

REVIEWER FEEDBACK AND HELPFUL TIPS

(Straight from the Reviewers' Mouths!)

PROBLEM/NEED SECTION

When possible, use both national and local data to support your need. If there isn't much local data available, reviewers recommend including anecdotal data/stories to demonstrate your knowledge of the target population. Also, be sure to look for the most current data and cite your sources. A good source for local data is www.kchealthmatters.org, which provides health and demographic statistics for the HCF service area. Other resources can be found at <http://hcfgkc.org/research-resources>.

ORGANIZATION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

Brief History of your Organization

Try to be succinct. Give reviewers an idea of who you are, what you do, what population you serve and how you fit into the overall healthcare community (but, reviewers say there's no need to go back decades!)

Target Population

Describe the specific demographic(s) and health-related characteristics of the people you hope to serve with this project, and your recruitment or access strategy. Typically our applicants do well with this section.

Proposed Project Activities

- Don't be afraid to include a lot of detail in this section. Fleshing out of details is important so that reviewers can understand the flow of your proposed project.
- Reviewers recommend adding a visual of your project, such as a timeline, flowchart, and/or logic model (which can be attached as an appendix that will not be included in your page count.) The goal of such tools is to help the reader understand how the various pieces of your project are connected and how specific project activities will lead to corresponding desired outcomes.
- ***IMPORTANT*** - For existing projects, it is imperative to provide a brief assessment of the project's effectiveness to date and a summary of lessons learned. One of the most frequent reviewer complaint is, "The applicant did not discuss past outcomes!" If you are submitting a request for an existing project, your application will not be recommended unless you include information of the project's past outcomes and lessons learned

Outcomes & Evaluation

The outcomes section of a proposal is often the applicants' biggest challenge.

Most reviewers prefer applications that include logic models.

While not required, reviewers say including a logic model/outcomes framework enhances the proposal. Logic Models and Outcomes Frameworks can be included within your proposal, or attached as appendices that will not be included in your page count.

Collaboration

We recommend you not only explain how your organization fits into the overall healthcare community, but also how your partners fit as well. Reviewers have been known to take points off when applications lacked letters of support/commitment from organizations specifically mentioned in proposal.

"Stress to the applicants that external reviewers are not familiar with the service area; therefore, if proposals reference other organizations, then a brief explanation of the partnering organization's strengths or positions/profiles in the community should be included."
Outside Reviewer

Basic Tips

- Check your spelling and math.
- Be consistent. Double-check the online portion, the abstract, and the budget to ensure your request amount and project numbers are consistent throughout!
- Make sure your proposal is COHESIVE
- Try a test run. Have someone unfamiliar with your project review before final submission to see if it makes sense.

Staffing & Capacity

If you are requesting funding for staff position(s), you should list desired qualifications (if a new position), experience and/or a job description. Be specific. Whether it's a new position or a current one, include info such as the tasks to be performed, the number of clients to be seen, etc., or refer reviewers to the project's flow chart.

Sustainability

Reviewers understand that many of our applicants rely upon grant funding to sustain their programs. Even though that is the reality, it is still important to discuss potential future fundraising, etc. It is common for this section to read as though the applicant is not even attempting to find new sources of funding, which can leave a bad taste in reviewers' mouths. One reviewer commented, "Even if it's true that you have to work very hard to find grants and cultivate donors, etc. - say that! At least that way a reviewer knows you're working at it!"

Rationale for Multi-Year Funding

If you are requesting multi-year funding, please include the following:

- 1) Rationale explaining why success of proposed project requires multi-year funding
- 2) An implementation timeline for the proposed years of funding.

DIVERSITY SECTION

This is NOT a space to simply input your organization's diversity and/or cultural competency policy (though, you are welcome to attach those as appendices to your application.) Reviewers want to know how you are carrying out your policy. One reviewer explained, "With the reality that communities are becoming more diverse, this section should contain more than board demographics. How does your staffing reflect the communities you serve? How are you responding to your communities' needs, values, preferences? Does your program or organization lack in diversity, what are your challenges and aspirations to improve?"

BUDGET/BUDGET NARRATIVE

"Budgets were weak overall and budget narratives didn't correspond; when asking for big dollars, these weaknesses can really hurt their chances!" Here are some tips:

- Take the time to do a detailed budget.
- Be explicit!
- Break out each salary.
- Itemize Other Direct Expenses.
- Include comments in the Budget Narrative section for every line item that is not 100% self-explanatory. (e.g. - If you're requesting portions of several salaries, the budget narrative section can be used to describe how that staff person fits within the program. Even if you have described it in the Proposal Narrative, don't take it for granted that they'll connect the dots!) And vice-versa. It is not wise to have costs reflected in budget narratives that were never alluded to in the narrative proposal.

Reviewer Nitpicks

They're not going to make or break your score, but they sure make reviewers happier.

PDFs. If possible, do NOT convert your attachments to PDFs!

Reviewers find PDF documents challenging to read.

Keep in mind that not everyone has the same PDF software or same version of PDF software, therefore, they won't be viewing it the same. And, to make matters worse, when you print a PDF document (as we do for our reviewers), it automatically frames it and condenses the data inside. So, what looks great on your computer can actually print out to be about 50% smaller and very difficult to read.

Font. HCF's Proposal Narrative Template instructs applicants to use '12-point Arial font.' In truth, we've never counted it against anyone who did not follow this instruction; however, we would discourage applicants from using too small of a font because reviewers have complained about it in the past (you probably should never go below 10 pts.) It's best to stick with crisp fonts and sizes, such as:

Arial (11 pt.), Calibri (12 pt.) or Verdana (10 pt).