# B. Writing the Proposal

If you have followed this guide from the beginning, you have now learned about principles to guide project design and the preparatory steps, including the completion of a preliminary needs assessment, a conceptual model, and a logical framework. We are now ready to begin discussing how to write the different sections of the proposal so that you can get the project funded.

The length of the proposal will depend on the nature and size of the project to be implemented. Generally, for a smaller project that will be implemented in one or two years, the proposal may be 8 to 10 pages long (excluding attachments). For a large, multiyear project, the proposal may be longer. Donors may specify in their guidelines whether there is a page limit on proposals. Be sure to adhere to these guidelines, as some donors will not even consider the proposal if it falls outside the guidelines.

## 1. Cover Page and Table of Contents

The cover page for your proposal should provide key information and look professional. On the cover page of the proposal, include:

- Name and logo of your organization
- Name of project
- Name of potential donor
- Month and year of submission
- Contact person(s) at your organization, with contact information (include all means of communication, such as street address, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address and Web address)
- Optional: duration of project and budget amount and request

*Do not* bind your proposal or have plastic covers. Many donors now view this as excessive and not environmentally friendly. Simply present the proposal on white paper and stapled. This will help staff at the donor organization make photocopies for others. You should send a copy of the proposal to the donor by e-mail, as well, which is a more environmentally friendly way for staff to share the proposal with others. Make your proposal stand out with the quality and clarity of the writing, and the evidence of your preparation.

If the contact person listed will be out of the office for any amount of time after the proposal is submitted, it is recommended that s/he designate another person who can answer a donor's questions.

If your proposal is longer than five pages, include a Table of Contents. This will help the donor reading it to know what to expect, and know that you have considered different aspects of project development, such as sustainability and evaluation. It is often helpful to create the Table of Contents before you begin to write the proposal, and use it as an outline for your writing. Add page numbers to the Table of Contents once you have finished the proposal.

**Make your proposal stand out with the quality and clarity of the writing, and the evidence of your preparation.**

## 2. Executive Summary

The recommended length for the Executive Summary is one page (or two pages for a larger proposal).

Why should you write an Executive Summary? Donors receive a large number of proposals, and in reading an Executive Summary, donors can determine whether your project interests them. The Executive Summary should be compelling—an invitation for the donor to read further—and a good overview of the essential elements of the proposal. A well-written Executive Summary demonstrates that you know what your project is about because you can highlight the key elements. By writing a strong Executive Summary, you will in fact be helping an interested donor, whose own staff members often have to write project summaries for their Board of Directors.

An Executive Summary is a summary of the entire proposal. This means that it should include brief descriptions of key information from each section of the proposal. The text of the Executive Summary should answer the following questions:

- Who (what organization) is requesting a grant?
- Why are you requesting it?
- What problems will you address and where?
- How long will the project last?
- What are your goals and objectives?
- How will you meet those goals and objectives? (What are the activities?)
- What results do you expect to achieve?
- What is the project budget? How much are you requesting from the donor? Are there counterpart funds that your organization or another organization is offering?
- How will your project continue once funding ends (sustainability)?

The Executive Summary should be written last, after you have completed writing the entire proposal and know the answers to the questions listed above. It is often tempting to write the Executive Summary while colleagues in your organization are reviewing the main body of the proposal. While sometimes this expedient is necessary, it is wise to give the Executive Summary the same attention and careful review that you do to the rest of the proposal. Remember, sometimes the Executive Summary is the only section of the proposal that a decisionmaker has time to read. The Executive Summary should be placed right after the Table of Contents in the proposal.

# 3. Introduction and Justification

The recommended length for the Introduction and Justification section is two or three pages.

The introduction to a proposal must cover two themes: the problem the project intends to address and the credibility and qualifications of the organization planning to implement the project. It is best to think of each as a separate subject area and to thoroughly cover one before proceeding to the other. Address the following points when describing the problem and the organization.

### Describe the problem or need for the project:

- Convey a sense of urgency. Why should a donor pay attention to the problem you describe? Be thorough but brief.
- Provide up-to-date statistics and the most recent research findings. Present statistics at the international, national, and local levels. Draw on information obtained from the needs assessment, if one was conducted. Cite each statistic or finding with a footnote, endnote, or with a parenthetical citation. Donors may want to know how recent your information is and the credibility of your sources. If the only available statistics seem out-of-date, mention that they are the most recent ones, if, in fact, they are the only statistics available.

> ***Every piece of the application points to the credibility of the group, and dated or faulty information can prove the difference between a positive or negative impression.***
>
> *IPPF/WHR DONOR*

- Refer to your review of theories and programs that have dealt with issues similar to the ones you seek to address, taking note of results and lessons learned, gaps in knowledge, strategies and program areas that need to be expanded or tested.
- Describe the sexual and reproductive rights that are most relevant to the problem that the project seeks to address. For example, if the project is related to increasing access to emergency contraception, refer to the Right to the Benefits of Scientific Progress, the Right to Decide Whether and When to Have Children, and the Right to Information and Education. The IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights (http://www.ippf.org/charter) lists 12 rights that are based on human rights conventions, the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, and other documents.
- Discuss the type of project that is needed to address the problem.
- Provide a brief overview of the proposed project, including beneficiaries and expected results (no more than one paragraph).
- Describe the project location's salient characteristics (urban, rural, dispersed population, etc.). You may want to provide a map of the area where the project will take place in relation to the rest of the country or to major population centers.

### Describe the organization that proposes to address the problem:

- An accurate understanding and definition of the problem should lead logically to a description of why the problem is of concern to your organization.
- Describe steps taken in the past by your organization, other NGOs and governments to address the problem. Present achievements as well as pending needs.
- Describe your organization, including when it was established, its mission and goals, and particularly, the skills or experience the organization has that makes it a good candidate for the proposed project. Your aim is to convince the donor to invest in your organization by showing that it has the ability to carry out the project successfully.
- Name other organizations (that is, collaborators) that will participate in the project, if any. Many donors are interested in funding collaborations, in order to draw on the expertise of various organizations, scale up programs, and obtain a greater return on their investment. If you plan to collaborate with another group, how will you collaborate? Describe your previous involvement with other collaborators and why the alliances were successful.

- Describe how the future beneficiaries were involved in the development of the proposal, if relevant. For example, a youth-focused proposal should involve youth from the development of the project through its implementation and evaluation.

## 4. Goal and Objectives

The listing of the goals and objectives should take up less than half a page.

Prior to writing the proposal, it is recommended that you complete the logical framework described earlier in this guide. In this section of the proposal, simply list the overall project goal and the specific objectives. As discussed previously, your project objectives should refer to the timeframe of your project, the beneficiaries or focus populations, and the location. Present your objectives as "Objective 1," "Objective 2," and so on; this will help you refer to them in other parts of the document.

# 5. Activities

The recommended length for the Activities section of the proposal is three to five pages, depending on the size and scope of the project. This is an important section because you can explain to the donor exactly what you will do with the donor's funds.

As described earlier in this guide, the activities should support the achievement of the objectives and be related to the indicators. In this section of the proposal, provide more details about the specific activities that will be conducted. Consider the skills and expertise of your organization and your collaborators. Through your needs assessment, you should have become familiar with similar projects that have been undertaken in the past.

Be descriptive in the Activities section of the proposal. For each activity, discuss:

- How will it be done or carried out?
- Why did you choose these activities?
- Who will conduct the activity?
- Who are the beneficiaries? Will the beneficiaries be involved in the design, implementation or evaluation of the activity?
- How many beneficiaries will be directly involved? How will you recruit or attract them? How can you maximize their participation in the activity?
- When will the activity occur? For how long? What will be the frequency of the activity? (Will it happen once, or will it be repeated?)
- What materials will you need to conduct the activity? Will materials or curricula have to be developed or do the materials already exist? Will the materials need to be adapted to the new population, and if so, how?
- Will your organization collaborate with other organizations to carry out the activity? What will be the role of each organization?

The activities described in this section need to be consistent with the budget. How the activities will accomplish each objective must be explained clearly.

The Project Activities for each objective will also be listed in the Work Plan or Project Timeline. This is a grid that lists all the activities, the persons to carry them out, and when the activities will be conducted. Sometimes the specific month is specified; other times, only the quarter or semester of the year is specified, if it is a multiyear project. Please see page 39 for a template of a Work Plan.

Because of the emphasis placed on youth programs within the sexual and reproductive health field and in the work of IPPF/WHR's affiliates, we provide some considerations for youth program activities below.

### Considerations for Youth Program Activities

- Identify the specific youth population the project will work with; conduct a needs assessment.
- Involve youth throughout the life of the project.
- Work with the community, including parents.
- Strengthen links to existing programs for youth.
- Use materials designed for and by youth.
- Make sure services are accessible to youth, as indicated by youth.

*Source*: WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF. Action for adolescent health: towards a common agenda: recommendations from a joint WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF study group. Geneva: WHO; 1997.

## 6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of the project proposal, and the Monitoring and Evaluation section is of great interest to donors. This section provides details on how the effects of the intervention will be measured. In addition, a well-designed monitoring and evaluation plan will enable project staff to understand how the project is functioning and to make programmatic decisions throughout the life of the project.

The monitoring and evaluation section should answer the following questions:

- What indicators will be measured? (Refer to the logical framework.)
- Where will the information or data come from?
- Who will collect the data?
- How and how often will data be collected?
- How and how often will reporting occur?

To prepare this section of the proposal, you will need to:

- Refer to the logical framework (which should be attached to the proposal as an Annex), and describe the indicators, the means of verification (data sources and data collection methodologies), and the frequency of data collection.
- Describe how the monitoring and evaluation plan will be implemented.
- Describe the human resources that will be used to monitor and evaluate the project, including the staff or department of the organization responsible for data collection and analysis and the consultants or technical assistance you will need.

**The descriptions of evaluation methodologies should include:**

- Sources of information (providers, clients, community leaders, etc.)
- Instruments to be used (existing tools or tools that will be developed)
- Sample size (when appropriate)
- Who will collect the data
- When the data will be collected
- Who will analyze the data and how

- Discuss the evaluation methodologies you will use for each indicator or type of indicator (organized by methodology).
- Inform the donor of your reporting plans and frequency, keeping in mind that donors may have their own requirements for reporting to them.

Remember that the Monitoring and Evaluation section of your proposal should be consistent with the budget. For example, if the Monitoring and Evaluation section states that staff members will work on evaluation activities, then there should be a budget line to cover the corresponding portions of their salaries, or the salaries should be listed as being funded by another donor or collaborating organization. Similarly, if you plan to conduct focus groups or carry out a survey, include the relevant costs in the budget.