How to Start a Club in College: 8-Step Guide

* **Starting a college club is a great way to make friends who share similar interests.**
* **You can develop leadership, communication, marketing, and fundraising skills.**
* **Following this eight-step process can get your club up and running.**
* **Learn about the different types of clubs and which ones may appeal to you.**

Joining a club in college can be a great way to [get involved on campus](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/ways-to-get-involved-on-campus/), meet people, explore different interests, and learn about group dynamics. It can also be fun and help [reduce the stress](https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/balancing-stress/) of late study nights and heavy academic workloads.

But what if you've attended the club fair and looked through the official directory and nothing piques your interest? Every organization started with someone who saw a need and filled it by creating their own club.

## **Why Should You Start Your Own Club in College?**

Starting your club can be one of the main highlights when you look back on your college experience. In some ways, it's a little like [starting a business](https://www.bestcolleges.com/business/mba/do-i-need-an-mba-to-start-a-business/). It involves [finding mentors](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/how-to-ask-for-mentorship/), registering your organization, building a budget, fundraising, and recruiting members.

You start with an idea and then, through planning and research, take the necessary steps to make it happen. In the process, you may also learn a little bit more about yourself, your strengths, and your ability to take one action at a time until you reach your goal.

Here are just a few of the many benefits of starting a club:

* [Make friends](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/how-to-make-friends-in-college/) and meet like-minded individuals who share similar interests
* Develop leadership skills
* Cultivate a [professional network](https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/networking/)
* Improve your [communication skills](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/top-soft-skills-for-the-workplace/) and your ability to engage with others
* Learn about marketing, budgeting, and time management
* Add experience to [your resume](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/how-to-write-a-resume-in-college/)

## **What Types of College Clubs Are There?**

There are many kinds of student clubs you can create in college. Here are some of the most popular types.

* **Academic Clubs:** Academic clubs are usually geared toward your area of study. These may include just about any major, like accounting, history, marketing, and graphic design clubs. These organizations can bolster your professional network and connect you with leaders in your field.
* **Community Service Clubs:** These clubs are for students who want to make a difference in their community, in their city, or even globally. A few examples include clubs focused on [environmental sustainability](https://www.bestcolleges.com/biological-sciences/getting-involved-environmental-clubs/), ending hunger, and animal rights.
* **Media and Publication Clubs:** If you're an aspiring journalist, photographer, or radio broadcaster, this type of club may be for you. Media and publication clubs may give you experience publishing the campus newspaper, developing a website, or producing a campus broadcast via radio or television.
* **Political and Multicultural Clubs:** These clubs bring people together who have a similar background or political view. For international students, coming together with others from your area can offer a sense of home. A political club may give you the chance to connect with influencers and party leaders.
* **Recreation and Sports Clubs:** Sports clubs offer a great way to connect with others while engaging in activities you enjoy. You may lean toward [intramural sports](https://www.bestcolleges.com/features/) or find interest in more esoteric clubs, like Quidditch and parkour. Some clubs compete locally and statewide.
* **Spiritual and Religious Clubs:** Whatever your faith or religion, there is likely a campus club that aligns with your beliefs. Students meet for regular fellowship and support, whether Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, or another faith-based group.

## **The 8 Steps to Starting a Club in College**

Fortunately, many students have gone before you and started a college club. This means there's a solid blueprint in place to get your club successfully up and running. Here are eight important steps to follow.

### **1. Define the Purpose of Your Club**

First, you'll need to decide what you want your club to focus on. Is there something you're truly passionate about that would fit into a club format? Are you rejuvenated by swing dancing or eager to help kids in need of mentors? You're only limited by your imagination and establishing the need for your club.

Once you have an idea in place, outline the club's mission statement, scope, and objectives. This includes what your group is working toward and your club's intended influence on students.

### **2. Start Recruiting and Assessing Your Peers' Interest Level**

Talk to friends and peers about your club and assess their interest level. Schools usually require a minimum number of interested students. These members will also fill positions like club president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

It's important that your core officers strengthen the team and that you can trust them to fulfill their responsibilities. You can recruit initial members through word of mouth and social media.

### **3. Find a Staff Advisor**

A staff advisor is required to help oversee your organization, offer helpful advice, and ensure your club is aligned with its original goals and intentions. Advisors may be instructors, administrators, or other college staff members.

Consider staff currently involved in your area of interest. For example, if you're starting a digital film club, think about asking an instructor that works in the entertainment and art department. If you're uncertain who to ask, check with the student life coordinator — they may have suggestions.

### **4. Complete a Registration Form**

Now it's time to make your club official by registering it with the school. Many schools have an online form, while others ask students to turn the registration form into the student life office. You'll need to include the name of your officers and advisor.

Becoming an official student organization by registering your club will usually give you access to college resources, such as funding, a free website, a mailing address, and rooms and equipment.

### **5. Write a Constitution for Your Club**

Some schools require a copy of your constitution and bylaws when you register, while others let you draft one after your club has been approved. In essence, the constitution details your mission statement, the organization's structure, and your club's governing rules.

Your bylaws cover specific operating procedures, like membership, dues, and duties of officers. If you're not clear on how to proceed, meet with your student life coordinator or staff advisor.

### **6. Complete the Anti-Hazing Agreement**

Hazing occurs when someone is initiated into a club in a manner that endangers their physical and/or mental health. This may be anything from forced alcohol intake to sleep deprivation or extended isolation. An anti-hazing agreement states a college's definition of hazing and notes that any type of hazing may be punishable by fines and/or imprisonment.

Officers, advisors, and all members must sign the anti-hazing agreement. Unfortunately, [college hazing](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/college-hazing/) continues across the country, resulting in injury and sometimes death.

### **7. Attend Training With Club Officers**

The club's officers will likely need to go through some formal training before you can start holding meetings and advertising on campus. Workshops should provide instructions detailing what is expected and the responsibilities of each role.

For example, the treasurer may learn how to [develop a budget](https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/budgeting-in-college/). Additionally, the secretary may gain knowledge about creating an agenda, typing up the meeting's main points, and organizing and distributing information within the club.

### **8. Hold Your First Meeting and Spread the Word**

Now that your club is up and running, it's time to hold your first meeting! Think about ways to make this meeting an experience that attendees will want to share with their friends. Most members join clubs to meet others, so consider starting with an ice breaker.

With the first meeting under your belt, you'll gain confidence, which can help you feel motivated to get the word out. You can raise awareness about your group through social media and by posting flyers. Remember, it takes time to build a club. Start with a solid base and grow from there.

# Starting a Club: How to's and Considerations

### **Starting a New Campus Club or Organization**

Students who don’t find what they are looking for among[**the many pre-existing club offerings**](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1wRilqaP49LX8DzxtMmyhvBFsqL4KMRznOziR1ii8Db4/edit?usp=sharing) are encouraged to create their own. New campus groups are founded regularly and evolve to best fit the dynamic needs of our campus community. Any group of two or more students interested in starting an organization on campus can register through the [**Budget and Events Committee**](https://www.bennington.edu/office-of-student-life/clubs-organizations/budgetary-and-programmatic-organizations/budget-events) on behalf of the OSE. Once approved, groups are assigned a staff advisor and a club budget.

The process for starting your own club at Bennington begins by filling out [**a new club proposal form**](https://forms.gle/LYHuzBDRr8LsUNUX9) through the Budget & Events Committee.

**Distinction Between Clubs and Organizations**

A campus club is a student-driven group that may or may not have regular meetings, may or may not have staff/faculty advisement, and may or may not meet regularly for discussion/conversation/activity built around a common interest. Clubs, by nature, are open to the entire campus community for participation and may or may not have a hierarchical leadership structure, although two primary points of contact are required. A club’s annual “club budget” of $100 per academic year may be augmented by written proposals to the Budget and Events Committee in support of additional event and supply funding needs.

### **Club Requirements and Expectations**

**Two Points of Contact**

It is a requirement that every club and organization have at least two points of contact. These student representatives serve a critical role in the function of the club or organization in that they are expected to serve as a liaison between the club and the OSE when outreach is required. It is not expected that this role necessarily serve as a “club leader”; however, often times those who identify as the leader of a given club or organization happen to serve a function in that contact capacity as well. Stated simply, the OSE needs two points of contact for a given club in the event that one member is unavailable for any reason. We use these points of contact as a means of disseminating club/organization related information and to gather information from the group when needed.

**Minimum Number of Members Required**

While there is no stated minimum to the number of members required to be an active club or organization, it is expected that in the interest of creating an inclusive environment, each group is actively pursuing opportunities to create connections and invite new members into the group, supporting its relative growth and longevity. Historically, groups of fewer than five don’t lend themselves to long-term sustainability in the way that larger ones do. All that said, no two groups are alike in this way, and the engagement office is here to support your efforts in any way it can.

**Inclusive Practice**

Membership to clubs at Bennington is to be made available to any and all students without exception. Additionally, any events proposed and overseen by a specific club or organization must be made open to the entire campus community whenever possible. For this reason, while groups are welcomed and encouraged to create events making use of public spaces, and/or produce functions in collaboration with community partners, particular care must be made to promote it thoroughly and to work with engagement office staff to assure transportation and other logistic opportunities are provided.

### **Basic Logistics and Leveraging Campus Tools**

**Advisor Roles and Option to Request an Advisor**

In the same way your academic advisor provides leadership, guidance, and support in your career as a student, a club advisor can serve in this very same capacity helping you maximize your co-curricular efforts by providing additional institutional support to your goals and objectives. Every new club or organization is automatically assigned advisement through OSE staff, although groups are welcomed and encouraged to seek out an advisor who will best support the work that a given club or organization pursues. Additionally, the OSE works closely with a wide variety of staff, faculty members, and community partners and is happy to find a fit for your group upon your request.

**Setting Up a Campus Email Account**

Setting up a campus email for your club or organization is easy, and many groups choose to create one simply to avoid the hassle of delegating contact emails between members when dealing with outside parties. Additionally, having a specific email account that is not tied to a single member means that it can stay current even as members graduate and transition from Bennington. [**Email the OSE**](mailto:studentengagement@bennington.edu) to set up a time for new email creation, and we will work with you and the IT department to complete the process. New emails typically take less than 48 hours to set up. At your request, the OSE is happy to keep a record of your club/organization email password in the event it is forgotten.

**Getting your Club/Org on the Bennington Website**

Any campus club or organization wishing to have its own section on the bennington.edu website is encouraged to do so with the help of the OSE. This space may be used to relay relevant contact information, links, photos, coming events, and other resources to both internal and external sources. Please note: having a club specific email account is a prerequisite to the creation of your own web extension within the bennington.edu domain. To set up your group page on the Bennington website, email the OSE for more information and to set up a meeting time.

# Access: Budget, Fundraising and Space Use

## **Club Budgets**

New and continuing clubs receive a club budget of $100 for the academic year (July 1 through June 30). This budget is not rolling and starts fresh at the beginning of each academic year, so that any unused portion goes back into the general operating budget of the student activities fund. Clubs make use of their budgets for everything from snacks at meetings to supplies and equipment for regular club use or for special events. When clubs require additional funding for a given event or initiative, they may submit a written proposal to the Budget and Events Committee in support of their funding request.

**Accessing Your Club Budget**

Accessing your club budget may be done in one of several ways outlined below.

* **Reimbursement:** The most common method of spending your club budget is to pay for the goods you need out of pocket, and then to submit receipts to the OSE for reimbursement. Turnaround time for a reimbursement is typically five days, so plan ahead if you think you will be needing reimbursement sooner than that. It is important to note that Bennington College is a nonprofit organization, and as such, any purchases made on behalf of Bennington College are eligible for tax-exempt status (that includes club purchases). Not all businesses take tax-exempt cards, but MOST do. If you are planning to shop locally and would like to save a few dollars that might otherwise get tied up in the tax, drop by the Office of Student Engagement for a tax-exempt card, which will void out the tax in your purchase. Please note that any tax you DO pay will come directly out of your club budget, so plan ahead and get the tax-exempt card whenever possible!
* **College-Issued Check.** If you are using your club budget to pay for a guest speaker/performer/lecturer, it is status quo to pay that person via College-issued check. This gives the guest a record of payment that they can track when doing taxes, banking, and so on. If you anticipate needing a check for this reason, contact the OSE at least two (2) weeks prior to the date the event takes place so that we have ample time to have this check cut. Additionally, visiting performers/speakers/clinicians are required by law to complete a Federal W9 form prior to their check being issued. OSE keeps these forms handy and is happy to guide you through this process from start to finish. Email [**studentengagement@bennington.edu**](mailto:studentengagement@bennington.edu) if you think you’ll need to have a check cut.
* **Petty Cash.** In rare instances, OSE may provide cash up front for your purchase; however, the Office of Student Life keeps only a small amount of cash on hand at any time and is unlikely to approve a petty cash request unless there are outstanding/extenuating circumstances attached. Receipts for ANY petty cash purchases are required to OSE within 24 hours of purchase, no exceptions. Please contact Matt Scott in OSE directly if you feel one of these circumstances is justified.
* **Online Purchases**. The Student Life Office has a credit card available for online purchases. In addition, the office maintains an account with Amazon Prime that can often help cut costs by offering free, two-day shipping on many items. If you have online purchases to make, please contact Matt Scott in the Office of Student Engagement to set up a time to order these products online together. In addition to convenience, ordering with the engagement credit card is optimal because any receipts required are automatically forwarded to the engagement offices (thus there is nothing you need keep track of/return).

## **Accessing Additional Club Funding Through The Budget & Events Committee (B&EC)**

**The Budget and Events Committee**

The Budget and Events Committee (B&EC) is a student-led committee advised by the OSE dedicated to providing budgetary and event planning support both to student organizations and students interested in planning events for the Bennington College community. Through the B&EC, clubs and organizations are encouraged to submit written proposals in support of funding those events and activities. In addition, the Budget and Events Committee provides the first round of proposal review prior to the ratification of any new campus club or organization.

**B&EC Proposal Guidelines**

The Budget and Events Committee meets bi-weekly to review funding proposals, and maintains both an active Facebook page, instagram account, and email account to ensure you can contact someone as efficiently as possible with new proposals and inquiries. As such, the group also maintains a digital submission form and detailed how-to guide on their homepage for your convenience when assembling a new proposal. Access to both documents can be found online on the [**Student Engagement**](https://www.bennington.edu/office-of-student-life/office-student-engagement) page on the Bennington website.

**Submission Deadlines**

**B&EC** submission deadlines are established at the beginning of each academic term. Please visit the B&EC webpage for proposal timelines this Spring. Please note that proposal submissions are required to hit the Budget and Events Committee email inbox by 5:00 pm the day before a review session takes place. Proposals submitted after this time frame will be rolled over to the next review cycle (two weeks following). Finally, due to the fluctuating volume of received proposals in a given week, please allow up to 72 hours for a response regarding your funding proposal, and up to 10 days for a determination regarding any club and organization.

## **Fundraising for your Club or Organization**

Clubs and organizations looking for sustained long-term financial support for their group are welcomed and encouraged to fundraise in support of a given project or goal. Bake sales, car washes, and other industrious methods have all been employed to help support new and continued initiatives. If you are interested in fundraising either on campus or in the Bennington community, it is strongly advised that you arrange a meeting with the engagement office prior to moving forward.

For all the benefits of fundraising, it is important to recognize that there are restrictions that are mandated both by OSE and Bennington College itself. As a community dedicated to promoting an inclusive atmosphere, asking anyone for money (even through an exchange of goods or other services such as a bake sale) should feel voluntary and reciprocal. That said, keep the following in mind when planning your next fundraising initiative to jumpstart a successful venture:

1. **Do not solicit staff or faculty via email**. Staff and faculty email accounts are for official College business only. Unsolicited fundraising emails are strictly prohibited and mandated not only by OSE, but additionally by the Human Resources office. If you have questions or require additional clarity on this, please email Matt Scott at [**mscott@bennington.edu**](mailto:mscott@bennington.edu) for more information.
2. **Be respectful**! It goes without saying that while you have only the best of intentions when fundraising, not everyone has the means or interest to participate. Take the time to design a fundraiser that represents your cause honestly and invites participation without being intrusive.
3. **Plan ahead.** Being thorough in the planning and execution of your fundraiser not only encourages participation but can also be a morale booster for your club. Consider advertising through College Week, Coffee Hour, an event listing on the student event calendar as well as with posters or flyers. See Section three below for more guidance on event promotion.
4. **Reserve space early**. Dependent on the type of fundraiser you are looking to organize, it is common to require the use of a dedicated space or table as a suitable anchor for the event. Because many spaces on campus are reservable on a first-come-first-served basis, it is important to reserve your space early to avoid conflicts the day of. Please refer to "Space Reservations" below for more information on reservation procedure and protocol.
5. **Asset Accounts**. Some groups choose to track their funding internally by appointing a club treasurer, while others choose to set up an asset account through the business office to track this income. Deciding whether an asset account is right for your group is simply a matter of personal/group preference. An OSE staff member would be happy to walk you through the process and help weigh the pros and cons of each.

## **Reserving Campus Spaces for your Club/Org**

A fundamental step in event production is deciding upon the physical location you will be inhabiting. Considerations for this location include not only finding a location that provides adequate space for your needs and attendance, but also provides the needed accessibility, proximity to power/electrical outlets, acoustics, and overall ambience. Many campus spaces have the capacity to be reserved for events, functions or your club meetings. In all instances that building's coordinator will have the final approval based upon availability and practicality. Click here for a complete list of available spaces and their coordinator and reservation process. Please note: In instances where a space requires a faculty or staff sponsor for space approval, OSE is happy to serve that role provided we have had an opportunity to review your event details with you beforehand. In most cases, a building coordinator will reach out to the OSE to confirm club status.

# Event Promotion and Engaging Outside Performers

### **Event Planning**

The OSE produces more than 100 events annually in conjunction with student clubs, organizations, and community partners. A critical function of the office is to assist Bennington students with the logistical, planning, and safety considerations associated with executing events both on and off the Bennington campus. As it is central to the core values of a Bennington education that students serve as the driver of their college experience, in working with OSE it is never our intention to plan out your event for you, but rather to provide tools, the experience, and the perspective to help you do better work and best serve the campus community in the process. Below are some of the most common logistical questions/considerations in event planning. Please use them as a launch pad for your work and feel free to augment this with conversation and 1-on-1 planning with OSE staff whenever needed. We're here to help!

**Reserving Spaces**

A fundamental step in event production is deciding upon the physical (and/or digital) locations you will be inhabiting. Considerations for this location include not only finding a location that provides adequate space for your needs and attendance (especially given campus COVID-19 guidelines), but also those of and including handicap accessibility, proximity to power/electrical outlets, acoustics, and overall ambience. Many campus spaces have the capacity to be reserved for events and functions, although in all instances that buildings coordinator will have the final approval based upon availability and practicality. For a complete list of available spaces and their coordinator and reservation process see the [**Space Reservations**](https://www.bennington.edu/events/space-reservations) page. Please note: in instances where a space requires a faculty or staff sponsor for space approval, the OSE is happy to serve that role provided we have had an opportunity to review your event details beforehand.

**Reserving Sound Systems**(for music, guest speakers, lectures, etc.)

Because sound systems for events generally require additional consideration and equipment, a Student Event Assistant is required to oversee the setup, operation, and breakdown of all equipment. That said, and due to the additional requirement of staffing your event, a minimum of seven (7) days notice is preferred to ensure a sound system for your function. If you are unsure of what your audio needs are for an event, a meeting with Matt Scott in the OSE is strongly encouraged to determine the specifics of your request.  Please [**email Matt directly**](mailto:mscott@bennington.edu) to begin this process. If you're event is being held in spaces that have a preexisting audio system

**Reserving Video Projectors and other Equipment**  
  
As OSE does not directly oversee or own video specific technology, its rental and use must be coordinated with media services. For inquiries related to projection and video, please email Media Services with an IT [**HelpDesk ticket**](mailto:helpdesk@bennington.edu) outlining your request.

## **Food and Catering**

In the hierarchy of event planning, food is often among the very first considerations, not only as a means of drawing attendance, but in affirming the integral relationship between nourishment, conversation, and community. It is exceedingly common that campus groups will use most, if not all of a club budget within a given year toward food purchases at local grocers or restaurants, offsetting that expense with Budget and Events Committee proposals when anticipated attendance dictates a particularly large purchase. In other instances, it may be desirable or even critical to work collaboratively with dining services to cater your event.

**Catering through Aramark**

When planning for events where expected attendance is large, or the scale of food required exceeds the time/energy a group has available to acquire/prepare it, it can be quite beneficial to take advantage of campus catering. Campus catering can provide a variety of dining options including snacks, meals, and beverages—even working off recipes you’ve provided them. Cost varies greatly, so if something like this is of interest to your group, email OSE for more information and to set up a consultation with Chef Steve and Aramark directly.

### **Advertising Your Event**

Advertising is often the final step in an event planner’s “to do” list; however, the information it encompasses is comprised of many essentials you should have confirmed well in advance of finalizing the logistical and delegation-based elements of your event. In some way, your advertisement should ideally include some mention (or all) of the following information:

* Date
* Time
* Location
* The organizing body (club, organization, or other group)
* A brief description of what the event is
* Alternate attendance methods when applicable (Zoom, Google meet, other)
* Any needed contact information
* Any sponsorship by other campus or community organizations.

Outside of digital advertising methods such as Facebook and Instagram, the Office of Student Life and OSE also offer several campus options to help spread the word about your pending event.

**The Student Event Calendar**is new for Spring 2021 and serves as a direct way for Bennington students to create and advertise events in great detail within a shared google calendar. This also makes it possible to create push notifications for your phone when new events surface or you want reminders of whats coming up. You can [**view the student engagement calendar**](https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/r?cid=Y19iMnBrbXRyc3U5MnBubGc4MmFkMzFrb2k1c0Bncm91cC5jYWxlbmRhci5nb29nbGUuY29t), and use [**this form to submit an event**](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeLlNfzeRrWg5w9ul8qaz9RdlePOslxWakwhgprzMVusurViA/viewform).

\*Please note, all submissions are subject to review prior to being populated on this shared calendar, anticipate a 24-48 hour gap between the time you submit your event and the time it is reflected.

**Tabling** is the most direct way to connect with your peers. Whether you are advertising for an event, gathering input, starting a new club, fundraising, or something else entirely, tabling allows you a space to have intentional conversations with students. Tabling is most successful between 11:45 am and 1:00 pm and 5:00 to 6:30 pm. Various Tabling locations are available outside of commons. To reserve a table, [**send an email**](mailto:studentengagement@bennington.edu) with your requested date/time/ location and any other needs you may have.

**College Week** is a digital publication distributed on Wednesday of each week to students, staff and faculty. Simply [**send them an email**](mailto:collegeweek@bennington.edu) with a complete summary of your event by that preceeding Monday at noon for submission to the following week’s publication.

**Coffee Hour** is a publication distributed to house chairs to stimulate conversation among house communities each Sunday during Coffee Hour. Submissions to Coffee Hour are broken into sections based upon their intent (academic, co-curricular, institutional, and so on) and are generally more descriptive than College Week submissions. To submit to Coffee Hour, simply [**email**](mailto:coffeehour@bennington.edu) your completed blurb, by noon on Thursday for submission to that Sunday’s publication.

**Posters** may be printed and hung on your behalf through the Student Life office. Simply [**send an email**](mailto:posters@bennington.edu) with a hi-res copy of your poster as a pdf or jpeg format and specify the number of posters you need printed, anywhere specific they need to be hung and if there are any other special details involved the printers/distributors should be aware of. A typical poster run would be 25 posters distributed about central campus buildings (houses excluded given COVID-19 precautions). Posters are printed and distributed on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings so plan accordingly!

## **Bringing Guest Speakers and Entertainers to Campus**

One of the most exciting opportunities presented to campus clubs, organizations, and motivated community members is the potential to bring in outside speakers, performers, and community partners which enrich and enliven the work that you do. The scope of this opportunity is limited only by the imagination and the budget (if required) to meet the needs of the guest and presentation itself. All that said, outside of initial email contacts with these outside entities it is always in your best interest to schedule a consultation with an OSE staff member so as to avoid any potential missteps. (Important Note: email may serve as legally binding documentation, as such you should avoid discussion of finances with any potential speaker/entertainer prior to conversation with OSE staff.) Please [**email the OSE**](mailto:studentengagement@bennington.edu) with any questions or to set up a preliminary meeting regarding your guest speaker ideas.

WRITING A SUCCESSFUL PROPOSAL Summary At the beginning of your proposal, or on a cover sheet, write a two- or three-sentence summary of the proposal. This summary helps the reader follow your argument in the proposal itself. For example: "Annunciation Shelter requests $5,000 for a two-year, $50,000 job training program for homeless women in southwestern Minnesota. Training will be offered at four rural shelters and will include basic clerical skills, interview techniques and job seeker support groups." Organization Information In two or three paragraphs, tell the funder about your organization and why it can be trusted to use funds effectively. Briefly summarize your organization’s history. State your mission, whom you serve and your track record of achievement. Clearly describe, or at least list, your programs. If your programs are many or complex, consider adding an organization chart or other attachments that explain them. Describe your budget size, where you are located and who runs the organization and does the work. Add other details that build the credibility of your group. If other groups in your region work on the same issues, explain how they are different and how you collaborate with them, if you do. Even if you have received funds from this grantmaker before, your introduction should be complete. Funders sometimes hire outside reviewers who may not be familiar with your organization. Problem/Need/Situation Description This is where you convince the funder that the issue you want to tackle is important and show that your organization is an expert on the issue. Here are some tips: • Don’t assume the funder knows much about your subject area. Most grantmaking staff people are generalists. They will probably know something about topics like Shakespeare, water pollution and HIV/AIDS, but you should not assume that they are familiar with "Troilus and Cressida," taconite disposal methods or Kaposi’s sarcoma. If your topic is complex, you might add an informative article or suggest some background reading. • Why is this situation important? To whom did your organization talk, or what research did you do, to learn about the issue and decide how to tackle it? • Describe the situation in both factual and human interest terms, if possible. Providing good data demonstrates that your organization is expert in the field. If there are no good data on your issue, consider doing your own research study, even if it is simple. • Describe your issue in as local a context as possible. If you want to educate people in your county about HIV/AIDS, tell the funder about the epidemic in your county — not in the United States as a whole. • Describe a problem that is about the same size as your solution. Don’t draw a dark picture of nuclear war, teen suicide and lethal air pollution if you are planning a modest neighborhood arts program for children. • Don’t describe the problem as the absence of your project. "We don’t have enough beds in our battered women’s shelter" is not the problem. The problem is increased levels of domestic violence. More shelter beds is a solution. Work Plan/Specific Activities Explain what your organization plans to do about the problem. What are your overall goals? You might say: "The goals of this project are to increase the understanding among Minneapolis middle school students about the impact of smoking on their health, and to reduce the number of students who smoke." Then go on to give details, including: • Who is the target audience, and how will you involve them in the activity? How many people do you intend to serve? Some projects have two audiences: the direct participants (the musicians in the community band, the kids doing summer clean-up in the parks) and the indirect beneficiaries (the music lovers in the audience, the people who use the parks). If so, describe both. How will you ensure that people actually participate in the program? • What are you going to do? Describe the activities. Tell the funder about the project’s "output," or how many "units of service" you intend to deliver over a specific time period: how many hours of nutrition counseling to how many pregnant women; how many HIV/AIDS hot-line calls answered by how many volunteers. Be sure you don’t promise an unrealistic level of service. • What project planning has already taken place? If you have already done research, secured the commitment of participants or done other initial work, describe it so the funder can see that you are well-prepared. • Who is going to do the work and what are their credentials? (Attach resumes of key people.) Some funders ask for the name of a project director, the person most responsible for the project, whether volunteer or paid. Demonstrate that the staff or volunteers have the expertise to do a good job. • When will the project take place? Some funders ask for the project start date and project end date. In general, a project can be said to start when you start spending money on it. If the project is long, consider including a timeline. • Where will the project take place? You may not know the answers to all these questions when you submit your proposal. But the more you know, the better the proposal will look. Apply the "mind's eye test" to your description. After reading it, could the reader close his eyes and imagine what he would see if he came into the room where your project is happening? Many project descriptions are too vague. Remember: You can continue to submit updated information to foundation staff almost until the date the board actually reviews the proposal. Outcomes/Impact of Activities Tell the funder what impact your project will have — what will change about the situation as a result of your project. For example, your pregnancy nutrition counseling program intends to increase the birth weights of your clients' babies. The impact of a project is sometimes hard to define. What is the intended impact of a performance of Beethoven’s "Ninth Symphony," for example? Impact can be difficult to measure. The desired impact of a smoking cessation program is clear, but the desired impact of a leadership program for teenagers may be ambiguous and difficult to quantify. To add to the difficulty, few nonprofits can prove conclusively that a given impact was caused directly by their project. Your clients’ babies may weigh more, but the cause may not be your nutrition program. Nevertheless, you must do the best job you can to define your intended impacts. Other Funding Here the funder wants to know if other organizations have committed funds to the project or been asked to do so. Few funders want to be the sole support of a project. (This may not be true if the project cost is very small — less than $5,000, for instance — or if a corporation is seeking public visibility by sponsoring the project.) Funders generally expect you to ask for support from more than one source. In this section, you can also describe the in-kind contributions (goods or services instead of cash) that people are giving to the project. Future Funding If you continue this project in the future, how will it be supported? Most funders don’t want to support the same set of projects forever. Many funders see their niche as funding innovation: supporting new approaches to old problems or finding solutions to new problems. What the funder really wants to see is that you have a long-term vision and funding plan for the project, that the project is "sustainable," especially if it is a new activity. If you don’t have such a plan, start thinking about it — if not for your funders then for the success of your project or organization. Evaluation How will you know whether you achieved the desired impacts? If you have done a good job of defining them, all you need to do here is describe the information you will gather to tell you how close you came. Will you keep records of incoming hot-line calls? Will you call your counseling clients six months after they leave the program to ask how they are doing? Explain who will gather the evaluation information and how you will use it. Be sure your evaluation plan is achievable given your resources. If the evaluation will cost money, be sure to put that cost in the project budget. Budget How much will the project cost? Attach a one- or two-page budget showing expected expenses and income for the project. Or you can use the budget format in the Minnesota Common Grant Application Form. EXPENSES Divide the expense side into three sections: • Personnel Expenses • Direct Project Expenses • Administrative or Overhead Expenses Personnel Expenses include the expenses for all the people who will work on the project. They may be employees of your organization or independent contractors. If they are employees, list the title, the annual pay rate and, if the person will be working less than full-time or less than 12 months on the project, the portion of time to be dedicated to the project. For example, if an employee will work half-time on the project from October through May: Counseling director ($35,000 x 50% x 8 months) = $11,667 Also consider the time that may be contributed by other staff who are not directly involved. For instance, the executive director must supervise the counseling director: Executive director ($40,000 x 5% x 8 months) = $1,333 If you are using employees for the project, don’t forget to add payroll taxes (FICA, Medicare, unemployment and workers’ compensation) and fringe benefits such as health insurance. You can include a portion of these costs equal to the portion of the person’s time dedicated to the project. For independent contractors, list either the flat fee you will pay ($1,500 to design costumes for a play) or the hourly rate ($40/hour x 40 hours). Direct Project Expenses are non-personnel expenses you would not incur if you did not do the project. They can be almost anything: travel costs, printing, space or equipment rental, supplies, insurance, or meeting expenses such as food. Remember that you will have to live with this budget; you can’t go back to the funder and ask for more money because you forgot something. Think carefully about all the expenses you will have. If you will be hiring new people, for example, don’t forget that you may have to pay for classified ads. Also take the time to get accurate estimates. If you will be printing a brochure, don’t guess at the cost. Call your printer and ask for a rough estimate. Administrative or Overhead Expenses are non-personnel expenses you will incur whether or not you do the project. But if you do the project, these resources can’t be used for anything else. For example, if you pay $500 a month for an office with space for four employees, you will continue to rent the office even if the project doesn’t happen. But if the project does happen, one-quarter of the office space will be occupied by the project director. So you can charge for one-quarter of your office rent, utilities and administrative costs, such as phone, copying, postage and office supplies. Be sure to read the funder’s fine print on administrative or overhead expenses (sometimes called indirect expenses). Some funders don't cover administrative expenses. Some instruct you to charge a flat percentage of your direct expenses. Others will allow you to itemize. If the funder has rules about overhead, remember that some of your personnel costs may in fact be "overhead" and should be moved to this section. An example is an executive director supervising a project director. You will pay the executive director whether or not you do the project, so she could be considered an administrative expense. Note: Be sure to add up all your expenses carefully. Incorrect addition on budgets is one of the most common errors in a grant proposal. INCOME All income for a project fits into two categories: • Earned Income • Contributed Income Earned Income is what people give you in exchange for the service or product your project generates. Not all projects generate income, but many do. A play generates ticket income and maybe concession income. An education project may have income from publication sales or tuition. Show how you calculated the estimated earned income: Ticket sales ($10/ticket x 3 performances x 200 seats x 50% of house) = $3,000 Contributed Income comes in two categories: cash and in-kind. Show cash contributions first and indicate whether each item is received, committed, pending (you’ve made the request but no decision has been made) or to be submitted. This section should correspond to the Other Funding section in the text. For instance: Ardendale Community Foundation (received) $5,000 City of Ardendale (committed) $2,500 Acme Widget Corporation (pending) $3,300 Jones Family Foundation (to be submitted) $4,000 Other funders (to be submitted) $5,400 If you plan to seek funds from a number of other funders but don’t know which ones will say yes, an "other funders" line is an easy way to indicate how much total money you need to receive from all other sources to balance the budget. In-kind contributions are gifts of goods or services instead of cash. They can include donated space, materials or time. If you list in-kind contributions as income in your budget, you must also show the corresponding expenses. If someone gives you something at a major discount, you would show the whole expense and then list the portion being donated under in-kind contributions. Here are some examples: Expenses: Classroom rental $1,500 Curriculum consultant $2,000 Teacher aides (4 x 40 hours each x $5/hour) $800 In-kind contributions: Ardendale Community Ed. (classroom rental) $1,500 Jane Doe (curriculum consultant) $1,000 Parents of students (teacher aides) $800 In this example, Jane Doe, the curriculum consultant, is doing the work for half-price, while the parents are volunteering as teacher aides. In-kind contributions can be important for three reasons: 1. It shows all the ways in which the community is supporting your project, even though not everyone is giving cash. 2. It shows the true cost of the project -- what you would have to spend without the community support. If you want to show in-kind for these reasons, you can either show it in the budget, as above, or simply add a footnote to the bottom of the budget, like this: "This project will also receive more than $3,000 of in-kind support from the school district, participating parents and various education professionals." 3. If you are applying for a matching grant, the in-kind income may sometimes be used as part of the match. If you want to use in-kind contributions as part of your match, then you must put a dollar value on them and put them in the budget. Funders who provide matching grants may have policies on how much in-kind expenses you can use in your match and how it must be documented. Supplementary Materials Funders may ask for a variety of materials along with the proposal itself. Almost all funders want at least the following: • A copy of your IRS letter declaring your organization tax exempt. If your group is not tax exempt, you may need to apply through a fiscal agent, or fiscal sponsor. In that case, send a copy of your fiscal agent’s IRS letter. • A list of your board of directors and their affiliations, such as "CPA," "marketing director, Acme Widget" or "parent volunteer." • A financial statement from your last complete fiscal year, including a statement of income and expenses and a balance sheet showing assets and liabilities at the end of the year. Some funders ask for an audited statement. If you are too small to be audited, call to ask whether an audited statement is mandatory or just preferred. • • A budget for your current fiscal year. If you are well along in the fiscal year, also show actual year-to-date income and expenses next to the budget projections. • A budget for the next fiscal year if you are within three or four months of the new year. Some applicants are small parts of very large institutions, such as a department at the University of Minnesota or an after-school program in the Minneapolis Public Schools. In such cases, you may be better off submitting supplementary materials only for your program, not for the whole institution. Ask the funder what you should do. Grantmakers may ask for other materials, such as a copy of your most recent IRS Form 990. If you don’t understand what a funder is requesting from you, ask. If you don’t have some of the requested materials, attach a note explaining why. You can also attach resumes of your key personnel as well as general information about your organization, such as newsletters, brochures or annual reports. If you have a lot of supplementary materials, consider adding a sheet that lists them in the order in which they are attached. Putting It All Together Now put the whole thing together: the cover sheet (if appropriate), the proposal itself, the budget and the supplementary materials. Add a cover letter if you wish. Don’t put the proposal in a fancy binder; a paper clip is fine. Be sure to note if the funder wants multiple copies of anything, or if a cover sheet needs to be signed by a staff or board member. Variations on the Standard Outline The proposal format described above is most appropriate for a problem-based project costing $5,000 or more. At times you will need to alter this format to suit other circumstances: • Small project proposal • Non-problem-based project • General operating proposal • Capital or endowment proposal Small request If you are asking for a small amount of money ($1,000 or less), you can put the entire proposal in a two- or three-page letter with required attachments. Use the same outline, but keep it short. Non-problem-based project Many arts and humanities projects are not trying to solve a problem. A performance of Beethoven’s "Ninth Symphony" is not a response to some societal ill. If that is your situation, you can alter this outline by deleting the situation description. After you have described your project, insert a new section in which you discuss the benefits of the project. General operating proposal Often you are asking for money not just for a specific project but to support all your activities for one fiscal year. In this case, adapt the standard proposal as follows: • Organization information: No change. • Situation description: What issues was your organization founded to address? Why is your organization needed? (If yours is not a "problem-based" organization, you can skip this part.) • Work plan/specific activities: Use this section to explain what your organization plans to accomplish during the year for which you seek operating funding. • Impact of activities: What are the intended impacts for that year’s activities? • Other funding: Who are the other funders providing operating support for this year? • Future funding: What is your long-term funding plan for your organization, especially if your operating budget is growing? • Evaluation: In general, how do you evaluate your work? • Budget: You don’t need a special project budget, just the financial information described under Supplementary Materials, above. Capital or endowment proposal Include the same information as for a project proposal. Explain how this building project, or the creation or expansion of your endowment, will help you do a better job of serving your community. But also write about your long-term plans for financial health, especially if you want money for a building. The funder doesn't want to help you buy a building if you can't afford to maintain and operate it.

Target Every curious student who wants to explore new tech and pursue career in it

Develop students’ networking skills