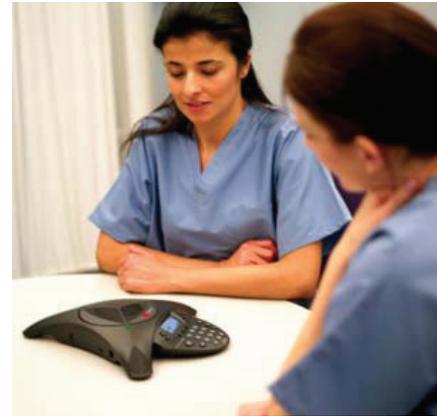


## Preparing a Grant Proposal



# Polycom Grant Assistance Program

## Preparing a Grant Proposal

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## **The Objective of the Grant Proposal**

The objective of the grant proposal is to illustrate the close relationship between the purpose of the funding source and the purpose of the project being proposed. It is the marriage of the funding source's plan and the applicant's plan. The result of funding should be a project that is mutually beneficial to both parties. This is the message to be presented in a proposal.

The tone and format must match as well. *Understanding Private Funding* emphasizes the process of learning to understand each funding source's purpose in order to select one that matches your organization. Through the discovery process, each funding source's unique "personality" will emerge. Some are formal and some are informal. Some are rigid and some are flexible. Some are disclosing and some are reticent. A proposal that matches the personality of the funding source will be more successful.

While some elements of a proposal will be used for multiple funding sources, there is no "one size fits all" proposal. Approach each proposal individually. Pay careful attention to the specific interests of the funding source and purposefully link them to the proposal. This is a case in which it is appropriate to use the funding source's exact language (which can be found in annual reports, web pages, and articles written by the organization's personnel, requests for proposal and other materials).

Become familiar with the program you plan to implement to be certain it fits the funding opportunity. Make note of the project's strengths in relation to the goals of the funding source. These will be featured in the grant proposal. Also note any weaknesses or inconsistencies present in your plan. These will need to be addressed in the proposal. Leave no questions or doubts in the grant proposal reviewer's mind.

## **Grant Request Formats**

Most requests for funding are made in the form of a letter of intent, letter of proposal, or proposal. Foundations and corporations often prefer a letter of intent prior to a full proposal. Public funding sources (states and the federal government) are more likely to engage in a full proposal as the first level of application.

## **Letter of Intent**

Many funders will request a "letter of intent" as the first step in the application process. The letter of intent is typically one to three pages. It provides the basic information necessary for the reviewers to determine whether to accept a full proposal. Think of it as a first impression. The letter will not include all of the details of a proposal. It must be very compelling and clear.

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## The Letter of Intent might include the following:

1. Brief description of the organization and community in which it operates;
2. Description of the vision, goals, objectives, and main activities for the project requested for funding;
3. Brief overview of expected program outcomes and impact on the community, described in context of the funding organization's interests.
4. Attachments: some organizations use cover sheets or forms, which would be included. Most organizations will request a copy of your organization's 501(c)(3) designation letter. If your organization does not have its 501(c)(3) designation letter, you must submit the letter of agreement you signed with your fiscal sponsor accompanied by its 501(c)(3) letter or other evidence of your organization's nonprofit status.

Guidance on the Letter of Intent/Letter of Inquiry is available at the Foundation Center <http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/faqs/html/letter.html>. Samples are available at [http://www.npguides.org/guide/inquiry\\_letter.htm](http://www.npguides.org/guide/inquiry_letter.htm). A few tips are provided here.

- \* There are different schools of thought, but consider leading the letter with the request up front.
- \* Follow with a brief description of the organization and community in which it operates.
  - \* Note any special factors, either strengths or challenges that are relevant to the project. Avoid unrelated information.
  - \* Address changes or other factors that might lead to the discussion of the problem.
  - \* Connect to the funding source, if possible.
  - \* Include partners if any are included.
- \* Describe the vision, needs, goals, objectives, and main activities for the project requested for funding;
  - \* Create a clear picture of the desired "future state."
  - \* Establish the basic problem using key data. Limit the scope of the need statement, which will be developed in the full proposal.
  - \* Create measurable goals that are also realistic.
  - \* Describe main activities, trying to anticipate the reviewer's questions.
- \* Briefly list expected program outcomes and impact on the community, described in context of the funding organization's interests.
  - \* Be judicious about using the types of data presented in the example. You may be called to provide evidence of the validity of your estimates. All of these are based on data found through research and/or reports. In a full proposal, you would provide the citation of the sources.
  - \* When listing benefits, consider the reader. For example, a local employer might want to improve the workforce, improve quality of life, and reduce taxes and costs of education. If the proposal were focused on a "socially conscious" foundation, the emphasis would be different, focused on

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- \* Close strong!
- \* The letter should be signed by the “CEO” level person of the organization.

The funding agency will review the letter of intent. Most will notify you of your eligibility to submit a full proposal.

### **Letter of Proposal**

The scope and length of a letter of proposal varies significantly based on the funding source’s guidelines, the type of project being proposed, and the author’s writing style. It is imperative to follow the guidelines provided by the funder – exactly. If no guidelines are provided, then the following could be used as a guideline for a brief letter of proposal:

### **Brief Letter of Proposal could include the following information:**

- \* Description of the project
- \* Brief history, description, programs and mission of the organization and community
- \* Discussion of partners, if any are participating
- \* Need for the project
- \* Project description
- \* Project timeline (beginning and ending dates)
- \* Signature of the Principal, Superintendent, or Board President
- \* Specific amount requested
- \* List of other funding sources and amounts
- \* List of Board of Directors and occupations
- \* Most recent audited financial statements OR organization prepared statements
- \* Current copy of IRS Determination Letter certifying tax-exempt status or other documentation of tax-exempt status

The sample for the proposal that is included in the next section could be adapted to letter format to serve as a letter of proposal.

### **Proposal**

A proposal usually provides more extensive details on the need and the program. Some letters of proposal include the elements of a full proposal, but are written in letter format. Most foundation or corporate grant proposal will ask for the following items. Again, follow the guidelines of targeted funding sources to prepare a letter of proposal.

- \* Cover letter from the CEO level representative
- \* Introduction that describes the applicant organization, emphasizing special or unique features
- \* A specific request for support
- \* Description of the project’s fit with the funding source’s priorities
- \* Statement of need

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- \* Goals and objectives
- \* Solution or methods
- \* Uniqueness of project
- \* Evaluation
- \* Outreach plan (marketing and/or dissemination of findings)
- \* Statement of experience
- \* Request in context of overall project budget (portion of total budget being requested; other sources of resources)
- \* Plans for sustainability beyond grant
- \* Budget
- \* Attachments – proof of tax exemption, audited financial statement, articles of incorporation/by-laws, and other sources of funding for overall project budget.

The Internet provides many samples of proposals that may give you some ideas about language, format, and presentation. Some of the ones identified in February 2009 include:

- \* <http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/faqs/html/propsample.html> - primarily foundations
- \* <http://www.theideabank.com/onlinecourse/samplegrant.html> - real proposals to foundations and public (state and federal) programs
- \* [http://www.npguides.org/guide/sample\\_proposals.htm](http://www.npguides.org/guide/sample_proposals.htm) - sample private and public proposals
- \* <http://www.effectivewriter.com/proposal.html> - how to effectively organize a proposal narrative

The Foundation Center provides a free “short-course” in proposal writing online at <http://foundationcenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html>. A list of books about proposal writing is maintained by Joe Levine at <http://www.learnerassociates.net/proposal/amazon2.htm>.

### Tips to Consider

- Do not attempt to hide the request for money. There are different schools of thought about the placement of a request. This example places it at the very beginning. Do not make the reader look for the request. They know the proposal is asking for money, so there is no reason to be shy.
- Emphasize the benefits to the ultimate participants and the community rather than to the organization.
- Describe changes that will be made to integrate the technology into the organization. How will interaction with constituents change? How will services change?
- Make a “business case”. Most foundation board members are business people, not educators. Compare this example to the examples in the section on federal grants. There are a lot fewer details in this example. The message is direct and clear.

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- ☑ Talk in terms of future potential. What will constituents be able to do that they cannot do now? What will change for the community? How will you build capacity through training?
- ☑ Do not be afraid of “emotion” but do not count on it either. The proposal makes a sound business case. Following that case, it closes with a motivational vision of what can be possible.
- ☑ Recognize different points of view. Some people embrace “new research” while others value the “good old days”. People adhere to various political views. Most people attended school and many have children in school. Consider various perspectives when preparing a narrative.

Consider national trends, including federal legislation, but don't be limited by them. Studies and reports make good reference points, but these are not government grants.

### **The Most Important Section – Establishing a Relevant Need**

People regularly ask which section of a proposal is the most important. The discussion of need creates a framework for all other narrative and convinces the reader that the project is worthwhile. It connects the reader, and the related organization, to the problem. It creates relevance.

If philanthropy is motivated by a desire to address a need or problem, then your proposal must have a clearly developed statement of need. Take time to develop a highly significant needs statement that will be compelling to the targeted reader. Realize that the majority of people who will read proposals to a foundation or corporation are not community leaders and business people. The process of developing the statement of need may require a bit of “out of the box” thinking.

The needs assessment or problem statement should be focused on a specific issue that relates clearly to the purposes and goals of your organization. Illustrate a thorough understanding of the problem. The problem should be defined in such a way that it can be reasonably addressed in the given time period. For example, a 12-month project is sufficient time to install videoconference equipment, prepare professionals and constituents to use the equipment, adapt services and materials, and begin to implement a program. It is not a long enough period of time to realize significant benefits. In contrast, one would expect significant and measurable improvement in a two-year time frame.

The needs assessment describes the conditions of an organization or group of constituents that will be addressed through the proposed project. A problem statement analyzes the situation in comparison to other situations and establishes a “problem” that will be remedied in some way by your project. These two terms are often used interchangeably and both should be addressed in the section on the need or problem.

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Consider this process for identifying a set of needs that might be developed into proposals.

- \* Review organizational plans, popular literature and web resources related to your type mindful of the “general public” perspective. For example, “accountability” is a common theme in education and business; however, it has different implications in each setting. Quality healthcare is another theme that is commonly recognized; but the specifics of serving specific populations would not be widely known.
- \* Break away from describing needs in ways such as, “We need videoconferencing” or “We need telemedicine.” Rather than focusing on the equipment or the programs, focus on the benefits, the ways in which communication and service to constituents will change, and the ultimate positive outcome. Move beyond the acquisition to the underlying need. One successful strategy is to ask why the acquisition is desired repeatedly until you reach the underlying need. For example:
  - \* How many citizens currently lack access to healthcare and how does this affect their quality of life?
  - \* What barriers would be overcome through videoconferencing and the associated services?
  - \* How would it benefit these clients and their families?
  - \* How does lack of access limit them?
  - \* What role does cost play in the problem?
  - \* Is there evidence that the strategy is successful in similar environments?

Continue to ask tough and specific questions until a compelling and specific set of needs evolves.

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The following table provides some “ice breakers” to begin the conversation about needs as they relate to distance learning and to telemedicine (note that the underlying access barriers cross between learning and medical applications).

Distance Learning	Telemedicine
Lack of access to relevant experiences to develop and use high levels of critical thinking.	Inability to reach high need constituents whose health or personal/family situation prevents access to care.
Limited interactivity and communication strategies between students and teachers and between students and others.	Time required for home health providers to travel between patients’ homes.
Instructional flexibility to explore related topics and support independent study.	Negative economic impact in communities that lack medical services (loss of revenue as citizens travel to other communities for care.
Limited currency of printed materials, particularly in science and professions.	Businesses unwilling to locate in a community that lacks health care services.
Lack of connection to the world of work and to practical applications of academic content.	Lack of pre-service and Continuing Medical Education programs relate to severe shortage of medical staff, particularly nurses, in rural hospitals.
Limited ability to serve special populations and to offer specific courses – need for individualized instruction.	Lack of rural constituent involvement in most clinical trials.
Inability to match learners’ needs regarding time (particularly for students who work, have health concerns, or are parents).	Need to develop more consultative health services in which patient and rural primary care provider communicate with specialists “real time”.
Budget limitations and/or lack of faculty necessary to provide needed courses.	Transportation costs, such as patient automobile travel expenses, emergency air evacuations or other forms of transporting patients across the large expanses.
Need to address multiple learning styles through multi-sensory experiences.	Need for “follow on” care as patients leave hospitals more quickly than in the past and still require medical care.
Lack of equitable access, particularly for rural schools, inner city schools, private schools, charter schools, small schools, and low income communities.	Need to standardize and streamline medical records to improved collaboration between providers (e.g., shared access to electronic medical records and provider to provider consultations).
Need for flexible pacing of instruction to more closely meet students’ learning abilities.	

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These examples are very broad and generic. Be very precise about the way in which the need is defined in your own environment. For example:

- How many constituents do not have access?
- How is this documented?
- What are the specific problems caused for them by a lack of access?
- What benefits are not available to them?
- Once these constituents are served, will the need be addressed or is it an ongoing concern?
- Who else is impacted by this problem (family members, employers, peers)?

### Checklist for Needs Statements

- Make a list of the purpose of the program as listed in the grant guidelines. Reflect similar needs in the proposal.
- Are the problems logically developed?
- Avoid circular reasoning (i.e., that the school needs videoconferencing and if it had videoconferencing, its problems would be solved. Look for deeper issues similar to those provided in the table.
- Is the problem substantiated with facts and data?
- Who is the primary topic of the section (it should be the beneficiaries rather than the applicant organization or personnel).
- Are the major consequences of the problem described?
- Have you described any measures already taken to address the problem (and any progress made)?
- Is the description free of jargon?
- Ask an objective reader to critique your statement for readability and clarity.

### Communicating a Credit Plan: Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives are another important elements of the proposal. They define the “products” that the funding source is “purchasing” with its grant. For each problem described in the needs assessment, there will be a corresponding goal with more detailed objectives developed from each goal. The goals and objectives emphasize the outcomes that will result from the activities. Ideally, the goals and objectives will exactly match the needs. If there is a problem that cannot be addressed, omit it. If there is a goal that does not match a need, review the needs or omit the goal.

### Goals

Goals are the ultimately desired conditions that will exist as a result of the project. For example, if one problem is the fact that students in a given school do not have equitable access to experiential learning on which to build a higher order thinking skills, then a goal might be to improve students’ abilities to apply critical thinking skills to organize and

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use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology. If a problem is that home health providers cannot meet the needs of all constituents in geography, then the goal would be to increase the number of patients served.

### **Other goals might include:**

- Enable students to experience “real world” situations through interaction with others and real or simulated laboratory situations.
- To create a safe, effective, and universal operating system to allow physically disabled people to quickly and reliably coordinate with a wide range of health and service providers from their own homes.
- To increase health care value for a specific organization.
- To connect all members of a public safety or emergency response chain of command across different locations to streamline emergency management response activities, reduce disaster recovery costs, and mitigate the impact of disasters through risk reduction and prevention.

### **Objectives**

Objectives are precisely stated sub-sets of goals. Objectives should tell who is going to be doing what, to or for whom, when, to what degree, and the measure of the change.

Objectives form the basis by which the evaluation will be developed. Thus, they should provide a measurable statement of the outcomes by which you – and the funding agency – will know if the project has been successful. Some examples follow.

- To realize costs savings of 20% over current service budgets within 12 months through increased efficiencies of (travel savings, coordinated service, more timely insurance filing, etc.).
- At least 20 classrooms will interact with 3 or more institutions of higher education to experience relevant applications of content through collaborative learning.
- Within X minutes of declaring an emergency situation, the dispatcher will establish video-supported communication between all members of the chain of command appropriate to the emergency.

*One note of caution.* Objectives should not simply restate the activities, which are the means to the end. Rather, objectives should be statements of the expected end that will result from the activities. One way to assess this is to review the beginning verbs of each objective. These verbs should indicate a direction of change; such as to increase or decrease, to expand or reduce.

### **Budget**

The budget translates a conceptual plan into a financial plan. The budget should connect logically with the proposal narrative. In particular, any equipment covered in the budget should have clearly developed roles in the proposal. Do not add any new elements in the budget that have not been covered in the proposal narrative.

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Begin the development of a proposal by preparing a budget for the entire project. Include items that will be covered by the grant and also items that will not. This activity will help ensure that no item is overlooked. Carefully read the instructions for the budget prior to building your own spreadsheets. The instructions will guide the placement of cost items. Understand any budget restrictions before you start and do not attempt to work around them.

The budget is your best estimate of future costs. It is normal to make changes in the budget both at the time of award and during the grant itself. Do not “pad” the budget with inflated or unnecessary costs. Most grant proposal reviewers will recognize this strategy. However, you may want to have in mind a couple of items that could be omitted to reduce the budget. For example, you may be able to reduce the number of students to be served or eliminate some of the parent involvement activities; thus leading to a reduction in the budget. Any reduction in budget should necessitate a reduction in activity.

### **Lucky Seven Tips and Ideas for Writing the Proposal**

#### **1. Do homework to understand the funding source.**

The program staff is there to help and most welcome your call. They can clarify details about available grants for you and assist you with due dates, applications and pertinent information related to the requirements of the grant.

#### **2. Read the instructions thoroughly**

It may sound like a given, but this is the primary reason why many grants don't get funded – people just don't follow the directions. Make a checklist, and check it twice!

#### **3. Create a timeline**

Working backwards from the due date, create a list of all the important tasks you must complete, when they need to be done, and who will do them. Remember, about 40% of your time is writing the grant and 60% is planning and building necessary relationships. Use the remaining time wisely to plan and gather research and data to support your project.

#### **4. Don't rush!**

This goes hand in hand with the time line. Proper planning will keep you from the night-before-its-due marathon!

#### **5. Demonstrate management skills**

Be certain to spell out the “who, what and when” of how the project will be managed. Mention names and positions, dates and times, etc.

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### 6. Know your budget

Think through everything (personnel, materials, travel, etc.) and be realistic. Be certain that what you are asking for is within the limits of the funding source. Remember- the budget can make or break your chances for funding.

### 7. Brevity is the soul of wit

Be brief and to the point in your writing. Grant readers don't want to wade through extraneous information.



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## Resources for Grant Writers and Grant Seekers

### Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal

- \* <http://www.minerandassociates.com/PPW3%20Brief.htm>
- \* Overview of proposal writing, samples of funded proposals and other tools.

### Fundraising & Grantwriting Resources

- \* <http://www.fundsnet services.com/grantwri.htm>
- \* A collection of links to funding applications, grantwriting consultants and services, and grantwriting tutorials.

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- \* [www.polycom.com/pgap](http://www.polycom.com/pgap)
- \* [grants@polycom.com](mailto:grants@polycom.com)

### Post-writing Checklist

- Did you address every single point listed in the funding agency's evaluation criteria and/or proposal guidelines?
- Did you write the proposal to emphasize the funding agency's priorities and goals rather than your own organization's priorities?
- Have you identified needs that will be clear to a lay-person?
- Have you specified who will benefit from the project and why they should?
- Did you involve those who will be affected by the project in the assessment of need and/or planning of the project?
- Have you set realistic goals and described a believable plan for accomplishing the goals?
- Have you checked spelling, grammatical usage, and overall document appearance?
- Have you included all necessary documents to support the proposal?
- Have you established the credibility of the organization to manage the project?
- Do you have a plan for continuing the project after grant funds end?

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## About the Author

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