

# Competitive Grant Proposal Writing Masterclass

10X your confidence as a grant proposal writer

 Sarah Hall







# About Me



## Professional Background

Experienced business leader and writer. Experience in Fund Development, Sales, Strategy, BizOps, and Product. Nonprofits. Startup. Google. Intuit.



## Life and Family

Mom of 3. Married to middle school sweetheart. Recently relocated to Orangevale.



## Community Focus

Passionate about cause-driven work. From Kenya. Active volunteer.



# Maximizing Today's Session

## Gather

Get a notebook and pen ready

## Focus

Close Slack, email, and move your phone away

## Participate

Engage actively and keep video on



# Group Introductions

Share in Zoom Comments

Your name, organization, and something you love about your county

Self-Assessment (in your own notebook)

Rate your grant writing confidence (1-10) and why

Set Intentions (in your own notebook)

Note what you hope to gain from today's session



Today's Goal:

10X

Your Confidence



# For discussion

What makes an effective funding proposal?

# For discussion

What makes an effective nonprofit or cause-driven organization?

# Org Effectiveness = Proposal Effectiveness

Community-Backed

Supported by the  
population you're serving

Empowerment Focus

Help target population  
overcome challenges and  
help themselves

Proven Track Record

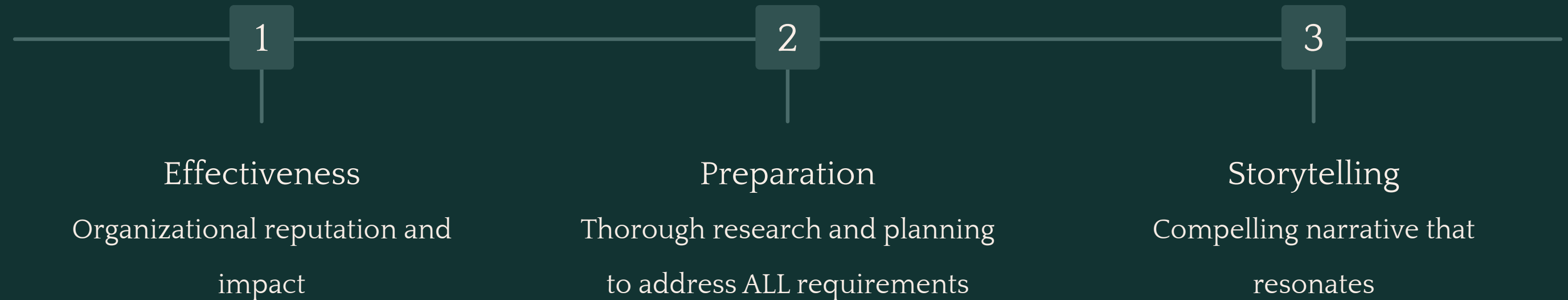
Consistent results with  
carefully planned  
programs

Accountability

Continuous evaluation  
and ownership of work  
done



# Competitive Grant Proposal Framework



# Thorough Preparation



Understand the Assignment

Know exactly what the funder wants



Plan Ahead to Win

Create a strategy and timeline for success



# Thorough Preparation



## Understand the Assignment

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# Understand the Assignment



## Review RFP Multiple Times

Read thoroughly and mark key requirements



## Watch Proposer's Conference

Attend or review recordings if available



## Review Previous Feedback

Study comments from Round 1 if applicable



## Research Funder Thoroughly

Explore website, press releases, funded projects



# Why Do All This Research?



Qualification Check

Do we actually qualify?



Matched Proposal

Write proposal that fits funder's priorities



Strategic Leverage

Find ideas/data/framing to strengthen application



# Qualification Check

## Pre-development

Are we at the right stage?

## Targeting Job Creation

Are we focused on the right industries?

## Economic Equity

Are we serving disinvested populations?







Let's Practice

# Yolo Climate-Smart Ag Innovation Hub

The Yolo Climate-Smart Ag Innovation Hub is an exploratory pre-development project designed to assess the feasibility of establishing a regional center in West Sacramento focused on regenerative agriculture, climate-resilient food systems, and biotech-driven soil health solutions. This initiative aims to support job creation in the Working Lands and Biotechnology sectors by building workforce pipelines for middle-skill roles such as lab and field technicians, agricultural equipment maintenance workers, and production specialists. Catalyst funding will support critical early-stage activities including a market analysis, environmental review of the proposed brownfield site, and the development of a Community Benefits Agreement co-created with historically disinvested communities in Southport and Broderick. The project will also fund capacity-building for local BIPOC-led agricultural cooperatives, ensuring community-led planning and equitable economic participation.



Let's Practice

# Colusa GreenBuild Workforce and Innovation Campus

The Colusa GreenBuild Workforce and Innovation Campus is a last-mile pre-development project focused on finalizing site plans, permitting, and financing structures for a modular construction training and light manufacturing facility on a 4-acre publicly owned parcel near downtown Colusa. Building on a recently completed feasibility study, this project aims to catalyze equitable job creation by training residents from disinvested rural communities in energy-efficient modular home assembly, clean construction trades, and precision equipment maintenance. Catalyst funds will cover the finalization of architectural designs, legal structuring of a public-private partnership with a regional construction firm, and the development of a Community Benefits Agreement ensuring priority hiring and workforce development opportunities for low-income and formerly incarcerated individuals in the region. With a focus on decarbonizing the built environment and expanding middle-skill pathways in both Precision Manufacturing and Construction, this project will position Colusa as a rural innovation node in Northern California's transition to a climate-resilient economy.







Let's Practice

# Colusa Riverfront Pavilion

The Colusa Riverfront Pavilion Project proposes the construction of a new event venue and public amphitheater along the Sacramento River, designed to boost local tourism and generate revenue through weddings, festivals, and seasonal markets. The project team is requesting Catalyst funds to begin construction immediately, having already selected contractors and finalized architectural designs. Once completed, the Pavilion is expected to draw visitors from surrounding counties and support local small businesses through vendor space rentals and promotional opportunities.



Let's Practice

# Sutter SoilTech Pilot Program

In Sutter County, where agriculture is the backbone of the economy, there's a growing need to connect the next generation of workers with the skills needed for a more sustainable, tech-driven future. The Sutter SoilTech Pilot Program is a pre-development project designed to test a new workforce training model that prepares local residents—especially from farmworker and underserved rural communities—for middle-skill careers in soil health, agtech, and biotech. With support from Catalyst funding, the project will launch a small-scale pilot training course in partnership with a local community college, focused on regenerative farming techniques, data-driven soil monitoring, and bio-based pest control technologies. The grant will fund curriculum design, instructor onboarding, equipment needs, and a community engagement process to shape a long-term training hub that could expand across the region. Early participants will receive paid stipends, hands-on experience with emerging technologies, and direct connections to employers in the Working Lands and Biotechnology sectors.







Let's Practice

# Placer Outdoor Economy Enhancement

The Placer Outdoor Economy Enhancement Initiative is a pre-development effort aimed at supporting local tourism and small business growth across the Sierra foothills. The project focuses on planning and preparing for a network of scenic byways, bike-friendly routes, and visitor signage that will connect outdoor recreation areas with small business hubs in Auburn, Colfax, and nearby communities. Proposed activities include designing wayfinding elements, coordinating with local partners to identify signage locations, and developing a marketing strategy to promote Placer County as a year-round outdoor destination. The initiative includes the purchase and installation of branded signs and kiosks as a way to quickly activate tourism corridors and boost exposure for local shops, cafés, and lodging providers—especially during the slower travel seasons.

Let's Practice

# Greater Sacramento TPM Manufacturing Collaborative: Digital Tools Initiative

The Roseville Area Chamber of Commerce and Rancho Cordova Area Chamber of Commerce are excited to partner on the Greater Sacramento TPM Manufacturing Collaborative: Digital Tools Initiative. Backed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) framework, this initiative aims to address workforce shortages in precision manufacturing across Sacramento and Placer counties. It will explore and evaluate digital software tools to enhance workforce accessibility, strengthen employer engagement, and better align education and training with industry needs. A key focus is supporting the region's veteran community, whose skills are highly transferable to manufacturing careers. By bridging the gap between job seekers, employers, and training providers, the initiative will help build a more inclusive and resilient regional economy.





# Thorough Preparation



Understand the Assignment

Know exactly what the funder wants



**Plan Ahead to Win**

Create a strategy and timeline for success



For Example

# Budget & Budget Narrative

A strong budget demonstrates your organization's fiscal responsibility and planning capabilities and gives funders an understanding of and confidence in how their money will be invested.



Be specific and detailed

Include precise, itemized line items and explain how you calculated each amount and why the expense matters



Get help if you need help

Google it! Ask AI to make a template! Phone a friend!  
Google it again! Ask another organization to review!  
Be empowered!

# Budget Example - Personnel & Operating Costs

PERSONNEL		
Position Title	Amount Budgeted	Justification. Briefly state the role, purpose, and/or need for the budgeted item. Include the calculation of cost (for example, hourly rate x # of hours)
Project Manager - fulltime	\$65,000.00	FTE dedicated 100% to managing and supporting this pre-development project, including ensuring plans stay on track, funds are used most effectively, learnings are clearly documented, and adjustments are made where needed.
Finance Lead - 4 hrs/week	\$6,240.00	FTE responsible for careful finance management and reporting to ensure budget stays on track. Total is calculated based on 4 hours/week for 1 year at a rate of \$30/hour, which includes salary and benefits.
Project Coordinator - 10 hrs/week	\$15,600.00	FTE who supports Project Manager and drives the logistics and details for the planned community engagements and events. Total is calculated based on 10 hours/week for 1 year at a rate of \$30/hour, which includes salary and benefits.
PERSONNEL TOTAL	<b>\$86,840.00</b>	
OPERATING COSTS		
Line Item	Amount Budgeted	Justification. Briefly state the role, purpose, and/or need for the budgeted item. Include the calculation of cost (for example, # of units x cost/unit)
Event/Meeting Expenses	\$1,600.00	This supports quarterly community meetings to gather feedback and share progress. Venue rental, refreshments, and AV equipment are essential for accessible and productive sessions. Calculation: 4 meetings x \$250 venue rental + \$100 refreshments/supplies + \$50 AV = \$1600 total
Materials/Supplies	\$1,400.00	Project staff need basic office supplies and printing for reports, surveys, and informational packets. Computer software licenses are also required for data analysis. Calculation: \$50/month office supplies x 12 months + \$300 printing costs + \$500 software licenses = \$1400 total
Outreach/Marketing	\$1,700.00	To reach target audiences and build awareness, we'll utilize social media ads and local print publications. Promotional materials, like flyers and banners, are necessary for community events. Calculation: \$100/month social media ads x 12 months + \$200 print ads + \$300 promotional materials = \$1700 total
Consulting from [NAME] Consultancy	\$50,000.00	[NAME] Consultancy will give guidance on the project as well as be specifically responsible for driving planned feasibility studies, competitive assessments, and for helping us investigate additional funding and grant opportunities and write grant proposals for implementation. Budget narrative includes detailed cost break down by activity. Total is calculated based on...
Contractor - Community Outreach Specialist - [NAME]	\$52,000.00	To effectively engage and build trust with disinvested populations, specialized outreach expertise is crucial. This subcontractor has existing relationships within the target communities and will ensure culturally sensitive communication and program participation. They will also be responsible for organizing community meetings, collecting feedback, and ensuring the project is responsive to community needs. Calculation is based on an hourly rate of \$50/hour working 20 hours/week for 1 year.
Contractor - Data Analysis and Evaluation Consultant - [NAME]	\$12,200.00	To ensure project effectiveness and provide data-driven insights, a data analysis and evaluation consultant is necessary. This subcontractor is someone we have worked with previously and whose work is excellent. They will design evaluation tools, collect and analyze data, and provide reports on project outcomes and impact. This expertise is essential for meeting reporting requirements and demonstrating the project's value to the community and funders. [NAME] has quoted a project-based fee of \$5,000 for initial evaluation framework development plus an ongoing hourly rate of \$75/hour for ongoing data analysis and reporting, which we together estimate will take up ~8 hours/month for the year. $\$5,000 + (\$75 \times 8 \times 12 = \$7200) = \$12,200$
OPERATING COSTS TOTAL	<b>\$118,900.00</b>	







# Recruit Your Team Example

Request to Review Grant Proposal Draft

Recipients

Request to Review Grant Proposal Draft

Dear [NAME],

I hope this email finds you well.

We are currently working on a grant proposal for [X], due [WHEN]. We are very excited about this opportunity and believe it aligns strongly with our organization's mission and focus on [X]. I'm reaching out to ask if you would be willing to review a draft in a few weeks and give us feedback.

Your experience and insights as a board member are invaluable, and your experience in [X] feels relevant, especially as we received feedback in Round 1 that [DETAILS]. We would greatly appreciate your feedback and I believe your input would significantly strengthen our application.

Here is a link to the RFP: [insert link to RFP here]

Here is a link to the rubric we have created based on the RFP: [insert link to rubric here]

If you are up for it, we will aim to have a draft ready for your review by [DATE] so that we have time to incorporate your feedback. Would that timeline work for you? Of course, there is flexibility should you need it.

Thank you for your consideration and ongoing support.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

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# Reach Out Guidance:



## Be Professional

Maintain a professional tone in all communications.



## Be Authentic

Personalize your outreach to show genuine interest.



## Be reciprocal

Is there anything you can offer to them?

# Plan Ahead to Win



## Create Rubric

Build scoring guide based on RFP. Identify help needed



## Map Timeline

Include buffer for polishing final draft



## Identify Contributors

Who can help? Who will review/edit/proofread?



## Brainstorm Partnerships

Identify potential collaborators to strengthen work



## Evaluate Credibility

Is there anything you need to explain or overcome?

\*Grammar matters!!





# Planning Exercise: 10 Min

Write Rubric

List key evaluation criteria

Draft Timeline

Map key milestones for your proposal

Identify Team

List who will contribute what



10 Min Break



# Identifying Other Sources of Funding



# 3 Fund-Finding Tips



## Dedicate Time to Searching

Set aside regular time and go down the rabbit hole!



## Track Your Research and Opportunities

Keep a clear record of prospects, deadlines, and potential funding sources



## Reach Out!

Build professional, authentic relationships—don't hesitate to connect or ask questions.





# Research Starter List (not comprehensive)



California Grants Portal



Sacramento Region  
Community Foundation



Teichert Foundation



The California  
Endowment



The California Wellness  
Foundation



Placer Community  
Foundation



Key Stakeholder or Grant Maker Perspectives

Homework: Send out 5 respectful, genuine, well-researched inquiries

Funder Name	Funder Type	Contact Info	Application Deadline	Check Back Date	Notes
National Science Foundation	Government	[URL]	2025-08-21	6/1/2025	Requires detailed proposal. In-progress.
Ford Foundation	Foundation	[URL]	None as of April 2025	5/15/2025	Focus on social justice initiatives. Have relationship with Emily and we should continue to exchange quarterly emails.
Google Inc.	Corporate	[URL]	None as of April 2025	7/1/2025	Tech education grants. Emailed general email in January and Kara Small said to check back in July as there may be an RFP coming focused on California rural communities.
Jane Doe	Individual Donor	jane.doe@email.com	Ongoing	4/1/2025	Has funded \$10k asks for us in the past. Interested in local arts projects.
Department of Education	Government	[URL]	2025-06-27	8/15/2025	Early childhood education focus.
The Gates Foundation	Foundation	[URL]	2025-03-14	4/30/2025	Global health initiatives.
Microsoft Philanthropies	Corporate	[URL]	2025-07-19	9/15/2025	Digital skills training grants. Not a fit for us as of April 2025. Check back for future opportunities.
John Smith	Individual Donor	john.smith@phone.com	Ongoing	5/15/2025	Supports environmental projects. Good prospect for us to inquire with.

# Research Tracker Example



# Funding Outreach Example



## Inquiry about Funding Opportunities - Organization X

### Recipients

### Inquiry about Funding Opportunities - Organization X

My name is [Your Name] and I am with Organization X.

We have been following your work at Organization Y and really appreciate your work on [Fill in details], particularly your funded projects focused on [Mention specific area or type of project funded by Organization Y, e.g., youth education, community development, environmental conservation]. We were especially interested in [Mention a specific project or funding effort from Organization Y, e.g., the XYZ initiative and its impact on the community].

Organization X works to [Briefly describe what your organization does, keep it concise]. Our mission aligns closely with the work of Organization Y in that [Explain the alignment between your organization's mission and Organization Y's work].

We are currently exploring funding opportunities to support our upcoming projects, specifically [Mention specific project or area you're seeking funding for]. We were wondering if Organization Y might have any upcoming Requests for Proposals or if you are aware of other funding opportunities that may be a good fit for our work.

Any information or guidance you could provide would be greatly appreciated. We are eager to continue our work in [Mention area of focus again] and believe that potential support from funders like Organization Y could significantly enhance our impact.

Thank you for considering our inquiry. We greatly appreciate your time and any assistance you might be able to offer.

Sincerely,  
[Your Name]

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Send





# Reach Out Guidance:



## Be Professional

Maintain a professional tone in all communications.



## Be Authentic

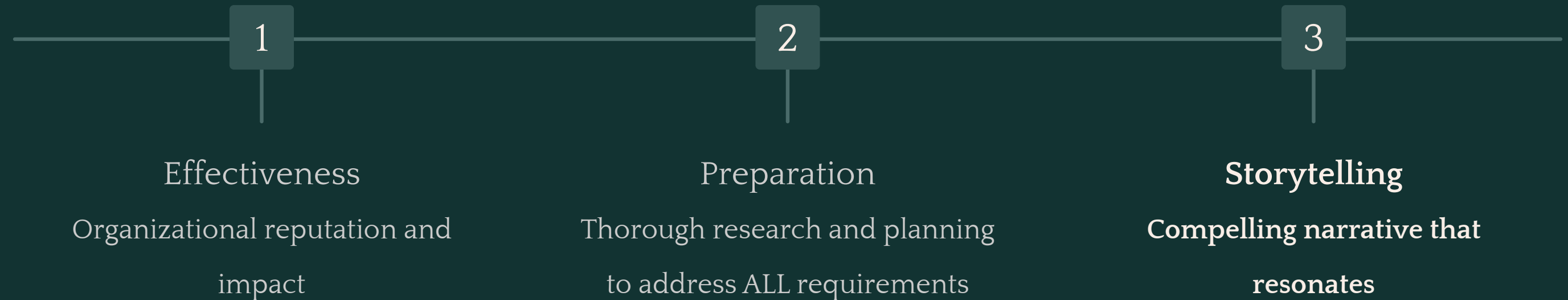
Personalize your outreach to show genuine interest.



## Do Your Research

Verify opportunities and understand funder priorities first.

# Competitive Grant Proposal Framework



# Good Storytelling

## Compelling Case for Change

Clear problem and solution narrative

## Customer Focus

Center who you're serving

## Strong Data

Evidence that supports your claims

## Leverages All Your Research

Use all that homework you did

## Reader Empathy

Remember reviewer experience





# Focus on "the Customer"

Your proposal's effectiveness depends on how well you center the people you serve.



## Center Who You're Serving

Keep your beneficiaries at the heart of your narrative and demonstrate how your solution addresses their specific needs.



## Empower and Co-create

Help people help themselves. Ensure your plan has thoughtful input and design from who it's for.



## Include Authentic

~~Noises~~  
Incorporate testimonials and stories from those you are and will serve.



## Align with Funder Priorities

Connect your customer-focused outcomes directly to the funder's goals and focus areas



# Compelling Case for Change



## Problem

Clear definition of challenge facing community



## Impact

How problem affects real people



## Solution

Your unique approach to addressing need



## Outcomes

Specific changes your work will create



# Include Strong Data & Outcomes

## Data Sources

- Your organization's records
- Local organizations' reports
- RFP or grant maker's website
- Participant feedback
- Articles
- Fact Book

## Writing Tip

Use **placeholders** if data isn't immediately available

Example: "Colusa County's unemployment rate, [X]% , is one of the lowest in the state..."







# Leverage Your Research

66

Use Funder  
Language  
Echo key terms from  
their materials



Align with  
Priorities  
Show how you  
address their focus  
areas



Re-review for  
gotchas  
Recheck notes and  
materials as part of  
editing & polishing



# Reader Empathy



## Use Your Rubric

Make scoring easy for reviewers



## Cut Excess

Be concise and direct (“Baby Bear” details)



## Simplify Language

Explain it to a 5th grader



## Review Thoroughly

Revise! Revise! Revise!





# Storytelling Exercise: 10 min

## Problem Statement

Write one paragraph defining your community need

## Solution Approach

Describe your pre-development plan to address

## Expected Outcomes

List 3 specific, measurable results from your plan



# Grammar and Typos Matter!



Grammatical correctness reflects your professionalism and attention to detail. Always proofread carefully!



# Common Proposal Pitfalls

## Missing Requirements or Details

Overlooking key RFP instructions

## Jargon Overload

Using too much technical or "buzz wordy" language

## Weak Outcomes

Vague or unmeasurable results

## Last-Minute Rush

Insufficient time for review and polish



# Final Checklist



## Requirements Review

Verify all RFP elements are addressed. Score yourself!



## Proofreading

Check grammar, spelling, and formatting

3

## Fresh Eyes

Have someone unfamiliar review proposal



## Early Submission

Submit before deadline to avoid technical issues





Questions?

# Next Steps

1

Do your planning

Make a rubric and timeline. Send emails to your contributing team.

2

Get started

Finish a strong draft before the in-person grant proposal workshops.

3

Attend an in-person Storytelling workshop

May 29 (Sacramento) or June 2 (Colusa)

Register now!

# Please Complete Our Survey

Please share your honest feedback







Thank You!