

Making Life Easier for Grantees: A Common Proposal Format

For more information on this project, aimed at developing a common proposal format for international grantmakers, contact Cynthia Steele at csteele@empowerweb.org.

Workshop materials

Workshop agenda

- 10:45 Intro
 - Purpose and plans for session
 - Intros by all in room

 - Icebreaker, in pairs and report out:
 - What is the hardest question to give/get good input on a grant application form?
 - What question should be asked that too infrequently isn't?
- 11:15 Share key results of grantee survey: powerpoint
Perspective from a grantee: Angela Petruso
- 11:40 Input on our tough questions and theirs (per icebreaker exercise)
(in small groups if group size is large?), and report back.
- 12:15 Hand out draft format.
Brainstorm on how to broaden the list of those using common application, and ascertain who in room is interested in being involved
- 12:25 Closure including next steps

COMMON PROPOSAL FORMAT; DRAFT OF 5/22/06

I. CONTACT INFORMATION

1. Date of Application:
2. Name of organization to which grant would be given:
3. Address (give both mailing and physical address if these are different):
4. Fax:
Email:
Website (if any):
5. Name of head of organization (legal signatory):
6. Contact person for proposal and title:

II. NARRATIVE – 10 pages maximum (devote the most space to Funding Request)

A. ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

1. Date the organization was founded and its current mission:
2. Please list several of important accomplishments in the recent past:
3. Current major programs:
4. Number of paid staff (indicating how many are full-time and part-time) and the gender breakdown (% women, % men).

B. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

1. What is the organizational budget for this year?
2. How much funding have you raised toward this budget to date? Please complete the following:

Donor	Grant Amount	Date of Grant Period	Purpose of Grant

3. What was the total amount the organization spent last year? Please explain any significant change in the organization's budget in the past year.

C. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE COMMUNITY

1. Describe the community in which your organization works. What are the specific needs or problems you are trying to address? What are other organizations doing to address these problems and what gaps remain? What are the socioeconomic conditions for the population you serve (for example, levels of literacy, employment, average monthly income)?

D. REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

1. Please describe the work for which you are requesting funds. Describe who it will serve, and the problems or opportunities it addresses. Are the funds for a new program, an ongoing program, expansion of an existing program, or for general support?
2. How will the work advance the organization's mission? What qualifies your organization to undertake this work? Give examples of how you are a leader in this area.
3. What results do you expect to see if the work is successful? Please be as concrete as possible.

4. What are the major activities planned to accomplish these results? Provide a timeline for the work for which you are requesting funds, indicating when the major activities will be carried out and when you expect them to be completed.
5. What are the main challenges you anticipate and how are you thinking to address these?
6. Explain if and how the community is involved in the design, implementation or evaluation of the program. What is its planned role? Describe the anticipated long-term effect of the project on the community served.
7. Please explain how you will measure the effectiveness of your activities. Describe your criteria for a successful program (what indicators will you use to assess the impact of the project?)

III. BUDGET

1. Please provide a budget for the work or project for which you are requesting funds. If using local currency, indicate the exchange rate used (in US dollars). Indicate in a separate column funding that is already in hand for any budget line items. Double-check that line items in the budget have been described in the project description (for example, if costs for a training are in the budget, the purpose and plan for the training should be described in the narrative).
2. Provide budget notes explaining the cost basis for any item if it is not obvious (for example, is a staff salary for a full time or part time person).
3. List any significant in-kind contributions (volunteer staff, free services, or material donations). List any revenue expected from income-generating activities, fees for service, or membership dues.

IV. REQUIRED APPENDICES

1. A list of your Board of Directors, indicating their primary job/position.
2. One paragraph resumes of up to 5 key staff (executive director and any staff directly involved with implementing this program), including qualifications relevant to the specific request.

Report on a grantee survey of the draft proposal format

This survey was sent in late March to 11 grantee partners in different regions, each funded by one or in most cases several of the following foundations involved in the harmonization project: American Jewish World Service, Banyan Tree Foundation, EMpower, Global Fund for Children. Thanks to AJWS for compiling the responses.

Their comments follow (we have scrubbed out identifiers of either the source or, if named, the donor to whom they refer).

The survey follows below (each box represents a different response).

We recently met with several of our colleagues in the international grantmaking field to discuss how we might work together to make the process easier for you, our grantees. The organizations that have engaged in this discussion include the and ourselves; these organizations are funders who have a common interest in simplifying and improving the proposal and reporting process. Grantmakers without Borders also has an interest in this streamlining and is participating in this process. To this end, we are considering how we might streamline parts of the proposal and reporting process through a set of common guidelines, questions and reporting forms. Your thoughtful responses to the following questions will help us greatly as we explore how we might collaboratively overcome challenges related to the international grantmaking process.

1. What might we, as donors, do to make reporting and proposals easier to complete? (This can include how we communicate our requirements, simplifying instructions and forms, etc.)

<p>It would be most valuable for us to know how our reports are used. Who reads them? Who gets the information? Is our 'grants officer' the key audience or is your board or the public? It would also be helpful to have simplified forms for regular reports and then a freer form for end of grant reports. I know some grantors do this for their regular reports (e.g. ___ has four-five standard pages and a few questions) and we have found that easy to comply with. The 'meat' of the information can then be relayed to our grants officer in face to face or phone conversations. Conversations help us to get to know you better and encourage a more open relationship, than written reports.</p>
<p>Communication should be made in good time and deadlines well set. For instance one month for proposal writing and one month notification for report writing. Simplifying the report and proposal formats would make this work easier.</p>
<p>We find your reporting structure clear and concise, and easy to understand.</p>
<p>A format for project proposal and Reporting would be easier for us to complete. In the absence of such format the organization may fails to meet all the requirements that the donor agency expect. In addition the organization will be reporting / proposing a project in a self prepared format. In that case the donor agency may ask for more clarification for better understanding. By a particular format by the donor agency the above said difficulty can be avoided.</p>
<p>En realidad los formatos de ustedes son bastantes sencillos, no son excesivos y son bastante considerados con el tiempo y pacientes cuando nos atrasamos.</p>
<p>Up to my knowledge the ___ funding proposal form is the simplest and very much informative from the funders side. Required information must be in question and answer method. You can give little space for their own writings about their award and specialty.</p>
<p>It is good for donors to harmonize what they require from the grant receivers and develop common formats and instruments. This will ease the workload on implementing partner agencies.</p>
<p>You might ask the grantee partners to report in a standardized reporting format, formulated jointly by the above organisations. Frequent changing of the format means duplication of work and time. Perhaps you can ask each orgnisation to develop a reporting /proposal format and this could be</p>

<p>reviewed by you to see it fulfills your information requirements. It should perhaps include 1. Planning of the activities, 2. Activities - target vs. Achievement, 3. Process of evaluation and monitoring 4. Problems encountered and solutions found, 5. Impact on the beneficiaries and 6. Case studies. We prefer to give more objective and less subjective answers</p>
<p>Simplifying forms with relevant example (Just like the one you mentioned in the bracketed Question 1) Normally we have some communication gaps. So you could also list out the areas that partners not understand and these can be clarified Sometimes if the proposal is very brief it reduces the workload but at the same time it is difficult to express the idea in a very short form unless we have a very high fluency in English. There should be no space limit. It would also be helpful if a workshop is conducted on log frames and also on the reporting requirements then both parties will understand and can communicate effectively.</p>
<p>If you could synchronize the reporting forms and timing , we could further simplify the reporting format by structuring it and limiting the page numbers.</p>
<p>Not asking us to fill out surveys like this!! (HAHA) Seriously, I don't have time to do this justice...a phone conversation would have been easier.</p>

2. What is your favorite (or easiest-to-answer) question in one of our proposals?

<p>We find questions about our process and how we achieve change to be the most interesting and telling. Our process is key to our success and we enjoy clarifying it and explaining it for our funders.</p>
<p>Quantitative questions are always easy to answer.</p>
<p>The biographies are the best part! They are really the true testaments to the work allowed by the funding.</p>
<p>Neither we feel the questions are difficult nor we feel they are easier. But still we feel that the objectives and highlights of the project are easier to answer when compared to others because the organization has a clear cut idea for what the project is being implemented for. Hence it is easier to answer the objectives.</p>
<p>La parte que más tiene sentido para mi es cuando anexamos la biografía de una de las socias, es decir de las mujeres campesinas de la Amazonía. Y lo es porque considero que es sumamente importante incorporar sus voces de manera directa en los documentos.</p>
<p>About our partner; about our achievements; about the inputs and outputs; vision and mission; budget.</p>
<p>The organizational description parts and the project information part of the standard proposal form is the easiest part although other parts of the proposal form are not difficult except the project evaluation part.</p>
<p>Please describe the progress of your project, detailing the significant activities you have undertaken during the reporting period.</p>
<p>Community participation is the easiest and also favorite one to answer, as we are very clear about how the community is going to participate and what would be their shared responsibility in the development process.</p>
<p>Major accomplishments of the organization and the planned activities, Goals and objectives for proposed project.</p>
<p>I like ___'s question about political and social context because it really helps us engage in a conversation.</p>

3. What do you find to be the most difficult question(s) to answer? Why?

<p>The most challenging questions tend to be those that ask us how we include men. Working with large groups, male and female, is critical to our program and we have managed to build good relationships with men in all areas of our work. It is difficult to capture in a short question why we are confident that while our program targets women, it neither excludes men nor antagonizes them. We often find that the wording of these questions presumes that this is an add-on to our</p>

program and we find it a challenge to explain the centrality of men and women of all ages and abilities to our work.
We have so far not found difficulties in report reporting with the organizations we are working with except where we are requested to measure the impact of the program. This is so because the impact assessment is on different levels due to insufficient skills to do so.
Deciding which "significant activities" as all activities are significant
Activities Achievements and its profile are very easy to answer for me.
El impacto siempre es una pregunta compleja de responder porque tiene muchos aspectos.
I do not find any difficult to answer question. Because some time if the question is difficult I am refereeing to my volunteer and answering the question. To me more than 10 volunteers are ready to fill the form on line.
In the standard proposal form the project evaluation part is little bit a difficult one. It because there is not clear whether the long frame work or description of each activity performance. Evaluation is required as it is deal with in the descriptions of activities. If so it seems duplicative .This needs improvement for future although not difficult
In the Renewal Proposal Form Q. No 6.d. ii Please discuss (if applicable) how the regional, national or global socio-economic and /or political climate has affected the target community. It is very difficult gauge how the community has been affected by the national / global socio-economic-political climate .as issues which concern the slum community are nearer home – food, shelter, education, gender justice, drugs, alcoholism etc.
In your proposal we did not find any difficult question(AJWS, GFC, Net Aid) but in some of the proposals we find it difficult to complete the log frame. Very few people in the organizations can do Kindly refer to our suggestion in point number 1.
Monitoring and evaluation, (how to measure success), most of our programs a qualitative and we a the pioneers in some areas , so some times we find un-intend results that we did not measure during the reporting period and yet they have made a big change in the communities
List all current donors is a pain...financial statements or annual reports should suffice.

4. In order for us to get a sense of your overall workload and timeline regarding your funding, please list the required documents and reports you have due in the next six months to all your current donors.

THIS INFO IS NOT PROVIDED HERE, BUT WAS EXTENSIVE FOR EACH!

5. Would it lighten your workload if some of your donors used a common or streamlined proposal format and/or reporting guidelines? Please explain.

Yes - it would be great if we could share reports with multiple donors and then give one or two pages of specific information to each grant.
Our workload of reporting and proposal writing would greatly lightened if donors used common and streamlined formats. Because this will (1) Create common understanding of the project outcome, (2) it will create flexibility on both parties to attain effective proposal writing as well as on reporting.
Ys – one format would be great but is unlikely to happen
It would lighten our work load if some of the donors use a common streamlined proposal format or reporting guide lines. But we don't find any difficulty in reporting in different format. We prefer a common format for the child projects, tsunami projects and community welfare projects.
Si porque simplificaría nuestro trabajo y pudiéramos mandar uno solo para varias fundaciones.
To my case I do not have any problem at present in reporting and proposal format filling. I like to continue in the present style.
Yes, This really improves our work performance. It simply the work load. But sometimes the competition among donors and partners is handicap for such practice. If the donor agencies manage to harmonize their strategies this will help grass root partners particularly small community initiative to be more responsive in their interaction.
It will be very good if some of our donors used a common or streamlined proposal format and reporting guidelines. Working on different formats is time consuming and we have to maintain

several records and data which is mind boggling.
It would be very useful but there should be both common proposal and reporting formats. This would help us in designing field level reports for all our projects helping us to monitor the process and measure the results..
Yes, Because many times donors co-fund the same project so streamlining the format would simplify reporting and proposal writing . e.g. say donor A is funding half of the activities and donor B is funding the other half , if they have different formats you write the same project in two different formats and report in two different format doubling your work load
Those of us in the NGO world are pretty good at making interim and final reports based on mid-points in a calendar year that we cut and paste into different donor formats. Sometimes it is interesting to get a new question. ___ is excellent on both proposal and reporting formats—straightforward design and encourages qualitative information—they also remind you what to report on.

6. Please comment on reporting requirements. Is it helpful, and if so, how? How could the reporting process be more useful to your organization in assessing and documenting progress of its programs?

Reporting is a great learning tool for us as an organization and we take every opportunity to approach it as such. That said, the workload can mean that we simply don't have the time to involve all the key people in the organization. A great way to make the reporting more of a learning tool would be to make it more interactive. Possibly, if the written report was simpler and more standardized, conversations would help fill in the gaps and encourage greater analysis of the programme.
Report is very helpful to our program as we consider it to be one way of evaluating, monitoring and showing the impact of the program. Furthermore, it is a tool for accountability and transparency. It is also a tool for sharing experiences and lessons learnt. The report should both be quantitative and qualitative and specific issues such as lessons learnt, recommendations and challenges should also be reflected.
It is a useful process – a real check in for the work we are implanting and gives us an opportunity to assess the value of the work we do;.
The reporting requirements are helpful to the organization. From the organizations point of view, reporting is a self evaluation. Through reporting the organization can evaluate the work done, outcome, status, and the gaps that has to be strengthened. Thus planning can be done accordingly for the next phase. Reporting also helps to assess the development / growth of target group.
La verdad que aun cuando el formato de reportes es bastante sencillo y el quipo ha sido muy flexible cuando nos hemos atrasado en enviarlos a tiempo, si es una actividad que consume mucho de nuestro tiempo, sin embargo entendemos completamente que es una parte muy importante del procedimiento.
a) Documentation of all event; b) Participation of all staffs in report preparation and in this way helping smooth administration; c) Measurement of talents among staffs and reaching the goal; d) accountability to the partners and the Board; e) Time and goal setting – vision and mission operational measurements.
The reporting requirement is highly useful. It gives space for report writers to include relevant information that clearly depict the project performance. It is highly helpful to document important learning for the project. Moreover, the participant biography part has helped us to develop experiences on the case studies to clearly show the project achievements and impact of the project. It is useful to document life cases on the changes brought about by the project
Reporting is very useful because it helps us evaluate our work – the achievements and failures. It motivates us to see that the mistakes are not repeated again.
The reporting should both quantitative and qualitative aspects. If the internal systems are worked according to the donor reporting systems then it would be helpful. But as of now different donors have different requirements and it has been difficult to have some uniformity in the field reports. If the uniformity is there then the consolidation would also be much easier. Moreover there should be half

yearly and annual reports. The half yearly reports would provide the quantitative details where as the annual reports would provide qualitative details. The annual reports should have the log frame at the start of reporting and a report based on the objectively verifiable indicators, the contribution made to realize the goal, achievement in relation to the purpose mentioned in the project and the impact it has created.
The reporting requirements are very useful it helps to assess progress and also to focus the work. We explore more innovative ways of reporting like making short documentaries or DVD cause writing English is a big challenge for many of our stake holders e.g. traditional healers and yet we require reports from them.
Those of us in the NGO world are pretty good at making interim and final reports based on mid-points in a calendar year that we cut and paste into different donor formats. Sometimes it is interesting to get a new question. AJWS is excellent on both proposal and reporting formats—straightforward design and encourages qualitative information—they also remind you what to report on.

7. Give us a sense of the frequency of site-visits by donors. How often are you visited by representatives of grantmaking agencies? How could the planning of or actual visits be more productive and/or less time-consuming for your organization?

We regularly host grantmakers visits to our programs (up to four times a year) and we encourage them as a great way for us to learn about our grantmakers, meet the people involved in assessing our grants and to gain new insight into our work. There is little that can be done to make them less work except the obvious few things – more planning time, ensuring that the visit timing is suitable for all, ensuring that one programme or country does not have to bear the brunt of visits, etc. It would be good for grantmakers to see this as a critical part of the assessment of the grant and allow us to cover our costs accordingly.
There should be one visit within the project period and two visits where the project is co-funded. For every project period we have one visit by grant making agencies. It should be that the visiting grant making agency gives us a notice of two to three months in order to facilitate effective and adequate preparation. The visiting agency should specify a number of days to be spent in the project and specific out-comes.
We constantly inundated with individuals, funders and others who wish to visit our programmes.
The representatives from the donor agency visits once in a year. We would like to comment something in this regard. The number of visits by the donor agency has to be increased to make sure that the project is implemented in a proper way. It also helps the grant making agency to have a clear cut idea about the organization which helps for better analysis of the organization.
Recibimos al rededor de cuatro visitas al año. Nos ayuda saber con varios meses de anticipación las fechas, expectativas y detalles de las visitas. Dependiendo de la cantidad de gente que venga en la delegación y del tiempo que se queden nos ayuda que la visita pague por una persona para que se encargue exclusivamente de los detalles previos a la visita, eso permite que el equipo siga enfocado en su trabajo y sus obligaciones diarias sin distraerse. También nos ayuda cuando todos los gastos de las visitas de los donantes están cubiertas por ellos mismos (traslado a comunidades, traslado de mujeres desde sus comunidades al Centro de Capacitación Tambo, etc.). También nos ayuda cuando las visitas no coinciden con feriados nacionales no laborables en el Perú.
Donors visits normally well. But some time in the name of evaluation few people put us in very ugly stage. We met a very bad experience with (another donor) in the year 2002. Mostly once in a year we met representatives from grant making agencies. Actual visits can be less time consuming if it is well planned.
The visits of grant making agencies vary from organization to organization. In the case of agencies having office in the country, it is highly frequent. This visit is not only for project monitoring but also for fund raising. However, our experience with agencies who don't have office in Ethiopia and particularly with foundation is only twice a year. In our case frequency of the visit by grant making experiences is not the critical issue but most of them demand the executive director and this put high pressure on the senior staffs like the general manager.

We enjoy having visitors from the grant making agencies. ___ and ___ visitors visit on a quarterly basis. All other agencies visit at least once a year. It could be better if the visitors will visit the organization , spent some time to get acquainted with grass roots issues and be exposed to the situation of the community we serve.
As of now some of the donors are visiting monthly and fortnightly. The site visits if there are any local representatives once a year and or international representatives visits once in 2 to 3 years
Once –twice a year ; visits a very good however it is helpful if we could plan with the donor so that it can coincide with a field activity , to reduce the costs of taking the donor to the field , we should share the work plans so that we can organize the visit before hand.
At least two visits per month. We try to work the visits into the work of the organization. Making sure the donor spends the whole day is helpful—it gives time to properly see the programs and doesn't require our whole mgmt team to stop and attend to the visitor. Then if they give us time we can do that wrap up in the evening over dinner so we don't interrupt the flow of work so much.

8. To what extent has language and/or technology been a barrier in your regular communications with your donors?

Technology is a challenge in many parts of Africa. While most of our donors understand this and are more than accommodating, occasionally we do find that donors want to speak by telephone or send an email to a teacher or a student in rural Africa and do not appreciate that this may not be possible. This is rarely a problem, but when it does arise it can be a challenge to accommodate the requirements.
Language is not a problem at all but the lack of equipment such as computers has really impacted negatively on our communication with our donors. The skill to use the equipment has also been so inadequate that something needs to be done about it.
n/a
The mode of communication being English we did not feel any barrier in our regular communication with the donors.
Si definitivamente nos ahorra mucho tiempo, esfuerzo y dinero poder escribir en español. No son muchas las fundaciones con quienes podemos hacerlo La tecnología no ha sido un problema sino más bien una ayuda en comunicarnos con los donantes.
No problem . Mostly all are good in English
We don't have such problem except some cases where there is a discussion with community representatives in the absence of senior program staffs at the project level.
We have no problems
Language and technology has been a major barrier. With limited pay it has been difficult to appoint staff with language and computer skills. Almost all the field staff do not have either good English or computer skills. Moreover there is no Internet facility in the field and no network connection. Paying a higher salary would help to reduce this problem. Moreover training people to use the technology would also be helpful. Some of the key terms used both donor and partner should be kept as a glossary.
Technology has been a major barrier for developing countries , some times we get problems with our e-mail systems which delays or breaks the communication process .
Internet access used to be a problem, but we have a better connection now. Time zone issues remain.

9. Do you have suggestions for how we provide feedback on your reports (or proposals)?

More feedback is always welcome. We learn greatly from our reports and proposals, even when they are not successful or do not fulfill your requirements. Feedback in writing (by email or letter) is most helpful to ensure institutional learning.
We would like to suggest that you quickly acknowledge receipt of our reports and proposals. In your response we would suggest that you indicate whether the report or proposal is good and

indeed indicate where we need improvement. This will help us to be effective in our proposal and report writing.
We would welcome even more feedback!
We welcome the suggestion from the donor agency in providing feed back. It helps us to improve in every aspect of projects. We need the donor agency to high light what we have lacked in the report, so that we can make sure that the same does not happen next time.
Se nota que ustedes leen los reportes, sus pregunta siempre han sido cordiales y en las conversaciones se nota que tienen una buena idea de lo que hacemos y hacia donde vamos.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Feed back with more suggestions will help us to improve. b) Feed back with more suggestions will help us to improve.
I think our experience particularly with ___ and ___ is highly educative. The feed back on our proposal and reporting is interesting. In most cases clarification demanded helped as to improve the quality of our proposal and report. But what is lacking is feed back report after field visits to project. Such feed back is good for credibility development. But the work load and related issues of visitors of the grant making agencies is found to be the major hindrance. It is important to improve this aspect if possible.
We will be encouraged to receive feed back from the donor agencies and would like to clarify any doubts they have about the programs.
Yes. You can provide feedback and also help us in documentation. As we stated in the first point there is a communication gap, which may be due to language and also our different cultural backgrounds. Most often we find that we are not able to present all the good work we have done. Maybe by visiting our field and seeing our program you can improve our reporting. The donors or the local representative should comment on the reports this would be helpful in improving the reports.
Please acknowledge receipt, raise questions, make comments and make any suggestion.
Informal emails are best.

Workshop report-back: Input from the Discussion

1. What is the hardest question to get/give good information? (in parentheses: organizations that indicated they have or could be resources on this issue)

Capacity questions

- How to capture capacity of organization to handle \$, regrant, and handle vast range of work (Women's Funding Network, Making the Case, Smart Growth Tool)
- How will program sustain itself once funding stops? Diversity of its funding sources (AJWS, GFW-org. sustainability)

Budget questions

- How much will be spent on general operating support? Lack of common terms on such (Firelight, New Field).
- Complete financial picture of an organization and program budgets

Evaluation questions

- Indicators for success, how to measure impact not just outputs (Firelight)
- Larger impact of grants on communities (AJWS regarding socioeconomic, political context, Global Fund for Women)

Stakeholder questions

- How to distinguish roles of implementing agency and regranter?
- How to include voice of participants? (Alex, New Field)

2. What questions do you wish were asked...but too infrequently are?

- What other services would enhance the program's/population's needs?
- How was the proposal developed? What was the process, were beneficiaries involved and how?
- What are the organization's real priorities and is the request for funding really in there?
- How project funding relates to overall organization's work?
- What are the organization's challenges and lessons learned?
- Leadership and decision-making: how are beneficiaries involved in these?
- How many people are served?
- How to present a holistic plan within the donor's framework?