

WRITING FOR THE READER TIPS

TIP 1. Write with the reader in mind.

Imagine the reader reading your proposal. Remember they are just meeting you. They aren't familiar with your history, your programs or your acronyms. Explain things. Remember they are trying to determine if you meet the **funding source's** priorities.

TIP 2. Simple, not fancy (KISS). Keep it simple, stupid. Readers are reading multiple proposals. They may be tired or bored. Use a simple, easy-to-follow sentence structure.

TIP 3. Don't make assumptions about expertise. Assume you're explaining the project to someone with some familiarity, but limited expertise. Jargon can be misunderstood.

TIP 4. Follow the application instructions and the specified format. The format may seem repetitious or not well-organized to you, but the funding source probably has some reason for the way and the order in which they've asked you to supply information. You may even be asked to repeat narrative information on pre-printed forms. Avoid the instinct to be creative.

TIP 5. Mirror the guideline language in sub-headings in the proposal. Readers follow funding source instructions – based on what was requested in the guidelines -- as they review proposals. Give the readers a titular map so they can easily see if you addressed all the requirements.

TIP 6. Follow ALL the rules. Guidelines may specify font type, font size, line spacing, margins, numbers of characters, page limits, etc. Use bolding, italics and underlines for sub-headings and section breaks and important phrases. If it's an electronic submission, be sure to check to see if you are using the right software (and the right version) for their application system.

TIP 7. Limit the number of appendices. Readers may be instructed to ignore appendices that aren't required. Any truly critical information should be in the proposal. Only use appendices if they are requested or if you believe a more in-depth explanation may be of interest to the reader.

TIP 8. Keep the number of proposal editors to a minimum. Remember – Editors can be wrong.

You do need input from those whom will be involved in project implementation, but they don't necessarily need to sign off on the final proposal copy. Your best editor may be someone who doesn't know anything about the subject of your proposal. If s/he can read it and understand it, you have a good application. As the proposal writer, you are most in tune with what the funding source is looking for. Be picky about what editorial advice you choose to follow.

TIP 9. Miss a deadline rather than submit a poor application. Every proposal is a form of cultivation. First impressions matter. Last minute proposals often look like last minute proposals.

TIP 10. Always request funding source critiques of rejected proposals. Even if a funding source is unable to provide you with a written response, they may remember that you cared enough to ask for it. You'll need the critiques to try again!