Abstract or Summary

This is your key opportunity to grab the reviewer’s attention. It is a concise statement that summarizes every other component in the proposal.

Checklist

Who are you? What does your organization do?
What is the problem?
What do you expect to accomplish with this project?
Why do you think it will work?
What outcomes do you expect to cause?
What will you do?
How will you evaluate success?
Who will do the work? Why are they qualified?
What resources do you need? What resources do you bring to the project?

Common Mistakes

Abstract is incomplete
Abstract focuses almost entirely on defining the problem
Abstract does not meet length limit
Abstract focuses almost entirely on the plan of work
Abstract is poorly written and does not capture the interest of the reader

Statement of Need, Problem Statement

This component explains and justifies the problem that you have identified. Think of yourself as a debater. Assemble your facts and arguments and present them persuasively.

Checklist

What is the problem or need? Why is this problem important?
Who does it affect?
Who is the target audience? Who are the clients for this program?
How does the problem or need relate to the goals and objectives of the donor?
What evidence do you have to show that the problem is real and important? Do you have statistical data? Are the data specific to your region? Where and how did you get this evidence?
Do you have testimonial data from potential beneficiaries of the project? Can you prove that the clients also think that the problem is important?
Who have you talked to — especially clients — about the problem and how to solve it?
Do you have a solution? Why do you think it will work? Did it work elsewhere? Can your solution to this problem serve as a model for other places and groups?

Common Mistakes

Too long; writer devotes too much of the proposal to defining the problem
Too vague; writer uses broad generalities, has no data to support the claim that the problem is serious and has no evidence that potential clients think it is important
Not specific to the target audience or community; no evidence that the problem, even if it is real and important, is of much importance to these people in this place
Self-serving; the problem is stated in terms of what the writer’s organization needs or wants rather than what the clients need or want
Circular; the problem is just a statement of what the writer wants to do (e.g., the problem is insufficient funding for consumer education; the solution is more funding for consumer education)
Grandiose; the writer is going to solve a major world problem on a shoestring budget
Extreme statements; writer claims the problem is “the most critical” problem facing the clients

Examples

Present data, facts and statistics to support your argument that the need is real, urgent, serious, widespread, important, etc. — but avoid overstatement and extreme statements:
The environmental impacts of construction in Florida are serious. For the last 50 years, we have converted 221 acres of natural or agricultural land into built environments every day.

Explain carefully why this problem or need should be of concern to the funding source.
Reducing the environmental impacts of construction directly addresses the XYZ program priorities of educating Americans to reduce resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. “Green” buildings that are environmentally sound use less energy, water, and non-renewable resources than traditionally constructed buildings. Many traditional construction materials generate large amounts of greenhouse gases in their manufacture – concrete, for example. Further, poorly constructed buildings compound these problems because they are not durable. They often require extensive renovation after only a few years or, in the worst case, are torn down.

Hold out hope; show that you do know ways of solving the problem.
New technologies and construction techniques can reduce these environmental impacts. Proper siting, construction clearing that minimizes natural habitat loss and designing for wildlife can reduce the impact of ecosystem conversion.

Show how your project addresses the problem differently, better, in a more innovative way than other approaches.
Building contractors must acquire 14 continuing education units every two years to renew
their license to build in Florida. For many contractors, getting these educational units is difficult because they must travel to major cities where most training workshops are offered. This means that they lose time and money on the construction site, an especially serious problem for the thousands of small to mid-sized builders in Florida who do not have operations managers. By offering our training locally, within each county, at a time convenient to local builders as determined by the local Homebuilders’ Association, our program will reach these builders very effectively.

Avoid circular reasoning where you describe the lack of what you want to do as the problem. Problem: “Builders do not know about environmentally sound construction techniques.” Solution: “We will train builders in environmentally sound construction techniques.”

Decide if your project could serve as a model for other places, organization, or projects; if so, explain how and why it will work as a model.

Although Florida has led the southeast in population growth and urbanization, the rest of the sunbelt is now experiencing explosive growth as well. Our materials and educational approach will serve as a model for similar educational programs for builders throughout the Southeast, especially the coastal plain region where environmental conditions closely resemble those of Florida.

**Goals, Objectives and Outcomes**

This is where you explain what you hope to accomplish. In most cases, you need to distinguish between the overall project goal, the specific objectives and the expected outcomes.

A goal is a broad, conceptual statement. “Our goal is to reduce the environmental impacts of new construction in Florida.”

Objectives are more specific and refer to measurable outcomes of a specific set of activities. “Our objective is to train at least 5% of all building contractors in Florida in environmentally sound construction practices. As a result of our program, at least 70% of all participants will use at least 10 or more of the recommended practices and technologies.”

Outcomes are the effects that your project will have on the real world – the problem you described. “As a result, energy use in new homes built by trainees who adopt our recommendations will be 20% lower than in other homes of similar size and location and water use will be 10% lower.”

Clear, precise objectives and outcomes are critical – put them in bullets or enumerate them. Do not allow them to be lost in the middle of a paragraph.

**Checklist**

Does the overall goal of your project support and enhance the donor’s goals and objectives?
Have you shown that your goal fits the overall goals and mission of your own organization?
Is the goal achievable? If so, is it worth achieving? Have you identified a meaningful, but realistic goal for your project?
Have you identified specific, preferably quantifiable, objectives for your project?
Do these objectives relate specifically to the problem that you defined?
Many problems have subsets or multiple facets. If this is the case in your proposal, have you identified at least one specific goal for each subset or facet of the problem that you discussed in your problem statement?
What will change in the real world as a result of this project?
Have you identified specific, preferably quantifiable outcomes for the project? For each objective you have identified?
Can you actually measure the outcomes — with the resources (people, time and money) available to you?

Common Mistakes

Confusing the goal with activities (our goal is to train 50 people rather than our goal is to reduce water pollution from agriculture)

Confusing the objectives with activities (our objective is to train 50 people rather than our objective is for 50% of all participants to adopt one or more of the BMPs we recommend to reduce water pollution from agriculture)

Confusing outcomes with objectives (as a result of this project 25 farmers will adopt BMPs...) or activities (as a result of this project 50 people will be trained... )

Failure to indicate a time frame for achieving goals, objectives and outcomes

Failure to demonstrate a direct link between goals, objectives and outcomes and solving the problem(s) identified

Examples

Explain explicitly how your project goals, objectives and outcomes tie into the goals and objectives of the funding source.

Our project addresses two of your priority objectives. (1) It will reduce resource consumption by Americans. A home is the single most important purchase that most of us make in our lifetimes. A well built home that is environmentally sound conserves resources. It reduces the water, energy and materials that we consume each day. Educating contractors to build high performance homes requires educating only a few thousand contractors rather than millions of Florida residents. Therefore our project has a high impact per dollar spent on education.

Define the long term goal clearly, even if this project will only go part of the way toward achieving that goal.

Our goal is to reduce water pollution due to agricultural activities.

List the objectives clearly.
As a result of our program, at least 500 Florida farmers will adopt one or more of five key Best Management Practices recommended by the University of Florida to reduce phosphate pollution of surface and ground water. These practices are ....

Make the outcomes clear.

The impact of adopting these practices varies. However, University of Florida research shows that, on average, the following reductions in ground and surface water phosphate pollution when these practices are adopted. (List practices and research results.) Based on these data, we will be able to reduce the amount of phosphate reaching ground and surface waters by an average of XXX for each acre of land put under one or more BMPs.

**Plan of Work, Narrative or Project Description**

Explain exactly what you are going to do. Write the project description so that the reader can envision the project from beginning to end. Make the logical flow of activities clear.

**Checklist**

- Have you explained clearly why and how the activities that you propose will help solve the problem that you described? Can you show that you know about previous projects and work designed to solve the same problem? Can you explain why your approach is better or more apt to succeed?
- Is the relationship between activities and objectives clear?
- Is your time table clear? Have you laid out in detail who will do what and when?
- How can you demonstrate to the donor that you are serious about this project and have already committed time and effort to making sure that the project activities will lead to the expected outcomes? What evidence do you have?
- What steps have you already taken in project planning? Have you identified partners? Can you prove that they are on board and willing to play an active role in the project?
- Can you show that your potential beneficiaries will actually participate in the project? Have you shown how you will contact them and get them involved? Better yet, can you demonstrate commitment to the project from clients? Can you show that they are already involved in problem identification and project planning?
- In some cases, you will be reaching beneficiaries through a secondary audience (e.g., science teachers as a secondary audience in order to affect the knowledge of school children, the primary audience). In this case, can you show that this critical link in project implementation is fully committed?

**Common Mistakes**

- No time table; sequence of activities is not clear
- No discussion of alternative approaches
- Unrealistic time table; usually too much to do in too little time
- Not enough detail
- Overwhelming detail; the proposal is basically a list of activities described in excruciating detail
Examples

Explain how you will put your solution to the problem into practice or meet the need you have described.

We will develop six training modules addressing different aspects of construction. We will submit these materials to the Construction Industry Licensing Board (CILB) for approval. Once approved by CILB, our educational programs will meet licensed contractors’ need for continuing education units to renew their license to practice. Our ability to offer these CEUs is critical to success because contractors must have 14 units every two years to renew their license.

Make the time sequence clear; show how activities build on each other. Best of all, include a time line so that the reader can clearly see what you will do, when.

After completing a draft set of educational materials during the first six months of the project, we will conduct a test workshop. In this workshop two county extension faculty members will jointly deliver each of our six modules to an audience of ten to twelve building contractors. Both groups will provide written and verbal feedback and suggestions for improving the modules. We will use this information to produce the final versions of the modules.

Justify your choice of methods, using data, testimony from experts, previous experience, successful examples. Do not just assume that your approach is the best – demonstrate that it is.

Many educational programs fail to achieve change in behavior because the end users of the information find it irrelevant, difficult to understand, or hard to use. We will avoid this pitfall. First, we have a team of four building contractors who are experienced in environmentally sound building construction who have agreed to review our materials as we develop them. Then a broader group of contractors, with less experience in environmentally sound construction, will evaluate our materials in a test workshop. Their input will also be incorporated into the final version of the materials.

Establish your credibility; show that you really know what you are talking about.

Our educational model for these modules is based on the experiential learning cycle described by Krebs and others (1996). According to this model, simply exposing people to new knowledge or information is not enough to achieve behavior change by adults. Rather, adults need to go through four processes: (1) exposure to new information, (2) hands on practice using the new information, (3) a period of reflection or thought specifically designed to help the learner fit the new information into their existing “knowledge bank,” and (4) a period of active projection in which the learner envisions and describes examples of how he/she could use the new information. Over 20 years of testing of educational programs using this approach show that experiential learning does lead to behavior change by adults (Heilbroner, 1998).
Evaluation

In this section you need to explain how you will measure the success of your efforts. In many cases, this involves measuring the change in the outcomes described in your proposal. In many cases, however, you should also include other kinds of evaluations. Most commonly these include process evaluations and evaluations of change in knowledge. A process evaluation measures the quality of the learning experience for participants. Did they enjoy it? Were the materials useful, etc. Change in knowledge can easily be measured by a pre- and post-test of knowledge.

Checklist

Have you described the measures that you will use?
Have you included a measure for each of the outcomes that you expect to achieve?
Have you included other kinds of evaluation instruments?
Have you set performance goals for each kind of evaluation — % of people who will learn a given skill, number of people who will change practice, gallons of water that will be saved, etc.?
Have you shown how evaluations will be used to modify and improve the project during its life — not just at the end?
Have you explained who will do the evaluation and cited their credentials?
Have you indicated how evaluation results will be reported?

Common Mistakes

Failure to measure outcomes
Confusion regarding what is being measured — process versus knowledge versus outcomes
Failure to include people with sufficient expertise in evaluation on the project team
Failure to describe the evaluation instruments that will be used

Examples

Explain exactly how you will determine success at each step in the project.

We will evaluate our project three ways. First, every contractor who participates will take a pre- and post-test – before and after completing each module. This will measure learning. Second, every participant will complete a process evaluation at the end of each program. This will measure the effectiveness of our materials in meeting learning objectives. Third, we will select a random sample of participants to include in a follow-up evaluation of change in practice approximately one year after receiving the program.

Tie evaluation back to the specific objectives and outcomes; every objective or outcome should be tied to an evaluative tool or measure. Define measures that you will use to determine success; set performance goals if possible.

We expect an average improvement in knowledge of at least 25% across all delivery sites and all program participants in our pre- and post-test of knowledge.
Organizational Capability

You need to make the case that your organization is the best possible organization for successfully implementing this project. For many donors, you will need to explain who you are and what you do in detail.

Checklist

Have you explained what your organization is and what it does?
Have you documented the expertise that your organization brings to the project?
Have you documented the track record of your organization — its prior successes in solving similar problems?
Have you clearly described your partner organizations or groups?
Have you explained how the partners complement each other and why you selected these particular partners?
Have you explain who will do what?

Common Mistakes

Vague generalities — failure to mention specific examples of success and expertise
Inadequate or non-complementary partners
No clear division of labor or expertise

Examples

Describe the characteristics and experience of your organization that make it ideally suited to conduct the project.

Florida’s Extension Service has a corps of trained adult educators in every county in the state. This statewide organization permits us to deliver programs to contractors at a location near their business place, no matter where they are located. Further, our faculty do not keep an “eight to five” schedule. We are accustomed to presenting programs at a time convenient to our clients.

Cite any previous organizational experience that is relevant.

Extension professionals have delivered successful educational programs to adults for over 100 years. A recent evaluation of our programs in urban horticulture showed that over 50% of all participants adopted one or more of the practices we recommend.

Make a firm, believable case – do not claim that your organization is the best thing since sliced bread.

Extension has been known traditionally for its educational programs for farmers. While it is true that Extension’s roots lie in the rural community, today’s Extension provides educational programs to both urban and rural clients, to both adults and youth. We do not have a long
experience in delivering educational programs to building professionals. However, we have already contacted the CILB. They support our effort (see attached letter) and have agreed to provide us with a data base of all licensed contractors in Florida. We are confident that we will reach this new audience successfully, just as we have expanded our audience for the past 100 years.

Do not denigrate other organizations or groups.

Many private and public organizations offer educational programs for contractors. These programs, however, do not have an environmental focus. Most of them are not delivered at many locations in Florida. Our programs, with their emphasis on the environmental consequences of construction, will complement the array of programs available to contractors.

Explain any partnerships; show how the partnership draws on the strengths of both members; explain how the partners will work together and complement each other.

This project is a joint effort by the Rinker School of Building Construction and the Florida Extension Service. The School of Building Construction brings the background and expertise in construction techniques and technologies critical to the content of our materials. The Extension Service brings expertise in adult education and educational materials development. In this project, Building Construction will supply the subject matter expertise. Extension will put that knowledge into a format that is known to lead to behavioral change and call upon its county-based adult educators to deliver the program.

**Personnel and Staffing Pattern**

This section shows why you have selected the specific persons who will work on this project.

**Checklist**

- Have you explained each team member’s role in the project?
- Have you highlighted the experience and expertise of each member?
- Have you explained clearly how responsibility will be divided?
- Have you included resumes of the key team members?

**Common Mistakes**

- Failure to include all of the expertise needed on the team
- Unattractive or inappropriate resumes
- Inadequate description of the staffing pattern

**Examples**

Explain who will do what.

Dr. Joe Blow will serve as materials development specialist. He will be responsible for taking
the content provided by faculty in the Rinker School of Building Construction and putting it into the experiential learning format. Dr. Blow will have overall authority on educational process and presentation, but the materials that he prepares will be reviewed by the content faculty person to make sure that content is not lost or altered.

Cite the relevant expertise and experience of at least the major project personnel. Dr. Blow has over 15 years of experience developing adult educational materials.

Explain how the project personnel will be organized. Dr. Susan Jones will provide overall leadership for the project. She will be responsible for organizing the flow of materials and information among other project participants, for organizing the test workshops, and for project financial management.

**Continuation or Sustainability**

Most donors want to know that their investment will continue to bring results in the future, after funding ends. Projects that are “one shot” have a relatively low chance of being funded in most cases.

**Checklist**

- Have you explained how you will continue the benefits of the project beyond current funding?
- Have you demonstrated organizational commitment to continuing the project activities after the grant?
- Have you described the resources that your organization(s) is committing to the project?
- Have you clearly described any other funding that you are seeking?

**Common Mistakes**

- Eliminate this altogether
- Inadequate organizational commitment (money, people, resources)

**Examples**

Explain how the benefits of the project will continue after the funds are gone.

We will deliver these programs for a fee. Each participating contractor will pay $175 to take our program. This fee is the average charged by several programs that we have examined, ranging from a low of $5 to a high of $525. We expect to deliver the program to an average of 500 contractors per year (20 per county in 25 of Florida’s 67 counties). This will provide a program income of $87,500 per year. These funds will be used to print materials, train county faculty to deliver the program, keep our materials current and develop additional modules. In addition, we will seek private sector partners, such as building supply houses and banks, to support our programs through cash and in-kind donations. Home Depot, for example, has indicated that they will support the cost of printing 800 copies of our materials if we are willing to put their logo on our participants’ manuals (see attached letter).

**Budget and Budget Narrative**
A “low” budget is not the objective. “Padding” the budget is not required. What is required is a realistic budget that clearly matches dollars spent to project activities. Develop a reasonable budget, neither too low nor too high. Present the budget in the format requested by the funding source. Provide enough detail so that the reader can see how you calculated different costs; e.g., not just Personnel - $8,000, but rather Word Processing Expert, 20 hours per week for 40 weeks at $10 per hour.

Checklist

Have you used the budget categories required by the donor?
Have you carefully checked to make sure your figures are realistic and detailed (avoid 00000s)?
Have you matched expenditures to major project components?
Have you shown how the partners will divide the budget?
Have you explained each major budget request?
Have you included matching costs if required?

Common Mistakes

No budget narrative or narrative is not detailed enough
Budget is too high or too low
Budget is clearly a “guestimate,” commonly indicated by many 00000s
Budget is the maximum request allowed
Do not ever ask for money for items that are not allowed. This is a common mistake. Really read the RFP – including the part that explains what you can and cannot do with the money.

Examples

Explain any unusual requests.
We are requesting a word processing expert because our materials will be highly formatted. This will be a time-consuming job, demanding someone who is highly skilled in several computer programs. Further, we need one person to work on all six modules so that all formatting is consistent. Our departmental secretary works for three people. She does not have the uninterrupted time needed to complete this task in a timely manner.

Explain how expenditures relate to different phases, steps or activities in the project.
We are requesting $6,000 for travel. These monies will be used (1) to bring 10 to 12 contractors to Gainesville for two days to participate in our test workshop six months into the project, (2) to permit state faculty to travel to each of the ten counties where programs will be conducted during the second year of the project, and (3) to bring 20 county faculty persons to Gainesville for a two-day training session at the end of year two of the project so that they can deliver the program in their counties after the project ends.