

Avoid using first person pronouns. Instead of saying "I (we) will conduct …" Reword the sentence to read "Tarrant County Public Health will conduct …".

- **Adhering to guidelines regarding font size and style, page count and margin size is critical. A proposal may be disqualified for failing to do so.**
- **Bold type is generally considered easier to read than underlining, using italics or capitalizing letters.**
- **Lists help convey a lot of information without being wordy. A numbered list should be used when items are to be read sequentially while a bulleted list is used when items are equally important.**
- **Documents with a ragged right margin (not justified) are generally considered easier to read.**

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

An MOU generally carries more weight than a letter of support. It must, however, be specific and unique to the relationship/arrangement. Original signatures are important – scan the signed MOU if the application is going to be submitted electronically. (FORM 1)

Letters of Support

Letters of Support from all entities collaborating on the project should be included as part of the appendix of the proposal.

When requesting a Letter of Support it is generally considered good form to provide assistance in composing the letter. This can be done in the form of a tip sheet or basic framework for the letter. Each letter should be unique, citing specific collaborations, partnerships, mutual interests, and experiences working together in the past. The letter should be written on letterhead, and signed with an original signature. Scan the signed letter if submitting the application electronically. Have examples to share with your supporters. (FORM 2)

Subcontracting Services
TCPH may not have in-house expertise or capacity to be the primary service provider for the deliverables of a proposal but can act as the fiscal agent and subcontract to different nonprofit organizations in the community whose sole mission is the target population. This allows TCPH to distribute funds very specifically and deliberately in its efforts to best serve the target population.

Subcontracts should be detailed, signed and scanned and planned ahead as soon as possible.

Proofreading
The best writers are the worst readers so it is critical that the proposal be proofread by at least one person other than the writer. It is even more thorough to call upon one person to proofread for content and another to proofread for grammar and mechanics.

Spell and grammar check: to a grant reader, a sloppy proposal is indicative of sloppy implementation.

Maps/Graphs
Understand that most grant readers receive black and white photocopies of proposals so any maps or graphs may appear as a big blur. Photocopy a proposal prior to submitting so that it is certain that all information is conveyed as intended.

Submit the grant proposal ahead of time; Ensure all the passwords and/or electronic submission systems are working ahead of the deadline date.

FORM 1: Example of MOU form:

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN
TARRANT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
AND
HEALTHY TARRANT COUNTY COLLABORATION (example)

PURPOSE: The authorized representatives of the afore-mentioned organizations enter into this Memorandum of Understanding this _____ day of _____, to support _____.

TERM: The term of this Memorandum becomes effective upon Tarrant County Public Health-Preventive Medicine Clinic receiving funding from _____ and/or about _____ .
Term dates and objectives will be reviewed yearly on or about anniversary date of funding cycle.

Tarrant County Public Health-Preventive Medicine Clinic agrees to:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Healthy Tarrant County Collaboration agrees to:

- _____
- _____
- _____

This agreement demonstrates the commitment to promote collaboration and active communication to forward the objectives and goals of Tarrant County Public Health-Preventive Medicine Clinic together with our community partners.

In witness whereof, the following member has executed this Memorandum of Understanding this _____of _____, 2010.