



What is a project proposal?

The step-by-step guide for writing a professional, winning project proposal.

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A [proposal](#) is the document that facilitates a professional relationship between an organization and [outside contributors](#).

Typically, a project proposal is the initial framework for establishing the concept of the project and includes what you want to accomplish, an explanation of objectives, and plans for achieving them. It is common for a project proposal to include a list of activities or tasks that will be associated with the project, illustrate the significance of this specific project idea, and explain the origins of this project.

A [proposal](#) is also the marketing document that kicks off a relationship between an organization and outside project stakeholders. Creating a proposal allows an organization to establish a formal, logical presentation to an outside worker or project donor. Proposals are generally drafted during one of the early phases of your project (before detailed plans are made and resources are allocated). Therefore, time and [budget estimates](#) are often rough, at best.

WHY DO YOU NEED A PROJECT PROPOSAL?

First and foremost, a proposal is required to get executive buy-in for a [new project](#), program, or service at your organization. Secondly, it is used to get everyone on the team thinking about the same goals and priorities. Lastly, it serves as a way for the organization to know when they need to make new hiring decisions or budget adjustments. Successful organizations get granular with their project proposals and engage in project planning before seeking out budget or executive buy-in.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF A CLEAR PROJECT PROPOSAL?

Clear proposals prove the viability of a project or program.

Increase clarity regarding requirements and project roadmap.

Structure and organization is established up front, reducing the chance for misalignment.

Successful proposals lead to approved budgets and financial support for organizational growth and project replication.

Proposals play an integral part in organizational growth, helping in budget approval and new client adoption.

Reaching out to stakeholders and building alliances increases credibility and exposure in the community at large.

Having detailed your project's methods and measurement tools in advance builds accountability into every step of your work.

Integrating grant writing into day-to-day work turns proposals into useful planning documents and detailed templates for project implementation.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT PROJECT PROPOSAL TYPES?

A formally solicited project proposal is established in response to an official request for a new proposal. In this case, a [Request for Proposal \(RFP\)](#) document is used to outline client demands and specific needs. A formally solicited proposal is the structured and specific response to said RFP. Having an RFP makes the entire proposal process easier. As the specifics are spelled out, project planning can prevent misunderstandings or a lack of information that may cause complications later.

An informally solicited proposal does not require an RFP. That is, there is no specific document required to outline customer or audience demands. This is the initial rough starting point when proposing a project's viability. The major differentiator between a formal and informal project proposal is the number of details involved in planning. Informal proposals lack granular project details, such as goals, deliverables, and methods. An informally solicited project proposal can be understood as a proposal request that is lacking specifics.

Unsolicited project proposals can be compared to a cold call — no one asked for or expected to receive one, but if the audience can relate to the proposal, it can prove extremely valuable. An unsolicited proposal is typically formed from more ad-hoc activities, such as an "aha" moment or an enlightening conversation with a customer. Unsolicited proposals can be the most difficult types to write, as you will have to put extra work in to convince the audience of the project's viability. Many times, these proposals require the most research and the most finesse, as the audience is unaware that the proposal is even coming their way.

Continuation project proposals are essentially an update or reminder for ongoing and already approved projects. This type of proposal is the simplest to construct, as it is a continuation of already existing documentation. A continuation proposal can be thought of as a check-in with the audience to ensure the correct funds are provided for the next phase, as well as discussing progress and accounting for any changes before moving forward.

A renewal project proposal is required when an ongoing project has been terminated or the resources and support behind such project can no longer be used. This proposal is more about proving that the return on investment is greater than the money being spent on resources so that the project can begin again.

A supplemental project proposal is required when more resources are required to complete a project than were originally proposed. The main goal of a supplemental proposal is to prove the value of adding resources and update the audience with a timeline based on this new plan. Many times, a supplemental proposal is required when the original project scope has grown beyond initial expectations. It can be seen as a continuation of the original proposal document.

WHAT A PROJECT PROPOSAL IS NOT

A [project proposal](#) is not a contract. It's easy to confuse it with a Business Proposal (a document in which legal terms are outlined). Clients or sponsors merely sign the project proposal to approve its contents. After signing and approving the project proposal, a business starts drafting a contract in addition to items such as a project charter and a project plan.

HOW TO WRITE A PROJECT PROPOSAL

After considering what type of proposal is the best fit for you and your project, it is time to start planning your document.

It is imperative to keep in mind that, regardless of the proposal type, you will always want to check the following boxes when starting a proposal document.

- Define your audience.
- Determine the problem being solved by your proposal.
- Conduct research on the current state of the issue and potential solutions.
- Proactively determine the effect that this project will have on company success.
- Establish a timeline and determine the type and amount of resources required.
- Begin to outline your proposal document.

Sample Project Proposal Outline

This section intends to provide a high-level picture of the project as well as convey the most critical project details.

Include the following in this section

- Name of the Organization
- Project Title
- Project Summary
- Project Timeframe
- Prepared By
- Attached Documentation
- Project Contacts (any individuals involved in the project)

The goal of this section is to present the reasons for doing this project as well as stating all of the objectives. In this section in particular, it is very important to write concisely and clearly. Some project professionals even suggest writing the project summary last.

Before you begin writing, you should be able to answer the following questions.

- Why are you doing this project?
- What will you be doing?
- How will you be doing it?
- Who will be doing it?
- Where will it be done?
- How long will it take?
- How much will it cost?
- **Project Background** This section of the proposal requires a few succinct sentences that clarify the problem your proposal is tackling. Here, it is critical to explain the current state of the problem and why your audience should care about solving it. Make sure to include references and statistics in this section. Best practice is to keep this no longer than 1 page.
- **Project Objectives** Use this section of the proposal to explicitly list the goals that the project is trying to achieve.

The project methodology section of a proposal is where you detail the plan for how the objectives mentioned in the previous section will be achieved. This is the first section of the proposal that details the course of action to remedy the problem and is meant to prove that adequate research has been done for this decision. To start, outline the methodology being used, the population being addressed, and establish the process for reaching your objectives.

This section is typically broken into three parts

- **The Project Approach Summary** Use a few sentences to describe the overall approach to the project. This includes how the team will be organized, what tools will be used, and how changes will be addressed during execution.
- **Task Breakdown and Time Estimates** This is the section of the proposal where a detailed project schedule is presented. To start, make a list of tasks that are required for the project as well as an estimation of the hours required to complete each one. From there, you can take a look at your resource pool and allocate your team accordingly. The purpose of this section is to establish the time and steps it will take to achieve the solution, as well as the resources involved in each section. Here is where you start to see ideas turn into action. A project proposal will often include a gantt chart outlining the resources, tasks, and timeline.
- **Project Deliverables** This is where you list out all the deliverables you expect to see after the project is closed. For example, this could be products, information, or reports that you plan to deliver to a client. Ensure that each deliverable has an associated estimated delivery date.

This section is dedicated to managing change during project execution. Clients know that a proposal rarely covers everything that is required to achieve the given project, so change management techniques are required. Establish how you will monitor project success throughout its entire life cycle to show clients that when and if change occurs, the project will not go haywire.

This section is broken into two parts

- **Risk Management Plan** A detailed plan of action to minimize the chance of risk or change during the project lifecycle.
- **Risk Register** A line-item list of risks and potential counter efforts that will be used to counteract these risks.

This section is dedicated to estimating the overall cost of the proposed project.

This section is broken into three major parts

- **Project Budget** This should be a detailed, line-item budget broken up by different project categories, such as travel, salary, or supplies. Ensure all overhead or indirect costs are also included in the budget.
- **Budget Narrative** This is a brief list of commentaries on the budget if any further clarification or justification is needed.
- **Additional Financial Statements** Some projects, depending on complexity, will require additional financial statements like a profit and loss statement, a tax return, or funding sources.

The conclusion section of a [project proposal](#) intends to be a brief review of all the points already discussed. This is your last chance to win over your audience, so ensure that you incorporate the most important evidence to receive approval. This is also the final moment to prove you have adequately researched all solutions and your proposed method is the best for business.

This section is dedicated to any additional charts, graphs, images, or reports that were cited in the proposal. Many times, referenced material will go into the appendix as it does not naturally fall into the main body copy of the proposal.

FINAL THOUGHTS

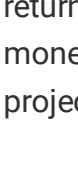
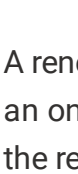
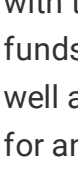
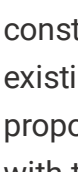
- Determine your project proposal type first for an effective presentation.
- Make sure your proposal targets your audience and clearly defines the problems it will solve.
- Follow the seven sections of a proposal to more effectively convince your audience.

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