

How to write a proposal to a charitable trust

Do your research and target your proposal

Trusts tend not to bend their rules. If your application is ineligible (against their published priorities and restrictions) when it hits their doormat it will go straight in the bin - no matter how urgent the need or well drafted the proposal. So do your research. Do not write the same letter to everybody. Target trusts carefully. Customise your 'ask' as closely to their interests as you possibly can - even if this means asking for only part of the project.

Length of proposal

Charitable trustees and their staff are busy - they like concise and succinct communications. Aim for 4 pages of A4 - less if possible. If you absolutely can't squeeze it into 4 pages, try to have a four page proposal plus appendices.

Structure of proposal

We favour the following seven stage structure. It has helped us raise many millions of pounds for clients over many years.

- 1 Summary
- 2 Statement of Need (the problem to be addressed)
- 3 Outcomes (that the work will achieve)
- 4 Method employed (i.e. a description of the work or the project).
- 5 Why you should do the work (a chance to describe your organisation and its track record)
- 6 How you will evaluate the work and what you will do with the information (i.e. how you will use it to improve what you do)
- 7 Budgets.

Style of proposal

Avoid specialist language, acronyms and jargon. Use short sentences. Put one idea only into a sentence. Try to record yourself as you talk about the issues and then transpose some of this onto the page - it's a good way to capture the passion behind what you do.

Check and check again

Nothing will undermine confidence quite so much as proposals that:

- * have spelling errors in them

- * have budgets with mistakes

Check your proposal for clarity and readability. Try giving it to someone who doesn't understand your work and ask them to read it and explain it back to you *as if you know nothing about the work*. Unless they can do this reasonably well then your proposal may not be clear enough.

© MBA 2006. This document is given freely to help not-for-profit staff and trustees improve their processes and get better results for their organisations. However it is not to be resold or used for any commercial purpose. No part of it can be cut and pasted into another document. It cannot be used to support any kind of training programme.