

Ten Steps to a Competitive Proposal

Pam DiBona

Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program

1. Be your own cheerleader

Be enthusiastic about your project! No one else will love it if you don't. And... if you do it right, you'll be spending a lot of time with your proposal, too, and no matter what the project is you'll be sick of it by the time you submit.



2. Be ready to roll

Always have some project ideas ready to go – I use a template to sketch out potential projects – and talk to potential partners identified and committed to working with you even before you find a funding source. Lining up partners ahead of time makes all of the difference.

3. Channel your inner storyteller

For each project, be ready to tell a 5-minute story with a beginning, middle, and end. Include: why did you come up with this project (= need)? What do you want to do (= approach)? Who will care (=impact)? What will you do with the results (= applicability)?



4. The project always comes first

Identify funding opportunities by matching the funding source to your project, not vice versa. Note eligibility, match requirement, prerequisite plans, etc. before you commit to writing a full proposal.

5. Read the request.

Read the request

Read the request again.

I dig into the details by printing it out, and adding notes in the margin connecting my project to their description.



6. Use the funder's outline

Use the RFR outline – or review sheet -- as an outline for your proposal. Put your plan into their words to make it easy for reviewers to check off the boxes.



7. Incorporate well-labeled maps

Include charts and maps for context and to make it easier for the reviewer to join your excitement/commitment to place. Make sure they work when photocopied



8. Get an editor

Ask a writer -- the person who works at the next desk, even -- to review your narrative and point out grammatical and spelling errors, and highlight portions that may be unclear. Rewrite as needed!



9. No form letters

Provide templates to partners that prompt them to personalize their letters of support – no form letters – and think about asking for support from non-usual suspects.



10. Triple-check the checklist

Double-check the request once more, to make sure the proper number of copies, format, and forms are included in your package. Then submit on time!