



TAR

Technical Assistance Reports

USCM HIV/AIDS PROGRAM

March 2003

Writing Proposals

Writing Proposals for HIV/AIDS Prevention Grants



This *Technical Assistance Report* (TAR) serves as a basic guide to proposal writing for staff of community-based organizations (CBOs) and health departments applying for HIV prevention funding. Since proposal guidelines vary from funder to funder, a specific or “ideal” proposal format is not presented here. Instead, the basic elements of a proposal are described along with proven strategies to improve the chances that a proposal will be funded. Many of these strategies are drawn from the experience of staff of the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) Health Programs, which has conducted an annual HIV prevention grantmaking process with funds from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) since 1985.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors HIV/AIDS Prevention Grants Program

The USCM HIV/AIDS Prevention Program was established in 1984, with funding from CDC, to provide information and technical assistance to local governments and community-based organizations. In 1985, USCM established its HIV/AIDS Prevention Grants Program which, through 2002, has awarded over \$12 million to 245 organizations and health departments nationwide. The Grants Program releases a Request for Proposals (RFP) once a year, usually in the winter.

Before You Begin

Preparing a proposal can be an extremely time-consuming process, particularly for CBOs and local health departments that do not have full-time proposal-writing staff. Following are some basic guidelines to consider before responding to a funding announcement:

- *Read the funding guidelines and directions carefully.* Most funding announcements contain fairly detailed information about funding priorities, eligibility criteria, and submission requirements. Federal agencies, in particular, have complex application requirements that must be followed exactly or the proposal may be disqualified.
- *Make sure you have enough time to prepare the proposal.* Funders' deadlines are usually non-negotiable. Be realistic about how much time the proposal will take your agency to prepare given your current resources then decide whether it's worth the effort. If you don't have time to do it properly, don't do it at all.
- *Consider whether the grant is right for your organization.* Even if your organization meets general funding criteria, it may not be the right "fit" for a particular grants program. Following are some questions an applicant may want to ask before beginning the application process:
 - Is the proposed program consistent with the mission and goals of my organization?
 - Does my organization currently have the staff expertise and resources to implement the program?

- Does my organization have the capacity to administer the funds that it is applying for?
 - Does my organization have direct ties to and experience with the target population?
 - Is there community support for the proposed program?
 - Is the amount of money being offered worth the time and expense involved in applying for it?
- *If possible, discuss your proposed program with the funder before writing the proposal.* Some funders, like USCM for example, are willing to discuss your proposed program by phone or to respond to your *letter of inquiry* (a letter that briefly describes your proposed program and the need that it addresses—see box to the right). In fact, some private funders require you to go through a screening process before submitting a proposal. Take advantage of any opportunities you have to get feedback from a funder *before* submitting a proposal. Making sure, upfront, that your program is a logical fit with a particular funder will save you a lot of time and trouble in the long run.
 - *Consider collaborating with other organizations.* Many funders, particularly federal agencies, prefer proposals that involve collaboration between two or more organizations because they avoid duplication of effort and enhance the capacity of the applicant to serve clients. You may increase your chances of being selected for funding if you pair up with another organization, particularly when your areas of expertise complement each other.

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How to Write a Letter of Inquiry

Also known as a *letter of intent*, a letter of inquiry is a two- to three-page summary that briefly describes the proposed project and gives potential funders the opportunity to decide whether they are interested enough in a project to request a full proposal. It is most commonly used by foundations, who are looking for evidence that the proposed project fits their funding priorities before they invest staff resources in reviewing a full application. A letter of inquiry can be more challenging to write than a full proposal because you only have a few pages to make a compelling case for why your project should be funded. Typically, a letter of inquiry contains some or all of the following components:

- *An introduction that serves as a type of executive summary.* The introduction should include basic information such as the name of your organization, the amount being requested, and a brief description of the purpose of the project.
- *A description of the applicant organization.* Your description should focus only on the types of information about your organization's history, experience, and staff qualifications that are relevant to the proposed project and the funder's interests.
- *A statement of need that describes the problems your project will address.* It should describe the target

population and geographical area and, without going into too much statistical detail, should describe the nature and extent of the problem being addressed.

- *A description of how the proposal will meet the stated need.* Describe the project briefly, including major activities and objectives.
- *Budget information* can include the estimated overall amount required to implement the project, the specific amount being requested from the funder, the time period for which funding is being requested, and a description of other funding sources that have already committed support or are being asked for support. Some funders may also ask for a complete proposed budget.
- *Contact information including* name, title, address, phone number, fax and email.

Note: Do not include attachments unless the funder specifically requests them.

For more information on how to write a letter of inquiry, see "What Should be Included in a Letter of Inquiry?" at <http://fdncenter.org/learn/faqs/letter.html>.

Basic Elements of a Proposal

Most proposals are made up of the following sections, although they may be called something else in each funding announcement and may appear in a different order. Once you understand what basic information reviewers are looking for in each section, you will be able to respond to a variety of funding announcements.

1. Executive Summary

Most funders require some sort of summary or abstract that highlights the key points of your proposal. Summaries provide reviewers with a quick orientation

The Executive Summary provides a snapshot of the whole proposal.

to your proposal and help them determine whether or not it matches their priorities. This section of the proposal is usually very brief—often a page or less. Because it is often the very first thing reviewers read, the summary should be clear, well-written, and interesting. Requirements about what should be in the summary vary by funding source but usually include some of the following information:



It is much easier to write the Executive Summary after all the other parts of the proposal have been completed. At that point in the writing process, the details of the proposed program will be much clearer.

- The name and description of the applicant organization, including a statement about why the applicant is qualified to do the proposed work.
- The target population.
- A brief statement of the problem or need the proposal addresses.
- A short description of the proposed project, including the main objectives, the key program components and activities, the methods or approaches used, and the expected outcomes.
- Amount of funding requested.

2. Problem Statement

The purpose of the Problem Statement is to show **why** the proposed program is needed.

This section is often referred to as the Problem Statement, Statement of Need, Justification of Need, or Needs Assessment. Regardless of the name used, the purpose is the same: to convince the reviewer, through a presentation of supporting evidence and persuasive argument, that a compelling problem exists in your community that can be effectively addressed by your proposed program.

Below are suggestions for areas that can be covered in the Problem Statement. Deciding what information to include will ultimately depend on the requirements of the funding source, the nature of the problem and the target population, and the information available to the proposal writer. Most of the information discussed below is already available in your local, regional, or state HIV prevention plan developed through the community planning process. For ideas on how to gather HIV risk information from other sources, see the box on page 6

entitled “Demonstrating HIV Risk When Limited Data Exist on Your Target Population.”

Definition of Target Population

Reviewers need to know as clearly as possible who your proposed program will serve. Given that all groups of people are not at equal risk for HIV, it is important to *be as specific as possible* in terms of race/ethnicity, specific risk behavior(s), age, socioeconomic background, and geographic area. Being specific demonstrates that your organization has a clear understanding of the risk behaviors and needs of your target population and has defined the part of that population that it can reasonably expect to reach.

Don't say that your program will target “African American women in the Bronx.” After all, *all* African American women in the Bronx are not at risk for HIV and there are far too many at-risk African American women in the Bronx to be effectively reached by a single program. A better way to specify a target population is to say you will target “African American women between the ages of 18-30 who live in the following areas of the Bronx [insert the names of specific neighborhoods or zip codes] and who are at risk for HIV because they abuse drugs and/or exchange sex for money, drugs, or resources.” Defining your target population as narrowly as possible will help you identify gaps in existing services for that population and make a better case for why your program is needed.

Impact of HIV/AIDS on Target Population

Your discussion should include information on the nature and extent of the HIV/AIDS problem in the target population. Discuss briefly how HIV/AIDS has affected the target population. How many people in the target population are infected with HIV, how many have AIDS, and how many have died of AIDS? What are the epidemiological trends that relate to your target population? The data you use should be as local as possible. Even when epidemiological evidence is strong, you can add specific examples from your organization's own experience to help reviewers visualize the situation. For example, if your organization recently provided HIV testing in a local bar to 30 Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) and several tested positive, tell reviewers about this (while protecting the clients' identities).

Demographic Factors

Use demographic data to provide a profile of the target population in terms of race/ethnicity (including membership in a racial/ethnic sub-group), age range, gender, self-identity (e.g., sexual orientation, gender identity), language, geographic location, socio-economic status (e.g., how many receive public assistance), legal status (e.g., immigration status, incarceration) and any other relevant demographic characteristics. If you are targeting a small or distinct population (e.g., male-to-female transgenders of color in Manhattan), you should provide an estimate of the size of that population—if that information is available.

Cultural Factors

Discuss any relevant cultural factors that contribute to HIV risk in the target population. For example, if you are targeting African-American MSM in the rural South, you may want to discuss the effect of homophobia, racism, and social and religious conservatism on this population's HIV risk.

Behavioral Risks for HIV

Describe the specific behaviors that put members of the target population at risk of HIV infection. These behaviors may include unprotected sexual contact, injection drug use, use of drugs such as “crack” cocaine that are associated with high-risk sexual practices, or the exchange of sex for drugs or resources. Provide statistics drawn from behavioral data to show how common these risk behaviors are in your target population. If there is limited information on behavioral risks in your target population that are directly related to HIV, provide data that indirectly demonstrate a risk. For example, if you are trying to prove that your target population—say high-risk women—is participating in risky sexual behavior, you can cite rates of sexually transmitted diseases or unplanned pregnancies.

Existing HIV Prevention Services and Gaps in Services

Try to provide as complete a picture as possible of HIV prevention services in your community that relate to your proposed program. What HIV prevention services are currently being provided in your community, which populations are being served, what geographical areas are being served, and who is providing these services? Remember to include activities conducted and/or funded



Remember that reviewers are human and, like everybody else, respond to a well-told story that grabs their attention and moves them. Don't be afraid to use your own words, to express how you feel about the problem you are describing, and to include anecdotal (based on your own knowledge and experience) information that will bring to life the story you are telling.

by the local or state health department, by other CBOs, and by your own organization.

Then discuss the specific gaps in services for your target population. These gaps could include: geographic areas or neighborhoods that are not being served, types of services (such as HIV counseling and testing or prevention case management) that are not being offered, or cultural or linguistic needs that are not being met (e.g., there are no services in Spanish for individuals whose first language is Spanish). What specific gaps will your proposed program fill and how will your program complement or add to the services that are already being provided to the target population in your community? Be as precise and honest as possible when describing gaps. Remember that reviewers may already be aware of the existing range of services, particularly in major metropolitan areas, and may notice if your discussion of gaps is not complete or is inaccurate. Reviewers are frustrated by vague descriptions that don't make it clear whether a program is really needed. Your ability to provide a clear and accurate picture of what's already available helps demonstrate to the reviewer that you understand how the proposed program fits into the range of services in your community.

Barriers to Access

Are there any barriers that exist in your community that make it difficult for members of your target population to access HIV prevention services? These barriers may be practical ones such as inadequate transportation and a lack of childcare services. Or they might be related to cultural factors such as specific cultural beliefs that discourage individuals from seeking services, or linguistic factors such as low literacy levels or poor English language skills. After identifying barriers, discuss how your proposed program will overcome these.

Using Statistics to Demonstrate HIV Risk

- Make sure that any statistics you cite are up-to-date and accurate; the persuasiveness of your argument will be weakened if you don't bother to check your facts or use outdated statistics.
- Whenever possible, use local—rather than state or national—data to illustrate your point, even if they are limited or anecdotal (based on your experience). Using local data will assure reviewers that your organization knows what's going on with the target population in the target community.
- Don't include information that doesn't directly relate to the point you're trying to make just to fill up space; it will only take away from your overall argument.
- Avoid repeating a long list of statistics that you have copied from elsewhere without interpreting them; help the reader understand *what* these statistics mean and *how* they relate to the real-life problems of people in your community.
- Always provide references and dates of publication for the data that you cite so that reviewers can know what the source of that data is and how current the data are.

Demonstrating HIV Risk When Limited Data Exist on Your Target Population

Not all populations have a current or likely HIV problem. Even populations with serious social and economic problems may not be at great risk for HIV. You must make an honest assessment of whether or not an HIV prevention intervention is needed for a particular population before you can make a persuasive case to funders. Still, there may be times when you believe a specific population is at risk for HIV, even though this risk may not be fully reflected, or reflected at all, in official HIV/AIDS surveillance data. For example:

- Persistent under-reporting and misclassification have made it impossible to know the true extent of HIV/AIDS among Native Americans and Asians/Pacific Islanders.
- The HIV/AIDS status of homeless persons or migrant workers is very hard to determine because of the mobile and sometimes “hidden” nature of these populations.
- Frequently HIV/AIDS cases among male-to-female transgendered people are not reported separately but are included with MSM cases, even though their risk factors are specialized and transgenders may be at much higher risk than MSM in general.
- Women who seem to be low-risk may be at risk because of unacknowledged risk behaviors among their male partners such as injection drug use or same-sex contact.

In instances like these, there are various strategies you can use to demonstrate convincingly that there is a real problem in your target population.

- a) *Use surrogate data.* If primary surveillance data (reported cases of HIV and AIDS) on your target population is lacking, look for other official data that can demonstrate a potential risk for HIV. For example, some Native Americans may not appear to belong to

obvious HIV risk groups but may still engage in behavior that may put them at risk for HIV. To show this, you can cite local alcohol and non-injection drug use statistics, rates of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, and socioeconomic data pointing to poverty and general social vulnerability.

- b) *Collect your own data.* If your organization's resources permit, consider collecting your own data to demonstrate risk in the target population. You can collect data on specific risk behaviors in your target population by administering a survey to a small segment of the population, conducting focus groups with members of that population, or holding key informant interviews with community representatives and leaders who have first-hand knowledge of the target population and its risk behaviors.
- c) *Report your organization's own data.* Most service organizations collect some kind of statistics on their clients such as basic demographic, socioeconomic, and behavioral data (e.g., whether a client reports having injected drugs in the last 30 days or having exchanged sex for drugs in the last 30 days) collected during initial intake interviews. This in-house information is often overlooked by applicants, even though it can provide a rich source of information on an organization's client base.
- d) *Report anecdotal data.* Often service providers become aware of a developing HIV problem before that problem is reflected in local health department statistics. For example, outreach workers from your organization may report having witnessed high-risk behaviors among certain groups of people who are not currently being served. Don't be afraid to use this information because it's not "official" (i.e., from a government source).
- e) *Cite evidence from published and unpublished studies.* If you come across a study detailing HIV risk in a population similar to the one you want to target, you may want to cite that study and its general findings. However, don't rely on this information too much to make your case.

What Funders Look for in the Problem Statement

- *A proposed program that addresses a real and compelling need.* Funders want to feel good about the selections they make; in general, they like programs that they think will make a difference. First, make sure your program targets a population that is demonstrably at high risk for HIV and is not already being served, or adequately served, by other organizations. Next, tell your story in a way that brings the problem to life and grabs the interest of the reviewer.
- *A clearly defined target population.* Be as specific as possible when defining your target population. If your definition is too broad, reviewers may think your organization lacks a clear understanding of the risk behaviors and needs of the target population and the segment of that population that it can reasonably expect to reach.
- *Solid evidence that supports your claims about the nature and extent of the problem your proposal addresses.* Start by providing a clear and specific description of the problem your proposal hopes to address. Back up these claims with facts that are related directly to the situation you describe, that are current, and that are, above all, local.
- *A clear match between the problem the proposal addresses and the funder's priorities.* Take the time to figure out what your funder's priorities are before you write the proposal. Most funders clearly state their priorities in the body of their funding announcement or in general information they provide to potential applicants.

3. Agency Description

The purpose of the Agency Description is to establish the credibility of your organization.

This section goes by a number of different names, including Agency Description, Capability Statement and Organizational Capacity. The task here is to convince the reviewer that your organization is qualified to carry out the proposed project and that, if funded, has the capacity to handle grant funds.

At minimum, the *Agency Description* should:

- describe (briefly) the mission and history of the organization
- describe past and present programs and services *that are relevant to the proposal*
- describe the populations served by the organization
- describe the organization's experience with the target population
- describe the organization's areas of expertise *as they relate to the proposed project*
- discuss why the organization is qualified to carry out the proposed project

Information About Your Agency

The types of information about your agency that you can include in your proposal are outlined below. Be selective about what information you provide—more is not always better. The challenge is to provide enough information to convince reviewers your organization is well suited to doing the proposed work, without wasting space on irrelevant facts. **Note: Only essential information that is directly related to the funding announcement should be included in the Agency Description section; other information that it would be nice to include but that isn't essential can be put in the Appendix.**

General Background

- a short history of the organization (including when, why, and by whom it was founded)
- a statement about your organization's mission and goals

Organizational Structure

- a short description of the organizational structure (this is often presented in the form of a diagram)
- a description of existing staff, including the number of full- and part-time staff and volunteers and their areas of expertise
- a description of the board of directors (including gender, race/ethnicity, areas of expertise, and the nature of their connection to the population(s) being served by your organization)

Programs and Populations Served

- a brief overview of existing programs with particular attention to HIV prevention or related programs
- a short description of the population(s) served by the organization



The *Agency Description* is a standard section that you can write once and re-use with modifications depending on the priorities and requirements of the funder. You can save a lot of time and avoid last-minute stress when writing future proposals by periodically updating information in this section so that it's ready to go when you need it.

- the number of people reached through programs
- statistics on the gender, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of your client base

HIV Prevention Experience

- a description of all the types of HIV prevention or AIDS-related services your organization currently provides or has provided, the target populations for each service, and the length of time each service has been provided
- an explanation of how the proposed program will fit into existing programs

Administrative Experience

- a description of how grant funds will be monitored and expended
- a listing of past and current funding sources

What Funders Look for in the Agency Description

- ***Clear ties to the target population.*** You must be able to demonstrate that your organization has experience with the target population and has access to that population. In most cases, these ties will be evident in such items as the description of existing services and populations served (if you already provide services to the target population). In cases where ties are not obvious, you will have to make a special effort to demonstrate that link. For example, you can mention efforts your organization has made to gather input from the target population (such as holding community forums or conducting focus groups) or the fact that, if funded, your organization will hire members of the target population to run the program.
- ***Experience in HIV prevention.*** One of the first things reviewers will look for in reading the Agency Description is evidence that your organization is experienced in providing HIV prevention services, particularly to the target population featured in your proposal. If your organization is new and does not have a substantial HIV prevention track record, cite the experience of staff, volunteers, and board members in the field of HIV prevention and describe any training they have received in HIV prevention methodologies and techniques. If, on the other hand, your organization is experienced in HIV prevention but does not have direct experience with the specific target population (e.g., an agency may have worked with the general Hispanic population but not with Hispanic MSM), then acknowledge this weakness upfront and state how it will be addressed.
- ***Administrative capacity.*** Funders want to be reassured that your organization can handle grant funds responsibly, particularly if it is a relatively new organization. Some ways to demonstrate administrative capacity include: showing your organization has a track record of receiving and administering funds from other funders, providing evidence that your organization participates in an annual fiscal audit conducted by an independent auditor, and describing your accounting system. New organizations without an established track record should provide detailed information such as how funds will be managed, what accounting expertise staff or board members have, and what procedures are in place to ensure administrative oversight of grant funds.
- ***Linkages to other organizations.*** Funders like to see that your organization is an established player in the local HIV prevention field and works well with other organizations. Describe past or existing collaborations with other organizations and how your organization is integrated into the local HIV prevention service and referral network. If your organization participates in local or state HIV/AIDS planning committees or councils, say so. Reviewers usually look favorably on plans to collaborate with one or more agencies because it shows that you are making the most of local resources and are not duplicating services. However, if you do plan to collaborate, make sure that the roles and responsibilities of each partner are clearly outlined in the proposal itself and in attached Memoranda of Understanding (MOA). *(See the box entitled “Tips on Collaboration” for more information.)*



If you don't already have one, start a "credibility file" containing documents that highlight the strengths and achievements of your organization. You can include copies of newspaper articles about your organization; letters of support from elected officials, other agencies, or clients; official commendations or awards given to your organization; and positive evaluations of your organization's programs. You can use these documents as attachments or quote from them in the body of the proposal.

Extent of Involvement With the Community

- a description of any formal sources of community input that your organization maintains (such as community advisory boards)
- a description of existing linkages to other local organizations (e.g., formal referral agreements with other agencies)
- mention of any memberships your staff or organization hold in local or state groups related to HIV prevention (e.g., the state or local HIV Prevention Community Planning Group)

4. *Proposed Program*

The purpose of the Proposed Program section is to describe and justify a set of activities to meet the prevention needs identified in the Problem Statement.

The Proposed Program section (also commonly referred to as the Methods section) should be the most detailed and comprehensive section of the proposal. Regardless of your proposal's other strengths, if your description of your proposed program is unclear, does not relate logically to the rest of the proposal, or proposes a set of interventions that are unlikely to be effective with the target population, the chances of your proposal being funded decrease greatly.

Think of the Proposed Program section as a type of blueprint that can be understood and carried out by someone who is unfamiliar with the project. New staff should be able to read this section and get to work right away without needing a lot of clarification. At minimum, the Proposed Program section should address these basic questions:

- *What* does the proposed program hope to achieve (what are its goals and objectives)?
- *How* does the proposed program plan to achieve the stated objectives (what activities are planned and what is their content)?
- *When* does the proposed program hope to achieve each task and activity (what is the order and timing of individual tasks and activities)?
- *Who* is going to implement the tasks outlined in the proposed program section (who will staff and supervise the program)?
- *Why* will the planned program lead to the anticipated outcomes (why do you think your program will work; why did you select the interventions that make up the program)?

The following sections offers guidance on addressing the key questions listed above.

1) Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives provide the logical framework or structure for your program plan and evaluation plan. They are important because they tell the funder what the proposed program is expected to achieve, how it will achieve it, and by when it will do so. Setting specific goals and objectives allows both the applicant organization and the funder to monitor the progress and success of the program.

Goals

Goals are *broad* statements that describe the ultimate general purpose(s) of the proposed program. They are not specific or time-phased and tend to refer to long-term results. Usually project goals reflect the priorities of funders as stated in funding announcements. *Projects usually have only one goal.*

EX. To increase the commitment and abilities of young African American men (in a specific geographical area) who have sex with men to avoid or reduce behaviors that put them at risk for HIV infection.

Objectives are *specific* statements that describe *what* the proposed program is expected to achieve within a specific time period and *how* it will do so.

EX. To teach a minimum of 60 clients safer sex strategies through a series of four interactive workshops to be conducted during the last six months of the funding period.

Types of objectives. Objectives allow program staff to measure the extent to which they have accomplished the proposed activities or achieved the expected results laid out in the objectives. There are generally two types of objectives: *process* objectives, which describe what you will do in your proposed program and how you will do it and *outcome* objectives, which describe the changes in the target population that you expect as a result of your program. **A proposal should include both process and outcome objectives.** Process objectives should be written first and then followed by related outcome objectives. A common mistake is to include only process or only outcome objectives. Listing process objectives without any outcome objectives doesn't give reviewers any information about the results you hope to achieve in the target population. Similarly, including only outcome objectives confuses reviewers because you are providing information about the results you want to achieve without saying anything about how you will achieve them.

Note: Objectives are not written in stone; if you find that they are not realistic once the project is underway, they can sometimes be adjusted in consultation with the funder.

- *Process objectives* focus on the *implementation* of a program; that is, they focus on the completion of the specific activities you need to accomplish over the course of the project. They answer the questions of *what* will be done, *how* it will be done, *for whom* and for *how many* it will be done, and *when* and *where* it will be done.

EX. To conduct 20 [how many] one-on-one weekly street outreach sessions [what], reaching a total of 320 unduplicated individuals [how many] between the ages of 12 and 21 who live in the ABC Housing Projects [for whom and where] during Months 4 through 8 of the project [when].

- *Outcome objectives* define the measurable results that the program expects to accomplish, i.e., the specific *benefits* to participants that the project hopes to achieve. In HIV prevention programs, benefits include such things as an increase in knowledge about HIV prevention, increased skills in such areas as condom usage, and changes in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to HIV prevention. Outcome objectives should provide information about *whose* knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors are being measured and *how many* of these individuals will be tested, *what* is being measured (e.g., HIV-related knowledge or behaviors), *how* it is being measured (e.g., pre/post intervention questionnaire), and *how much* of a change is expected (e.g., a 40 percent increase in knowledge).

EX. To increase by 25 percent [how much] the number of injection drug users attending HIV prevention counseling [who] who properly disinfect injection equipment with bleach and clean water [what] as measured by a pre/post test [how measured] by the end of the project period [when].

EX. By the fourth month of the project [when], 80% [how much] of the HIV prevention support group participants [who] will express confidence in discussing safer sex [what] with their sexual partners(s) as measured by a self-report questionnaire [how measured].

In general, all objectives should:

- be directly related to project goal(s)
- begin with the word "to" followed by an action verb
- specify only one major result per objective
- be specific
- be time-phased (specify when it will be accomplished)
- measurable
- realistic and attainable

2) Program Plan

Also known as the Work Plan, the Program Plan should flow directly from your stated goals and objectives; that is, each activity described in the Program Plan should relate logically to a specific objective and the goal under which it falls. If you have written clear and specific objectives, it should be relatively easy to fill in the details of the Program Plan.

The exact format of this section of the proposal will vary depending on the requirements of the funding source and the grant writer's preferences. Some applicants structure this section by first listing all their goals and objectives and then plugging in descriptions of activities under each one. Others list the goals and objectives separately from the description of the program and its activities. Some funders are interested in specific information about the proposed program and ask you to provide that information; in that case, just follow their suggested format. Regardless of the format used, in most cases you will have to cover the following information:

Program overview. If your format allows, consider writing a short summary of all the program components before describing each one in detail. Explain how each component relates to the others. This will make it easier for the reviewers to understand your program description.

Description of individual interventions. Most prevention programs are made up of a combination of individual services—or interventions. Describe each intervention



When you've finished the first draft of the Proposed Program section, get someone who is not directly involved with the project to read this section and give you feedback. Chances are that if this individual doesn't understand what you're proposing, reviewers won't either.

separately, being careful to include as much as possible of the following information:

- *Type of intervention* (e.g., condom distribution, prevention counseling, prevention education and risk reduction workshops, community awareness event)
- *Information or skills to be delivered* (e.g., "AIDS 101" information, sexual negotiation skills training, safer injection skills)

- *Content of each intervention* (topics to be covered)
- *Curriculum or model to be used* (e.g., Red Cross HIV prevention curriculum, Stop AIDS model, in-house curriculum to be developed)
- *Staff positions assigned to conduct the intervention* (e.g., program coordinator, peer educators, outreach workers)
- *Frequency and duration of the intervention* (e.g., daily outreach for a total of three hours a day, weekly support groups lasting two hours)
- *Times and location of the interventions* (e.g., outreach to high-risk MSM will be conducted between the hours of 11pm and 2am in bars frequented by MSM)
- *Number of clients expected to participate* (e.g., maximum number of participants for safe sex workshop; expected number of street outreach contacts per month)
- *Client recruitment and retention* (e.g., the program will be advertised through flyers and word-of-mouth, incentives such as a meeting stipend or subway tokens will be provided)
- *Activities or tasks related to implementing interventions* (e.g., design of workshop content, recruitment and training of peer educators)
- *Linkages and referrals* (how is the intervention related to other programs in your organization, what arrangements have you made with other local agencies to help you recruit clients, do you have a system for referring out clients who require assistance—such as locating affordable housing—that your agency doesn't provide?)

Time line. Many funders require applicants to include a time line listing the key steps involved in implementing a project, including beginning and projected completion dates and staff responsible for each step. Even if a time line is not required, it is a good idea to include one for several reasons. First, it reassures reviewers that your organization is realistic about the steps involved in implementing the project and the approximate length of time each step will take. Second, the time line also serves as a tool which your organization and the funder can use to monitor the progress of the project.

Staffing of project. It is important to convey to reviewers that your organization has a realistic understanding of the staff resources needed to implement the project. Briefly describe each proposed position by listing the job title, main responsibilities, and required skills.

Tips on Collaboration

- *Justify the collaboration.* If you plan to collaborate with one or more organizations or agencies, explain in your proposal why your organization has chosen each partner and what specific gaps each one will meet. It is also crucial to explain the *structure* of the collaboration. For example, if your organization is the lead agency but has significantly less experience with the target population than the collaborating agency, funders may wonder why the collaborating agency isn't applying for the grant instead of your organization. It may be that the collaborating agency has greater cultural competency with the target population but lacks the organizational skills to administer the project properly.
- *Make it formal.* Formalize your organization's relationship with potential collaborators by preparing a memorandum of agreement or MOA (also referred to as a "Letter of Collaboration" or a "Memorandum of Understanding") that outlines each partner's tasks and responsibilities and include the MOA in your proposal appendix. This is particularly important when the success of your proposed project depends on the cooperation of another organization. Make sure that any MOA you include in the appendix is current and specific to the proposed project.
- *Be specific.* MOAs should include a detailed description of the services each collaborating agency will provide and the time frame for these services. They should also describe how the partners will communicate with each other and monitor the progress of the collaboration.
- *Ensure accountability.* Work out a system in advance for managing the collaboration. This can include planning regular meetings, developing and reviewing forms that record services performed by partners, and holding periodic strategy sessions.
- *Distinguish between a collaborator and sub-contractor.* A collaboration is not primarily a financial relationship, though there may be some economic benefits of the project for all partners. When another organization is actually being paid to conduct some project activities, what's needed is not a collaborative agreement but a contract for services. There are a variety of ways in which collaborator/subcontractor relationships can be structured. For example, a project staffer might work at the offices of a collaborating organization while remaining on the payroll of the lead organization; this would not require a subcontract. However, if a staff member on the payroll of a collaborating organization is conducting vital project activities, a subcontract with the second organization is needed. What concerns reviewers is that the project includes organizations with the capacity to reach the target population, that project staff (no matter whose payroll they are on) are properly compensated, and that all staff are supervised in a way that ensures accountability to the funder.

Indicate whether the position will be full-or part-time by specifying the percentage of time to be spent on the position. It should be clear who will supervise each position and how they will do so (e.g., weekly staff meetings). If you have identified candidates for any of the proposed positions, provide a resume in the supporting documentation. If the program involves volunteers, funders will pay close attention to your plans for recruiting, training, supervising, and retaining them. Finally, be careful not to assign full-time responsibilities to part-time staff or volunteers;

reviewers may think you don't understand what's needed to do the job properly and that it won't get done.

Justification of methods. It is important to provide an explanation of why your organization has chosen a particular set of interventions for the target population. Most HIV prevention programs are designed according to a combination of formal (scientifically tested) and informal (based on experience) theory. There is nothing wrong with using informal theory; just make sure that you describe the assumptions that are behind the choice

of each intervention. If you are basing the proposed program on formal theory, avoid copying the theory word-for-word; simply repeating a theory does not show the funder that you actually know how to apply the theory to real-life interventions. Instead, explain how each proposed intervention corresponds to the different

elements of a theory. For example, if you are using the Stages of Change theory of behavior change, show how the different components of your HIV risk reduction program will take clients through the five stages of Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action and Maintenance. If you are basing your program

What Funders Look for in the Proposed Program Section

- *A logical link between the proposed program and problem statement.* Simply put, the proposed program should address the specific problem outlined in the problem statement.
- *A logical fit between individual program components.* Because HIV prevention programs usually have more than one component (for example, a weekly support group combined with street outreach, prevention case management, and referral services), it is important to explain *how* the various pieces of a program relate to and support each other. When this explanation is missing, reviewers may get the impression that you threw together some services to “look busy” without giving much thought to how they will work together.
- *Appropriateness of proposed program for target population.* Reviewers will hesitate to fund your proposal if they think it’s unlikely to be successful with your target population. For example, if you will be working with an ethnic or racial minority, reviewers will expect you to tailor your intervention to the specific cultural, social, and linguistic needs of that population. If your proposed project involves working with a low-income, high-risk population and a key element of the project is a website that promotes safer sex, reviewers will be skeptical about its success with a population that may not own computers.
- * *Involvement of the target population.* Because HIV prevention projects usually deal with very specific at-risk populations with unique perspectives and needs, reviewers like to see involvement of the target population in the design and implementation of the proposed project. This is particularly true of state and federal funding agencies. Research has shown that programs that are designed “by and for” a specific population are more likely to gain community support and succeed in their goals than “top down” approaches designed by individuals who are not familiar with the people whom they are trying to reach.
- *Clear, detailed description of project activities.* One of most common—and often fatal—mistakes that proposal writers make is not providing enough detail about a proposed project, or presenting the information in such a confusing way that the reviewer can’t make sense of what is being proposed or how all the parts fit together. It is very important that you have at least one other person in your agency read this section and provide honest feedback about any areas that are confusing or vague so that you can correct them.
- *Sound justification for proposed activities.* Reviewers want to know why your organization chose the specific set of interventions in the proposal. If you are basing your program design on formal theory, then provide references to the theory or theories you are drawing from and discuss how your project reflects them. If, instead, your design is based on informal theory derived from your organization’s experience with the target population, then discuss what observations your organization has made about what works best with that population and why you have chosen the approach taken in your proposal.

design on another program that has been demonstrated to be effective (e.g., the STOP AIDS model based on community mobilization, outreach, and small group meetings), then explain to reviewers why you have chosen this model and what, if any, modifications you will need to make to tailor it to your target population.

(See the Resources box at the end of the publication for information on where to find out more about theories and approaches commonly used in HIV prevention education.)

What Funders Look for in the Proposed Program Section continued

- *The proposed program plan is reasonable and “doable.”* Reviewers want to be reassured that your organization can actually do the proposed work given its overall resources—including financial resources, available staff and their areas of expertise, existing ties to the target population, physical space, etc.—and the time frame within which the activities must take place. Don’t promise to do too much (e.g., reach 3,000 clients during the first three months of the project) or reviewers will think your organization doesn’t know what it’s doing. On the other hand, don’t promise too little (e.g., enroll a total of 25 clients during the project year) or reviewers will think the grant money won’t be well spent.
- *Client recruitment and retention has been considered.* One of the most common problems in implementing HIV prevention programs is difficulty in reaching or recruiting clients and getting them to keep coming back for services. Funders will be reassured if you explain in detail how you plan to recruit and retain clients, or if your plan makes reasonable allowances for unavoidable client turnover.
- *The proposed project is special or unique.* In a competitive funding environment, proposals that are special or unique, either in the intervention proposed or in

the population targeted, are more likely to catch reviewers’ attention than those that appear to be doing the “same old thing.” This is particularly true when the proposed project is dealing with an established target population in a geographical area that already has many services for that population. For example, African American MSM in Harlem have had access for some time to a variety of prevention services, and it can be assumed that the basic prevention strategies (outreach, groups, prevention case management, etc.) have been tried. In this case your chances may be much improved if you propose some innovative strategy that seems to funders to be a fresh attempt to reach and engage this population. By contrast, African American men in a small Midwestern city may not have received any specific prevention services, and basic prevention strategies may represent a sensible first step. In this case, what’s special is the delivery of services to a previously unserved population. In both cases, your proposal will stand out from others that merely offer the usual services to the usual populations.

- *The project is adequately and appropriately staffed.* The number of staff assigned to the proposed project and their qualifications should match the level of effort required by your program plan.

5. Evaluation Plan

The purpose of the Evaluation Plan is to describe how you will assess the extent to which your project has met its goals and objectives.

The evaluation of HIV prevention projects is receiving increasingly more attention—particularly from federal and state agencies. More and more, funders want to know not only *how* a project was carried out (process evaluation) but also what *effects* it had on the clients (outcome evaluation). Even if an evaluation is not required (some funders just ask for occasional progress reports) it is a good idea to do one because it shows that your organization cares about the quality and impact of its projects. Evaluation has a number of benefits. It can help:

- determine if the project goals and objectives are being met;
- ensure that the activities in the work plan are being followed closely and on schedule;
- provide corrective feedback to staff that will increase program quality and effectiveness;
- gather information about the effects of the project on the target population;
- provide evidence of project achievements;
- provide evidence to potential funders of the organization's ability to run successful projects; and
- help with internal administrative planning.

That being said, evaluation can be challenging, particularly for small organizations with limited funds and capacity to conduct evaluation. However, by taking advantage of existing evaluation technical assistance and resources and free or low-cost evaluation expertise, conducting an evaluation of an HIV prevention project is feasible, even for organizations with modest resources. Some state and city health departments offer assistance in evaluation design and implementation and free or low-cost evaluation workshops are frequently offered locally or at national conferences. In addition, evaluation experts are sometimes willing to conduct evaluation free of charge as a form of community service and graduate

students with an interest in evaluation may be willing to lend a hand to fulfill degree requirements.

Basic Types of Program Evaluation

There are many types of program evaluation, more than can be discussed adequately in this short publication, but for purposes of evaluating small, community-based HIV prevention projects, the most commonly used are *process* and *outcome* evaluations (for more comprehensive information on evaluation, see USCM's publication "Evaluation for HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs.")

Process Evaluation

Definition

Process evaluation examines the *implementation* of a project. It documents what services were delivered, how they were delivered, and who received them. This information can be used to determine how well the project was managed, provide valuable feedback to project staff, and demonstrate to funders that the activities promised in the proposal were delivered in the manner described in the proposal. Of the two types of evaluation described here, process evaluation is generally the easier to conduct because it relies on information that is fairly easy to obtain, that frequently already exists, and that can be built into regular project activities.

Types of questions asked in process evaluation

- How many clients were reached by the intervention? (e.g., how many individuals were contacted during street outreach, how many attended each prevention workshop?)
- What was the demographic profile of the clients served? (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age, HIV risk factor, HIV status, etc.)
- What type of services were provided? (e.g., condom distribution, prevention case management counseling, HIV testing counseling, prevention workshops)
- How many times were the services provided? (e.g., number of condoms distributed, number of: street outreach contacts made, number of referrals to HIV testing, number of one-on-one counseling sessions held)
- How much time was involved in providing each service? (e.g., minutes spent on each street outreach encounter, duration of each prevention workshop)



Don't worry about developing the "perfect" evaluation design because there is no such thing. Just concentrate on designing the best evaluation you can with the resources you have available.

- Were there any difficulties involved in providing the services?
- What factors made it easier to implement the project?
- Were clients pleased with the quality of the services offered?
- Were project goals and objectives met; were they met on schedule?

Sources of information for process evaluation

Many organizations routinely gather information about their clients and services that can be used as the basis for a process evaluation, such as client intake forms and workshop evaluations. Before developing an evaluation plan, project planners should assess what types of information is *already* being collected and determine *what else* needs to be collected. It is not necessary to spend a lot of time designing data collection forms; in many cases, you can use existing forms that have been successfully used by your own or other organizations and tailor them to your needs.

Below are examples of types of data that can be used in process evaluation.

- client registration/intake forms
- participant sign-up sheets
- participant recruitment logs
- outreach encounter logs and diaries
- referral forms
- staff notes
- routine project documentation
- workshop evaluation forms
- client satisfaction surveys
- interviews with staff and clients
- observation of client services

Outcome Evaluation

Definition

Outcome evaluation looks at the *effects* of a project. It is used to determine whether any changes occurred in the target population *as a result of* the project (e.g., an increase in knowledge about HIV prevention; changes in HIV risk-related beliefs, attitudes and/or behaviors). In HIV prevention, most outcome evaluations conducted by community-based organizations focus on the *short-term* effects of an intervention since long-term behavior change requires a more complex methodology (e.g., follow-up interviews with a sample of the population over an extended period of time) and additional funding.

Types of questions asked in outcome evaluation

- Was there any *immediate* change in knowledge, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and skills of participants as a result of the intervention? If yes, what changes occurred and by what amount? (quality and quantity of improvement)
- Were there any differences in the effects of an intervention on one group as compared to another (e.g., between older and younger clients)?
- What benefits did clients report as a result of participating in the project?
- Were there any unexpected or unintended results of the project?

Sources of information for outcome evaluation

Below are examples of types of data that can be used in outcome evaluation.

- pre- and post-intervention questionnaires assessing changes in clients' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors
- focus group data
- observation of client behavior (e.g., correct use of bleach to clean needles) before/after intervention

Sample Evaluation Plan

There are many different ways to prepare an evaluation plan and no single “right” way. The following sample evaluation plan walks the reader through the steps involved in writing an evaluation plan for a hypothetical project that provides HIV/AIDS and risk reduction information to adolescents attending a runaway/homeless youth facility in an inner-city neighborhood. The intervention will be delivered through theatrical presentations featuring peer actors recruited through local high-school acting classes. Theatrical presentations will be held in conjunction with youth facility activities (e.g., meal functions, health screenings), which typically attract small groups of 10-20 runaway/homeless youth. The examples provided here are kept simple on purpose; in real life, an evaluation plan will be more complex.

Step 1 – Project Goal

State the goal of your project. The goal is a general statement of what your project hopes to accomplish.

EX. To increase awareness about HIV, its transmission, and its prevention among youth residing in a runaway/homeless youth facility in the inner city section of Anytown, U.S.A.

Step 2 – Project Objectives

State the project objectives(s). These must define: the *process* (i.e., type of intervention or services) to be provided and the expected *outcome* (i.e., effects and benefits) that will result.

The *first step* in writing objectives is to define an acceptable level of success for each individual objective. For example, you might ask yourself “How many clients can I reasonably expect to reach during the project period?” (process objective) or “How much of an improvement in skills and knowledge can I reasonably expect clients to demonstrate after attending the planned workshops?” (outcome objective).

The *next step* is to turn those answers into objectives that are **specific**, **time-phased**, and **measurable**. Objectives should be stated in **quantifiable** terms—that is, they should use numbers to measure success (e.g., numbers of clients you hope to reach, percentage of change in skills you hope clients will demonstrate). When writing outcome objectives, use action verbs—such as *to decrease*, *to increase*, *to reduce*, *to expand*—and express the degree of desired change in percentages (e.g., 30% increase in condom use skills). Finally, be realistic about what project staff can accomplish during the specified time frame and don’t promise more than they can deliver.

EX. *Process Objective:* To provide 270 runaway/homeless youth ages 12-18 [who, how many] with HIV risk reduction information [what] through a 45-minute theatrical presentation [how] within a six-month period [when].

Outcome Objective: At the conclusion of each 45-minute theatrical presentation [by when], participants will demonstrate an average pre-post test gain in knowledge [desired outcome] of at least 70% [how much] on a competency test [how measured] on modes of transmission of HIV infection and risk reduction behaviors.

Step 3 - Project Activities

Describe, briefly, the specific activities that will be conducted in carrying out the project objectives. Carefully select from your work plan *only those activities that you want to evaluate*. These should be the *core activities* that are necessary to implementing the project objectives, not routine administrative activities.

- EX.** *Activities related to the **process** objective:*
1. Develop a theatrical presentation workshop using peer actors to deliver the HIV/AIDS information. This includes writing a script and developing a curriculum.
 2. Recruit peer actors from local high-school theater classes and train them.
 3. Hold 3-4 presentations per month over the last six months of the project.
- Activities related to the **outcome** objective:*
1. Develop a pre-post test questionnaire to measure knowledge of modes of HIV transmission and risk reduction behaviors.
 2. Pilot test theatrical presentation and questionnaire with members of the target population to determine if any changes are needed.
 3. Before each presentation, administer the questionnaire to audience members.
 4. Following each performance, administer the questionnaire to audience members.
 5. Analyze results of the pre-post tests to measure gains in knowledge.

Step 4 - Data Types and Sources

Decide on the *types of data (information)* you need to determine whether you have met the project objectives (see Step 2) and the *source of that data*. What information is needed? Data can be quantitative (numerical) or qualitative (descriptive)—usually both types are needed. What persons, records, or instruments can provide that information? What’s the best way to collect the information? Select sources of data that provide the most useful information with the least disruption to project activities.

- EX.** *Data types and sources for process objective:*
- number and demographic characteristics of youth attending theatrical presentation workshop (data type) > demographic questionnaire handed out at beginning of each workshop (data source)
 - number of presentations held, dates, times and places (data type) > project records (data source)
- Data types and sources for outcome objective:*
- results of pre-post test administered to audience members at all theatrical workshop presentations (data type) > pre-post test questionnaires administered to audience members (data source)

Step 5 - Evaluation Timetable

Describe your timetable for the evaluation. List each evaluation activity, *by when* or at what stages in the project each one will be completed, and *who* will be responsible for collecting the information.

EX.

Activity	When Conducted	Responsibility
administer knowledge test	before/after each theatrical presentation	Project Coordinator

What Funders Look for in the Evaluation Plan

- *The evaluation plan flows logically from the objectives specified in the work plan.* The evaluation plan should be based on the objectives in the work plan. If you have written your original objectives well, you can just plug them into your evaluation plan.
- *Your evaluation plan promises to provide solid evidence of your project's effectiveness.* Funders understand that most community-based organizations have limited resources to conduct evaluation. However, they still want to see that an applicant organization is making a sincere effort to assess how closely it has come to meeting project objectives. For funders, evaluation is not about “proving” the success or failure of a project; it's about documenting and learning from the experience of implementing a project. Therefore, funders will look closely at your evaluation plan to see whether you are planning to conduct both process and outcome objectives, whether you are making a reasonable effort to collect appropriate and sufficient information throughout the project period, and to clarify what your interventions have achieved.
- *The evaluation plan is detailed and specific.* The more details you can provide about what you will evaluate and how you will evaluate it, the better. Describe the objectives you plan to evaluate, the methods and types of information you will collect, the timing of each evaluation activity, and who will be conducting the activity. This reassures reviewers that your organization understands exactly what is involved in carrying out an evaluation.
- *The evaluation plan is realistic and feasible.* Evaluation can be very expensive and time-consuming. Reviewers like evaluation plans that seem “doable” given the amount of the grant, the duration of the funding period, the type of project, and the resources available to the applicant organization.

6. Budget

The budget lists and justifies the costs of implementing the proposed project.

Although the proposal budget is usually not scored by reviewers, it may influence—for better or worse—their impressions of your proposal. In fact, the budget is the first section of the proposal that some reviewers look at because it provides important clues about the applicant agency and the proposed program. A carefully prepared budget that contains reasonable costs that are clearly related to the proposed project can enhance the impact of your proposal. Similarly, a budget that is sloppy, that contains costs that have nothing to do with the proposed project or omits costs clearly required by the project, or that has costs that are too high or too low, may put off reviewers. Therefore, it is important to approach the budget as seriously as you would any other part of the proposal. **Remember, however, that a proposal budget is only an estimate and will probably be changed during the negotiation process if your proposal is funded.**

The format of a budget depends on the requirements of the funding source and your organization's own accounting practices. Generally speaking, governmental funding sources require the most information and frequently provide you with specific budget forms to complete. Private foundations usually have less detailed requirements but nevertheless appreciate a carefully prepared budget. Because there are many different ways of preparing a budget and no single “right” way, a sample budget is not presented here. Instead, we discuss steps that should be taken to prepare a thorough budget and offer general pointers on what funders look for when reviewing proposal budgets. We recognize that the person writing the proposal is not always the same as the person preparing the proposal budget. However, we offer detailed information on important aspects of budget preparation because the primary writer of the proposal should ensure that the budget adequately supports the proposed project.



As you calculate estimated expenditures for each budget line item, don't forget to account for anticipated future expenses such as increases in rent or salaries that may occur during the project period.

Getting Ready to Do a Budget

1. Begin by reading the budget section in the funding announcement carefully and noting any special instructions. See whether the funder provides you with a specific budget format; if a specific format is required or recommended, follow it exactly, even if it is not the way your organization normally prepares budgets. Look carefully to see whether the funder has any restrictions on funding certain items or services. For example, some funders will not pay for *capital costs* (costs related to purchasing a long-lasting physical asset) such as construction costs or the purchase of office equipment. The federal government also has restrictions on paying for such things as meals, beverages, and drug injection equipment. USCM, because of its focus on funding HIV prevention rather than the care and treatment of people infected with HIV, will not pay for medical, laboratory, or psychiatric services.
2. Go back and read the Proposed Program section of your proposal from beginning to end. As you read, make a list of all the staff who will be involved in implementing the project, whether they will be paid staff working full- or part-time on the project, consultants, or unpaid volunteers. Next to each staff position, write the percentage of time to be spent on each position (e.g., 100%, 15%). (You can also express this information



Keep copies of all the backup materials you used to come up with the figures contained in your budget, including cost estimates, notes, mathematical calculations, and adding machine tape. That way, if you have to make any changes in the budget, you will know how you came up with your original figures.

as a decimal of a Full-time Employee or FTE—e.g., 0.75 FTE or 1.00 FTE). Finally, remember to include or make allowances for fringe benefits (e.g., health insurance, payroll taxes) for employees who will be receiving them. In some cases, fringe benefits can be quite high, say as high as 40 percent of an employee's salary, which will affect how much your organization can afford to pay for each position. Fringe benefits may be itemized and charged at their actual cost or lumped together and charged as a percentage of salary.

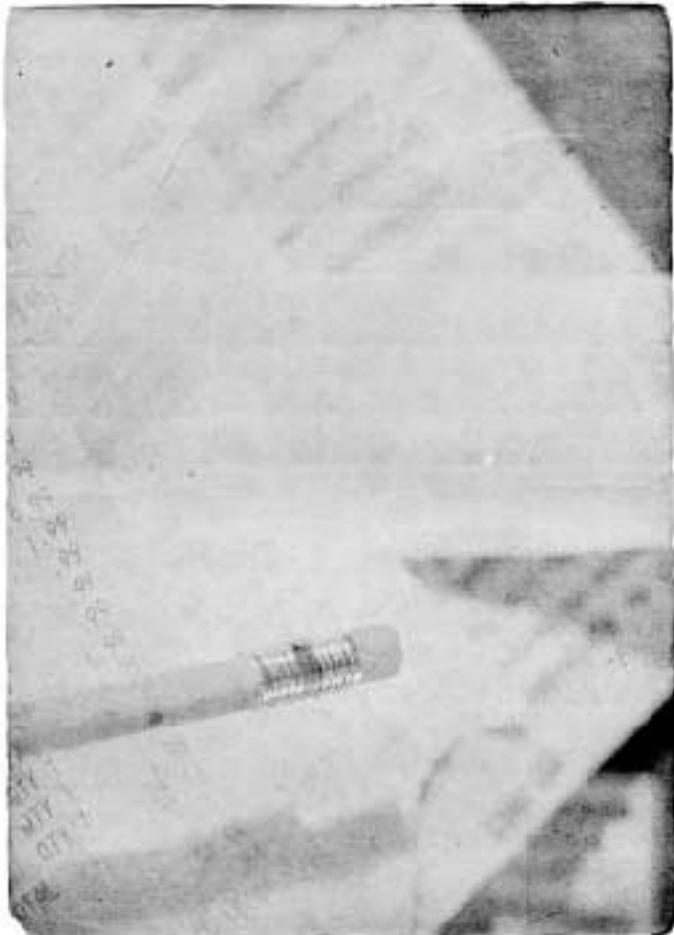
3. Next, make a list of each activity and service mentioned in the Proposed Program section. Are there any specific costs attached to these? For example, if you plan to conduct prevention workshops, will you be serving any snacks or providing participants with stipends? If you're planning to hold educational events featuring expert speakers, will you be paying the speakers a fee? If your project involves regular street outreach, will you have to purchase condoms, lube, bleach kits and other prevention supplies? How are you planning to promote your project? For example, will you be printing any promotional materials such as brochures? Will you be advertising in any local publications? Next to each activity, list its estimated cost based on past expenditures for similar items or estimates provided to you by vendors.



Have someone compare the budget against the Proposed Program to make sure that the numbers listed in each section are consistent with each other. For example, if you state in the Proposed Program section that you will hold six prevention workshops during the project period, make sure that the budget contains expenses for exactly six.

4. Then, make a list of all one-time or occasional expenses related to your project such as purchase of computers or other office equipment (if allowed by the funder), staff travel to an annual HIV/AIDS conference, or staff training. Again, list the estimated cost based on past experience or by asking for estimates from vendors.

5. Next, make a list of all ongoing organizational expenses that are essential to the running of your project but that cannot be easily separated from a larger total and assigned to a specific project. These might include rent, telephone, utilities, postage, and equipment rental. There are basically two ways to list these expenses in a budget: as *direct* or *indirect* costs (see box entitled “What Are Direct and Indirect Costs?” for a more detailed explanation of the two). A cost may be either direct or indirect depending on how an organization decides to treat it. For example, one organization may treat office supplies as a direct cost and charge the actual cost of purchased supplies to a specific project; another may treat it as an indirect cost and charge a set percentage each month for office supplies. The decision of whether to treat a cost as direct or indirect depends on the likelihood that a funder will reimburse for those charges. Before you decide whether to make certain costs direct or indirect,



find out what the funder's definition is of direct and indirect costs and what is an allowable indirect rate. This information may be included in the funding announcement; if it isn't, you should call the funder directly to clarify the matter.

6. Remember to list in-kind expenses—if you have any. In-kind expenses are non-monetary donations to your project of such things as volunteer time, staff time, equipment, supplies, and office space. They can be donated by other programs within your organization or by outside sources. Generally speaking, key project activities should not be assigned to in-kind employees. Create a second column for in-kind expenses.
7. Come up with an initial total. If a funding announcement states an *average* or *maximum* grant amount for which you can apply, be careful not to exceed that amount or you may run the risk of having the proposal disqualified without even being read. In some cases, you may have to modify the work plan to keep the total cost of the project within the range of available funding. Be careful, however, not to cut out too many key project activities or personnel in order to balance the budget or you may jeopardize the quality of the proposed project.

Sustainability. Some funders, particularly private foundations, are concerned about the long-term sustainability of your proposed project. In other words, they want to make sure that if they invest in your project, they are investing in something that will still be around in a few years. If you're addressing this issue, describe how you plan to obtain additional funds to continue the project in the future.

What Are Direct and Indirect Costs?

- *Direct* costs are those that are related to a specific project. They are listed as separate line items in your budget. Common direct costs include personnel, fringe benefits, travel, materials, supplies, and rent. These costs may have to be separately documented on a regular basis to meet financial reporting requirements. In situations where you share direct costs with other programs within your organization, you will need to assign a percentage of costs to your project and justify the percentage. Rent, for example, may be a shared cost of various projects sharing the same offices. The percentage of rent assigned to a given project might be based on the number of staff employed by that project relative to your total staff, or to the amount of space required by that project relative to the total space being rented, or to the percentage of your total budget represented by the project. Similar formulas could be used for a variety of shared costs. **The important thing is that you explain in the Budget Justification section *how* you calculated the formula for specific shared costs.**
- *Indirect* costs are associated with the general operation of an organization and are usually shared by two or more projects. These can include such expenses as rent, utilities, insurance, equipment usage, administrative oversight and accounting services. Indirect costs are not listed as separate line items, but are usually expressed as a percentage (called the *indirect cost rate*) of the direct costs of a project. Calculating

indirect costs (also sometimes called “overhead”) can be an extremely complicated process. On the other hand, the benefit of charging an indirect cost is that it is a more efficient use of time to charge shared costs than to determine the exact cost of each item used in a project and charge it separately. Some funders are generous with how much they will allow you to charge for indirect costs. Others allow no indirect costs or put a limit on how much you can charge for indirect costs. If yours is a small organization with limited funds, you may want to consider whether it is worth your while to apply for funding from a funder that does not allow indirect costs.

Calculating indirect costs. Some organizations—usually large, established ones that routinely apply for federal grants—have gone through the process of negotiating a Federal *indirect cost rate*. Others may have indirect rates approved by state or local governments. If your organization uses an indirect cost rate, you will have to state somewhere in the budget section what that rate is, what costs are included in the rate, and how you calculated the indirect percentage you want to claim. Even if this information is not specifically requested in the funding announcement, be prepared to provide it at a later point. The items included in the indirect cost rate should not be listed again under “Direct Costs.” If necessary, ask funders for guidance on this question before you draw up your budget.

What Funders Look for in the Budget

- *A clear match between proposed activities and proposed expenditures.* Every item in your budget should relate directly back to your work plan. There should be no inconsistencies or surprises in the budget. One common pitfall is to introduce a line item in the budget for an expenditure that does not appear in the work plan. Another is to propose an activity in the Proposed Program section and then neglect to provide financial support for that activity in the budget.
- *Reasonable and realistic estimates of expected costs.* A budget that contains reasonable costs shows the reviewer that the applicant organization knows what it will cost to do the job right. Underestimating expenditures may suggest to the reviewers that your organization is inexperienced. Overestimating expenditures may raise suspicions that you may be unnecessarily “padding” the budget to cover expenses not related to the project.
- *Adequate justification for all expenditures.* Even if it’s not required, include a Budget Justification (also known as a Budget Narrative) that explains in narrative form what each line item is for and how you calculated the cost of that item. This is also the place to explain how a particular cost that seems to be unrelated to the project or appears to be too high in fact supports the goals of the project.
- *Appropriate staffing of project.* Budgets offer important clues to reviewers about how you plan to staff a project, particularly when staffing details are not discussed in the Proposed Program section. Red flags may go up for reviewers if the number of staff assigned to a project seems too small to carry it out properly or if key staff are not being paid enough or are working less than full-time. (It is often a problem to find qualified staff who can be satisfied with a part-time salary.) Similarly, reviewers may question the honesty of your organization if it looks like project funds will be used to pay for staff positions that are unrelated to the proposed project.
- *Accuracy.* If the numbers in the budget do not add up and the budget gives the impression that it was done in a hurry without being double-checked, your organization may lose some credibility in the eyes of reviewers.



7. Appendix

The Appendix section is where you put documents required by your funder, such as evidence of your non-profit status. It is also a good place to put additional information that you want the funder to read but that would take up too much space within the main body of the proposal. Following are some general pointers for preparing an Appendix.

Dos and Don'ts for the Appendix

DO read the funder's instructions about required attachments very carefully and be sure to include everything that is asked for. Some funders will disqualify a proposal if certain required documentation is not included.

DON'T include materials that are bound or stapled (e.g., brochures, three-ring binders) because this will make copying the proposal difficult. (Remember that many proposals are read by several reviewers and that copies have to be made for each one).

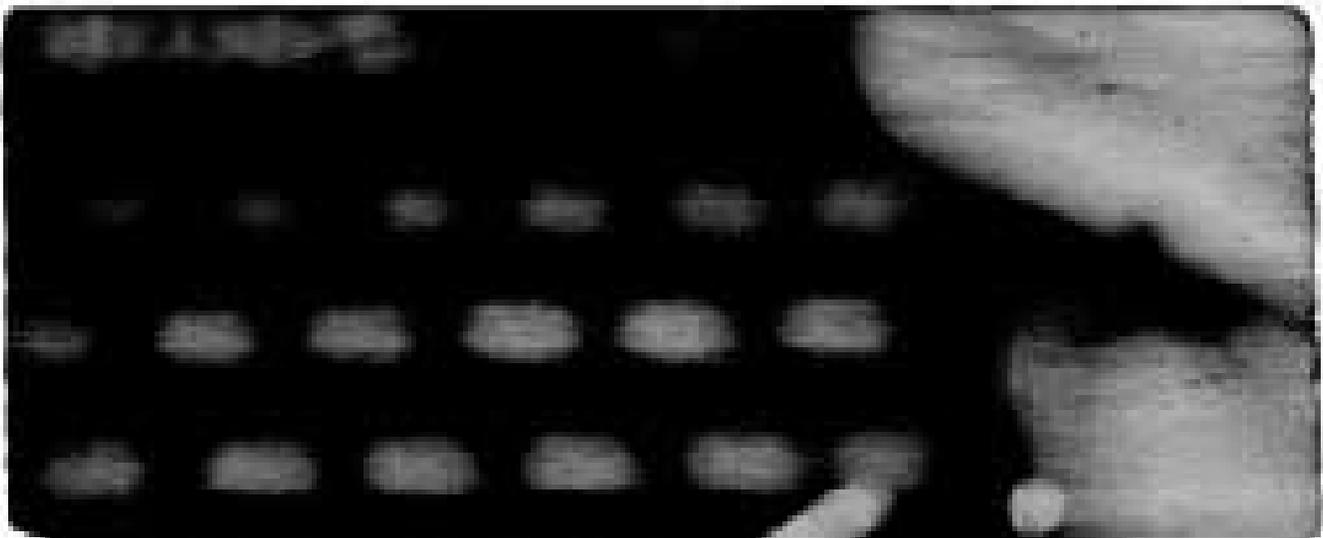
DO make sure that all photocopied items are legible. Often documents that have been photocopied over and over become too faded to read accurately.

DON'T include anything that is not required by your funder or that is not carefully chosen to help you make your case for funding. An appendix that is too heavy and full of irrelevant documents that nobody has time to read will just annoy reviewers.

DO check the dates on dated documents to make sure that they are current. This is particularly important if you're including letters of support. Generic letters of support are not as strong as letters of support for a specific proposal, and reviewers will notice the difference.

DO make it easy for reviewers to locate documents in the Appendix. Include a table of contents for the Appendix section (either on a separate page or integrated into the proposal's overall table of contents) that tells the reader what items are included and where to find them. Ideally, you should number all the pages in the Appendix—by hand if necessary. It is also helpful to reviewers if you divide the Appendix into sections and include dividers or tabs identifying each section.

DO direct the reader to appendix items mentioned in the main body of the proposal by writing something like "See Attachment 3 for more information."



Before You Send the Proposal: A Checklist

- ***Follow funders' instructions exactly.*** Make sure your proposal follows all instructions related to the organization and formatting of the proposal such as section titles, margin width, type size, page limitations, page order and numbering, and the inclusion of a table of contents and abstract page. Following directions is even more important in matters of content, such as limitations on grant amounts, restrictions on specific kinds of activities or expenditures, and all criteria that determine eligibility.
 - ***Pay attention to proposal deadlines.*** Check whether the deadline is for the postmark date or date for receiving the proposal. Whichever the case, send the proposal by a carrier or service that will absolutely guarantee that the deadline will be met. (If the proposal must be received by a certain date, sending it by regular mail is rarely a good idea; no matter how early you send it, there can always be delays.) Check the address you are mailing to very carefully; a wrong number in a zip code or street number can delay the proposal and cause you to miss the deadline.
 - ***Make time to edit the proposal.*** Sloppy, poorly written proposals are unlikely to succeed. Typos, misspellings, grammatical errors, unclear sentences, and sections that have been copied from other documents and inserted into your proposal without being properly integrated into it give the impression that the proposal was rushed or, worse, that the applicant organization is not very professional. For some reviewers such mistakes can create a bad first impression that may be hard to overcome. (You are trying, after all, to inspire confidence in your abilities.) They can also make the proposal so frustrating to read that reviewers miss important information or lose interest in the substance of the proposal. Someone other than the main writer of the proposal should read the proposal from beginning to end to check for errors and clarity of meaning. (Note: running
- Spellcheck on your computer is not enough; a reference to a "peace of paper" may not be flagged by the program, but reviewers will certainly notice the error.)
- ***Make sure all sections of the proposal are consistent with each other.*** Often different people prepare different sections of a proposal and due to time constraints no one checks each section to make sure that it agrees with the other sections. Or last-minute changes are made to one section without adjusting related sections to reflect those changes. For example, if you originally propose in the Program narrative to hold a series of eight workshops and later decide to scale back to only six, you should go back and change the original number wherever it appears in the work plan (e.g., budget, timetable, evaluation plan). This may be hard to do at the last minute, but such inconsistencies will count against your proposal. Again, asking someone other than the main writer of the proposal read it from beginning to end to make sure that all parts are consistent with each other should help you avoid this common pitfall.
 - ***Check the appendix to make sure it includes all required attachments.*** Often funders require certain attachments such as audit statements or evidence of your organization's 501(c)3 (tax exempt) status that, if left out, may disqualify your proposal.



Resources

Proposal Writing Guides

The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing (1997). Jane C. Geever, Patricia McNeill. Rev. ed.

The Program Development Puzzle: How to Make the Pieces Fit (1997). Support Center for NonProfit Management/National Minority AIDS Council. (Currently being updated).

Winning Grants: Step by Step (2002). Mim Carlson, The Alliance for Nonprofit Management. 2nd ed.

Online Proposal Writing Resources

Proposal Writing Short Course. The Foundation Center. <http://fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html>

Program development and grant writing information listed under Resource Development. MOSAICA: The Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism. <http://www.mosaica.org/resources.html>

Grant Writing Tutorial. National Minority AIDS Council. http://www.nmac.org/tech_assistance/Grant_Modules/grant_welcome.asp

Evaluation

Evaluating HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs in Community-Based Organizations (1993, 1995). National AIDS Fund.

Evaluation: Maximizing Your Prevention Efforts (1999). Dr. Charlene Day, National Minority AIDS Council. (Currently being updated).

Evaluation for HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs. US Conference of Mayors Technical Assistance Report. December 1990. (Currently being updated).

Theory and Program Design

"Can HIV Prevention Programs Be Adapted?" Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS), University of California, San Francisco. Fact Sheet #23E.

"What Is The Role of Theory in HIV Prevention?" Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS), University of California, San Francisco. Fact Sheet #14E.

Compendium of HIV Prevention Interventions with Evidence of Effectiveness (1999, rev.). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV/AIDS Prevention Research Synthesis Project.

Preventing AIDS: Theories and Methods of Behavioral Interventions (1994). Di Clemente RJ (ed). New York, NY: Plenum Press.

"Preventing HIV Infection: What Does the Empirical Literature Say About Programs, Outcomes, Implications and Research Directions?" Kyung-Hee Choi and Thomas J. Coates, 1995.

Writing

"Introducing Plain Language and Plain English." MOSAICA: The Center for Nonprofit Development and Pluralism. (<http://www.mosaica.org/intropl.pdf>).



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