> A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult.
>
> Melinda Gates

13

PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

13

INTRODUCTION

Chapters 8 and 11 in this guide will help advocates design strong advocacy proposals. However, to maximize the clarity and effectiveness of these proposals, facilitators should take advantage of the workshop space to provide effective feedback on proposal ideas and writing. By following the rules of feedback outlined in Chapter 2, facilitators offer participants ways to improve their advocacy strategy and proposal and increase the probability of funding. Often effective feedback consists of asking the right clarifying questions that help participants build a stronger, more compelling proposal.

13.1

PROPOSAL ELEMENTS AND REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

Donors such as private foundations, governments, and multilaterals establish funding priorities every few years. They develop and release Requests for Proposals (RFPs) based on these funding priorities. Sometimes they release RFPs only to certain organizations or groups that are eligible to apply; other times the RFPs are open calls for proposals to which any qualifying organization can apply. For foundation donors, be sure to check the foundation's website or meet with foundation staff to make sure that your organization's project interests and the foundation's priorities align well.

As with any funding application, you must read the RFP very carefully and take note of all of the eligibility requirements. Often, the RFP includes not only details on what the proposal or concept note should contain, but also specific criteria that the applying organization must meet to be eligible for selection. These organizational criteria might include certain certifications, an audited financial statement, or registration under a specific government system.

Here is an example of basic proposal components, but please remember that different donors have different requirements.

Sample Proposal Components

- **Cover letter.** Brief letter written on letterhead paper, signed by the organization's official representative who can legally accept funds.

- **Cover sheet.** Provides information for your organization's contact and person in charge. It includes the total requested budget, project duration, and brief summary of the project.

- **Executive summary.** Highlights the project's goal, objectives, strategies, and expected results.

- **Justification for the advocacy strategy.** What is the problem or issue you are addressing?

- **Goal and objectives.** What are your goal and objectives for the advocacy project?

- **Strategies and key activities.** What principal strategies and key activities will you implement to achieve the results you envision for this project?

- **Indicators of success.** What benchmarks will you use to evaluate the results and success of your project activities?

13.1 PROPOSAL ELEMENTS AND REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

- **Desired advocacy project results.** What specific results do you want to have achieved when this project is completed?

- **Involvement of adolescent girls.** How will adolescent girls be directly and indirectly involved in this project?

- **Identification of allies and potential partners.** Who (people, organizations, networks, collaborators, etc.) will you work with to accomplish your advocacy strategy?

- **Evaluation plan.** Details methods for monitoring and evaluating the advocacy strategy, including tools for collecting data and information on project outcomes and results.

The following are potential appendices:

- Detailed timeline for the advocacy strategy for the period open to funding.

- Project budget requesting the amount necessary to execute your advocacy plan. If your project requires additional funds, please include information concerning additional funders or the use of in-kind funds. Organizations may request a maximum of 10% of the total budget for capital investments such as vehicles, computers, etc.

- Brief biographies for key staff, their role and responsibilities on the proposed advocacy project, and the approximate percentage of time they will devote to the project.

- A copy of the organization's fiscal status as a non-governmental organization (NGO).

Timeline

You must submit your final proposal by the day indicated by the funder. Most funders will not accept incomplete proposals or those submitted after the deadline.

13.2

PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON WRITTEN PROPOSALS

Write feedback to proposals in as detailed, specific, and complete a manner as possible following "The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback." See the following page for specific tips on how to provide good written feedback. If possible, use the Track Changes feature in Microsoft Word and make your comments directly into the margins of the document.

Review the proposal according to the following required sections included in the RFP, and make sure the proposal has included each required section, in addition to effectively responding to the relevant questions. If the proposal does not address each point, suggest how the writer could do so more effectively.

After reading through the full proposal, consider the following overarching questions and write down your suggestions to share with the participant:

- **Impact.** How might the proposal potentially advance advocacy efforts relating to policies, programs, or budgets on behalf of adolescent girls?

- **Feasibility.** How feasible or realistic is the proposed advocacy strategy, given time and resource constraints? Does the project focus on one specific issue affecting adolescent girls (i.e., education), or does it seek to address girls' human rights more broadly (i.e., education, health, access to employment, etc.)?

- **Budget.** How well will the proposed project benefit adolescent girls in the short and long term, given the proposed budget?

- **Bonus.** Is there anything unique or especially valuable about the proposal?

When providing written feedback on proposals, try to incorporate the following:

1 **Create a dialogue when writing responses.**

- **Ask questions**. "You suggest that educating decision makers would be a part of a good advocacy strategy, but you do not tie this strategy to a long-term goal. What is the long-term goal of your project?"

- **Make observations**. "I do not understand how you are relating your activities to your advocacy strategy." "This is a very good example of how your activities work towards your goal."

- **Pose possibilities**. "You might consider looking at X for more information on Y."

13.2 PROVIDING FEEDBACK ON WRITTEN PROPOSALS

- **Ask for clarification.** "What do you mean when you say X? Is this really an advocacy strategy, or is it more of an Information, Education, and Communication strategy?"

- **Tell the writer what you heard.** "First you said X, so I thought you would write about Y, but then you brought in Z, so I am still unclear on the connection between X and Z."

2 **Point out successes.**
Let the writer know when something works—for example: "You have done a good job of organizing your key sections and timeline of the proposal." A word of encouragement may motivate the writer to see the value of revisions—something of value can be improved, but something of little value may not be worth the effort.

3 **Comment on organization.**
"Because you mentioned A as justification of your advocacy project, I thought you might cite B and C, but you did not. Why not?"

4 **Be specific.**
Comments should be specific enough to guide writers as they edit their work, but not so specific that they simply implement all of your suggestions.

5 **Summarize.**
Summarize the gist of the marginal comments. Provide writers with specific directions for revising. Tell them what is essential to revise and what will strengthen but is not crucial to the proposal.

You might recommend that the writer consider doing X, Y, and Z to improve the proposal; develop a particular point more fully; consider the relationship between parts A and B of the proposal; and so on.

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13.3

FACILITATING GROUP WORK ON PROPOSALS AND IN-PERSON FEEDBACK

Individual Feedback

In a workshop setting, the facilitator may find that he/she needs to provide feedback to a number of participants regarding their personal participation, their written exercises, or their draft advocacy strategies. When providing in-person individual feedback, follow all of the guidelines on page 18 of "The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback", which are reflected in the following suggestions:

- **Timing.** When providing feedback in person, it is especially important to select an appropriate time to provide feedback and ask the participant if he/she would like to receive feedback about their work and/or participation. This creates a positive setting for communication and greatly increases the chance that the participants will receive the feedback well. If the feedback is regarding a person's participation in the workshop, it is especially important that feedback be offered in a private setting.

- **Highlight the positive.** Always begin with positive feedback about the participant's work. Select one or two things that the participant has done well and elaborate on why you think that they were done well. Be sure to use "I statements" when providing this and any feedback to make it very clear that these are personal observations made as a facilitator.

- **Be specific.** Offering feedback on written work or advocacy strategies is more of a dialog between the facilitator and the participant. A good strategy to begin dialog is to ask specific clarifying questions about the work. For example: "I see that you are interested in X, and I am not quite sure how it relates to your strategy Y. Could you tell me more about that?" These kinds of questions solicit the participant's thought on a specific issue and often, in the clarification, partcipants make the necessary connections verbally that may not come through in the written work.

Other questions that promote good dialog include the following:
- Can you give me an example of that?
- Can you say more about that?
- How did you get to that conclusion?
- How do you see that relating to [whatever topic you are covering]?
- What do you think a solution to that problem could be?

13.3 FACILITATING GROUP WORK ON PROPOSALS AND IN-PERSON FEEDBACK

As with written feedback, it is important to conclude the feedback session with a brief summary of simple, concrete suggestions for improvements. That way, the participant leaves the session with a clear plan for improving his/her work. For example: "For me, your advocacy proposal would be even stronger if you justify the need more clearly, citing specific policies, and highlight the participation of girls in your strategy."

Providing Effective Group Feedback

For managing in-person group feedback, many of the same "Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback" guidelines apply. In a workshop setting, most group feedback is done in small groups of 3-5 people. Ideally, the facilitator will have support from other people and/or facilitators to provide feedback to several groups simultaneously. To maintain consistency when providing group feedback, make sure that the same facilitator provides feedback to the same group throughout the workshop whenever possible. When needed, bring in another facilitator to provide a different point of view on an issue or problem, especially when the issue is recurring.

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