

Elements of Proposal Writing

Step Two:

continued

Determining goals and objectives you would like the project to meet.

The objectives are the measurable outcomes of the project. Your objectives must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable and achievable within a specified time frame. Exactly how will your project benefit the people it is designed for? Tell the funder what impact your project will have -- what will change about the situation as a result of your project?

The impact of a project is sometimes hard to define. What is the intended impact of a performance of Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony," for example? Impact can also be difficult to measure. The desired impact of a leadership program for teenagers may be "increased self-esteem," but that is an ambiguous concept that is difficult to quantify. To add to the difficulty, few projects can prove conclusively that a given impact was caused directly by their project. Nevertheless, you need to do the best job you can to define your intended impacts.

Goals are more abstract versions of objectives, and are often confused with objectives. Here's an example of the relationship between goals and objectives:

Goal: Our after school program will help children read better.

Objective: Our after school remedial education program will assist 50 children raise their reading scores by one grade level after 6 months in the program as demonstrated on standardized reading test results.

Types of Objectives

There are at least four types of objectives:

Behavioral—A human action is anticipated.

Example: *Fifty of the seventy children participating will learn to throw clay on the wheel.*

Performance—A specific time frame within which a behavior will occur, and at an expected proficiency level, is expected.

Example: *Fifty of the seventy children will learn to throw clay on the wheel within ten weeks and will pass a basic proficiency test demonstrating knowledge of clay throwing techniques.*

Process—The manner in which something occurs is an end in itself.

Example: *We will document the methods utilized to teach throwing pots, identifying those with the greatest success.*

Product—A tangible item results.

Example: *A manual will be created to be used in teaching wheel throwing to this age and proficiency group in the future.*

Your objectives specify the outcome of your project—the end product(s). It is extremely important to specify your objectives clearly. More precisely, your objectives should tell:

- (1) who, is going to do
- (2) what,
- (3) when,
- (4) how much, and
- (5) how it will be measured.

For example, a proposal's objective might be to teach clay throwing techniques to junior high kids (who) to reduce the number of after school legal infractions (what) during the next 24 months (when) by 15 percent (how much) as noted in the Department of Youth Crime Report (measurement).

Objective writing

List your specific objectives, in no more than one or two sentences each, in approximate order of importance. Don't confuse your objectives (ends) with your methods (means).

A good objective emphasizes what will be done and when it will be done, whereas a method will explain why or how it will be done. Include goals (ultimate) and objectives (immediate) statements.

Your objectives should be very specific in contrast to your goals, which are your long-term idealistic ambitions, usually not measurable. Your objectives provide the yardstick you will use to conduct your evaluation; that is, if you write your objectives in precise, measurable terms, it will be easy to write your proposal evaluation because you will know exactly what will be evaluated.

Objectives: the immediate, measurable end results of the project.

Goals: the ultimate, long-term idealistic ambitions; usually not measurable.

Methods: the project activities in detail; how your objectives will be accomplished.

Program Goals and Objectives Checklist

- Each objective is clearly related to a need described in Section One--Needs Statement.
- Objectives are easy to find--not buried in other information.
- Comprehensively describe the intended outcomes of the project.
- Are developed with input from the organization and its beneficiaries.
- Are stated in a way that they can be evaluated later.
- Demonstrate the importance of bringing your project to the intended population you are serving, and are significant and timely.
- Do not overstate the actual things your projects will accomplish.
- Are measurable and quantifiable, if at all possible.

Step Three:

Developing methods and a detailed timeline for carrying out your project, including a means of measuring and evaluating the outcomes.

Your objectives, methods, and evaluation tools present an interlocking picture of the total project you are proposing. Each of your objectives will relate to a project activity(method), which will then be evaluated according to the means you specify. Generally, a straightforward, chronological description of the proposed project works most effectively.

Methods

In writing the Objectives, you have explained what will be achieved by the project. The Methods section describes the specific activities that will take place to achieve the Objectives. There are three areas that the Methods section should cover: how, when, and why.

How

This is the detailed description of what will occur from the time the project begins until it is completed. Your methods should match your objectives. In the example about teaching wheel throwing, good methods would be 1) how the students will be contacted and recruited, 2) how they will be taught, and 3) how their skills will be measured. Think about constructing a logical sequence from each objective to a relevant method. A good way to organize your thoughts and relate them effectively in your proposal is to write out each objective and then list the methods to meet it underneath. For example:

Objective: *Fifty of the seventy children participating will learn to throw clay on the wheel.*

Methods:

Artists-in-residence will teach a series of workshops, each beginning with a demonstration of a particular technique for 1/2 hour, and practice by the students for 1 hour with the artist assisting students.

When

The Methods section should present the order and timing of the various activities of the project. Put this information in the form of a timeline, which in the case of the spring projects should be a week-to-week outline of activities (since our time frame is relatively short).

With our example of the wheel throwing workshops, the first few weeks may look like this:

Week One:

Day 1: Introduction and overview of course. Administering pretest to determine baseline proficiencies. Showing various steps and examples of thrown pots that students will be able to make by the end of the program. Demonstrating wedging and centering. Students practice wedging and centering.

Day 2: Review wedging and centering. Demonstrate throwing a basic cylinder. Students practice cylinder throwing.

Week Two:

Day 1: Review cylinder throwing. Show good and bad examples, etc.

Why

You need to defend your chosen methods, especially if they are particularly new and innovative.

The main question you are answering in this part of the methods is: Why will the planned work lead to the outcomes you anticipate? You can answer the question in a number of ways, including using examples of other projects that work, and expert testimony. The methods section overall enables the reader to visualize the implementation of the project, and should convince the reader that you know what you are doing, and can justify the methods that you have chosen to meet your objectives.

Developing a means of evaluating and measuring outcomes.

An evaluation plan should be built into your project. It shows that you are serious about meeting your objectives, and will know whether you have done so by the close of the project. Evaluation also helps you learn what works and what doesn't as you progress from project to project--it's as much a learning tool as it is evaluative. Many projects have obvious evaluation procedures, where sheer numbers of people served will be the major indicator of the success of the project.

For other projects, you will probably need to collect some data as a part of your evaluation. Common data collection methods include achievement tests; psychological attitude tests; role-playing exercises; clinical examinations; personal diaries; ratings by program staff, management participants, or experts; interviews; observations by project staff (that's you) or evaluators; daily project records (telephone logs, tracking slips, referral forms); historical issue records and archives; government records; searches of news media; questionnaires; and surveys.

Administering pre- and post-tests is the most direct way to evaluate whether you have met your objectives. Determine a set of questions that address each of the objectives you have for your project. These can take several forms:

1. Psychological Attitude Test, asking participants how they feel about a range of issues related to your project, and which you hope to change for the better as a result of your project. Good for self-esteem building projects, etc.
2. Proficiency Test, asking participants to perform a task before the project, and then again after to determine their level of growth in their ability to do something. Good for skills and process based projects.
3. Achievement Test, asking participants about their knowledge about a particular topic that you hope they will learn more about by participating in the project. Good for teaching projects.
4. Role Playing Exercises, where participants are given a situation and asked to act it out. As the project progresses, repeat exercise as a means of seeing whether participants employ what they have learned. Good for conflict-resolution projects.
5. Tracking and Attendance Records, which provide numerical data about number of contact hours. Good for projects that seek to provide opportunities for a particular activity in an underserved area.

The most important issue is to write your evaluation tools so that they actually measure what you are hoping participants will learn or accomplish, rather than unrelated objectives.

The end product of your project can also be an evaluation method, where the successful completion of the project is the method of evaluation.

Methods and Evaluation Writing Checklist

- Restates and flows naturally from problems and objectives.
- Clearly describes program activities.
- States reasons for the selection of activities.
- Describes sequence of activities.
- Describes participants and their selection.
- Presents a reasonable scope of activities that can be accomplished within the time and resources of the program
- Provides a timeline of activities
- Is stated in terms of participants' needs
- and problems - not yours or the community's.
- Is formatted in a way that makes it easy to follow from objective to related methods.
- Is presented from a most important to least important order.
- Evaluation tools are a direct match for the objectives you have set out to accomplish.
- Evaluation questions address skills or attitudes or knowledge--not all at once. Separate tools for separate objectives.