

Raising sponsorship

Introduction

The ideal proposal for sponsorship will be clear, succinct and comprehensive. It needs to convey a compelling message to a potential sponsor as simply as possible. It has to retain interest. And it has to persuade. Sounds like a tall order, but it can be done – and in just a few pages. Most proposals can be described in no more than four or five pages. Remember that you are not trying to tell the sponsor everything about the organisation; you are just telling them enough to secure their support. In my experience, the following sections are essential, though there may be occasions when you need to add more sections.

- Introduction
- Background
- Proposal
- Budget
- Justification
- Appendices

The proposal

Introduction

The introduction is not a summary of the proposal. If your proposal is no more than four pages then a summary is not really necessary. But there should be one or two sentences at the beginning which explain the purpose of the document. For example: "This proposal has been prepared by the Timbucktoo Enterprise Development Institute to seek \$25,000 to launch an entrepreneurship awareness programme in secondary schools". Note that it says who wrote it, what is for, and implies what will happen if they are successful. You may feel a need to go a little further: "Last year a school supported by TEDI won first prize in the All Africa Schools Entrepreneurship Programme and this project is intended to build on that success". That is enough to stimulate interest and encourage the reader to continue reading.

Background

The background section should explain how the organisation has reached its current position. It may, for example, need to give a little bit of history about the organisation. If you have a good annual report, then keep this summary to just one (short) paragraph and attach the most recent annual report.

If the proposal is for a continuation or an expansion of an existing project, then it would be helpful to describe previous performance and successes and why further support is needed now. If you have a good evaluation then keep this also to one (short) paragraph and attach the evaluation.

If the proposal is for a brand new project (or at least new to the organisation), then explain how the organisation has come to the conclusion that this project or approach is needed.

It is easy to slip into attempting to justify the proposal in the background section but, as far as possible, that should be avoided.

Proposal

In this section, you should explain precisely what is being proposed: “We plan to work with 50 schools over the next three years. In each school, we expect to support a minimum of 30 students who will be taken through a programme of guided learning and who will start a small scale business activity in order to learn more about entrepreneurship.” You will want to start with a an opening paragraph that summarises the proposal and, for most proposals, then need to give more explanation about the activities that will be undertaken, the numbers of people that will be supported and the outcomes. Remember that outcomes are different from outputs.

You may want to include monitoring and evaluation in this section together with a note about how you will identify the lessons from the programme and how these can be disseminated more widely so that others can learn from your experiences.

You may also want a paragraph that talks about the possible risks and indicates how the risks can be mitigated.

Budget

The budget section needs to set out clearly the expected costs of delivering the project or programme. The ideal way of doing this is, firstly, to state for each project the number of days of staff time required and the associated costs such as social security and pension contributions. Then state the direct costs such as printing or travel or bought-in services. Lastly add a fair share of the overhead costs, such as office rent, power, telephones, etc. I used to add a percentage of the overhead costs to every project which reflected the proportion of total staff time allocated to that project. The objective is to ensure that if every project is funded, then between them they will cover all of the overhead costs.

If the project will earn income, then an estimate of the amount should be given. If you are unsure, then you may want to make an estimate, but ask potential sponsors to provide some support as grant aid and, in addition, guarantee the balance just in case.

If some sponsorship has already been secured from other sources, this should be explained, not least because sponsors like to think that they are making their money go further by leveraging in money from other sources.

Sponsors increasingly like to see whether and if so how projects may become self-sustainable. If you have such a project, you may want to show your sponsorship requirement tapering down as earned income ramps up. If you don't think this is likely, then don't pretend that it is. Above all, sponsors want you to be honest.

If you think that it is unlikely that a single sponsor will cover all the costs of a project, you may want to indicate how much you are hoping to secure from each sponsor: “Our total requirement is \$100,000. We intend to find \$20,000 from our own resources and are aiming to find four sponsors each willing to contribute \$20,000”. If you prefer, you could use percentages: “We are able to find 10 per cent of this budget from our own resources and are looking for three sponsors each willing to provide 30 per cent.”

Justification

This is probably the most important section in your proposal. This is where you justify what you are proposing; it is where you rehearse the arguments that you think will convince prospective sponsors actually to support you.

You need to stress the 'community benefit'. You need to explain how the project will make a difference and the level of the expected impact. You need to explain how this is innovative, if it is, and how others could potentially learn from it and be able to scale it up if successful.

You need to explain why you are the best possible organisation to undertake this project and make a success of it.

If there will be benefits to the sponsors, other than simply feeling good about providing support – perhaps they might get some good publicity, or staff on secondment might get good personal development, or they might get introductions to prospective customers,, then you should explain those benefits as well.

Appendices

If there is a need for more detailed explanation that you want or need to put in the proposal itself, then you may need to add some appendices. You may, for example, have the results of some specific research. You should include the headlines in the main proposal, but back it up with evidence in an appendix so that the detail is available should the reader want it. You may want to include detailed performance figures from running the project previously. You may want to give supportive information about similar projects run in other countries.

Formatting

If you do not already have a 'house style', that is, an agreed design that your organisation always uses, take time to think about how you are going to present your proposal. The overall design needs to communicate to the reader that it has come from a professional and competent organisation. If it is poorly laid out, then you will communicate exactly the wrong message. But if you present a well designed proposal, that is easy to read, it will communicate that you are professional and know what you are doing, so a sponsor is more likely to entrust you with spending their money.

Follow up

Often all a proposal does is open a door and you need to follow up with a personal presentation. Take as much care with this as you have taken to write the written proposal. Dress appropriately. If it helps, take a power point presentation, but the best presentations are the ones where you come across, like the proposal, as professional and competent together with the passion and commitment to make the project succeed.

Everyone expects that sponsors will support their projects, but foundations, donors, corporates all receive many more proposals than they can ever hope to support, so do not be too surprised or down-hearted if you do not secure grant aid straight away. Do take the time, however, to call the organisation and explore why they didn't like your proposal. If it doesn't fit their criteria, there is little you can do about it; if you do fit their criteria, try to find out what they thought was weak about your proposal and then ensure that you address that point in the revised proposal that you send to other prospective sponsors. If you are determined, then it is likely that you will eventually succeed.

Good luck.