

Be Kind to the Reader - 10 Easy Tips for Writing Winning Proposals

Most viral hepatitis service organizations keep their doors open through grants from a variety of sources and continuing to provide services requires ongoing funding. Whether you have been successful at grant writing, or you are writing your first application, thinking about these tips can help you to frame a winning proposal. Good luck!

1. Follow the format – even if you think it doesn't flow!

When responding to a request for proposals (RFP) or an unsolicited grant application, be sure to answer all of the questions in the order they are presented, even if it seems disorganized to you. The application reviewers typically use a scoring sheet that follows the questions and sections in the order they appear in the RFP. If the reviewer has to search for information, he or she will be less inclined to give you a top score. "Be kind to the reader" means don't make her work at finding information!

2. Spell out new names and terms when you first use them.

Example: "The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) is a coalition of organizations dedicated to the elimination of viral hepatitis. NVHR has members in many states." If there are two groups with similar acronyms or initials, consider spelling them out each time.

Example: "The hepatitis B virus (HBV) and the hepatitis C virus (HCV) affect millions of Americans. HBV and HCV advocates are joining together to address these two causes of liver cancer."

Remember: V stands for *virus*.

Not, "hepatitis B (HBV) affects millions of Americans."

Instead, "The hepatitis B virus (HBV) affects millions of Americans."

3. Avoid the use of personal pronouns – Who is "we" anyhow?

Rather than using personal pronouns (I, we, our), use nouns, such as program staff, program participants, providers, etc.

Not, "Our clinic provides mental health services to people who are homeless."

Instead, "The Rainbow Clinic provides mental health services to people who are homeless."

4. Use the active voice.

In the active voice the *subject* of the sentence does the action. Passive: "The support group will be facilitated by peer leaders." Active: "Peer leaders will facilitate the support group."

Bonus tip: Active voice usually takes up less precious space in your proposal!

5. Use plain English.

Not: "The results of our work will not be measured directly through the context of this project, but instead through increased program accessibility, availability and quality, which most likely will take time to develop."

Instead: "The project director will conduct a baseline survey of 50 clients in July, and again with the same clients in January and May, to determine if clients have noticed changes in service availability, access and quality."

6. Break up overly long sentences and paragraphs.

The above sentence might become, "The project director will conduct a baseline survey in July to assess clients' attitudes about service availability, accessibility and quality. The director will survey clients again in January and May to compare results."

7. Avoid opinion phrases without supporting data.

Phrases such as "It is important that" or "It is the best way" imply that you know something to be a fact. Unless you have supporting data, don't use it.

Not: "The most effective way to reach our patients is through peer support groups."

Instead: "Peer led support groups at the Rainbow clinic have a 34% higher rate of attendance than those led by medical professionals."

8. Use appropriate references and citations.

Avoid overuse and misuse of quotes. Your choice of citation style may hinge on the amount of space you have without going over the allotted page length. You may cite the sources within the body of the work or use footnotes. Both styles require a reference page at the end of the document.

Example: Straightforward health strategies such as remaining abstinent from alcohol can help persons with chronic hepatitis B and C remain healthy even without treatment. (1)

Example: Straightforward health strategies such as remaining abstinent from alcohol can help persons with chronic hepatitis B and C remain healthy even without treatment (Schiff, 1997)

Citation: Schiff, E.R., *Hepatitis C and alcohol*. Hepatology, 1997. 26 (3 Suppl 1): pp. 39s – 42s.

9. Never go over the page length, font size, or margins and get the proposal in before the due date!

It would be heartbreaking to devote massive amounts of time and energy and then have your proposal thrown out for not following the rules set forth in the application process!

10. Give your proposal the "Aunt Tilly Test".

Ask a third party to read your proposal. If someone who knows little or nothing about your project – like mom or Aunt Tilly – can understand what you want to do and how it will lead to the results you expect, then the reviewer will probably understand too!

The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable is a coalition of public, private, and voluntary organizations dedicated to reducing the incidence of infection, morbidity, and mortality from viral hepatitis in the U.S.

To support the increased capacity and sustainability of non-profit member organizations, NVHR produces a series of Tip Sheets on a variety of topics. If you have questions or suggestions for a future Tip Sheet topic, please contact [Martha Saly](mailto:Martha.Saly@nvhr.org).