

Attachment I

Tips on Writing Winning Proposals

Writing winning proposals is a skill that you can learn. The purpose of this toolkit is to provide applicants for ADSSP cooperative agreements with tips for writing great proposals.

General Guidelines

- Use simple, straightforward language. Do not use jargon or a lot of acronyms. If state-specific programs are central to the proposal, explain what they do in a way that people outside the state can understand.
- Use active rather than passive tenses. Write “the state funds respite services,” rather than “respite services are funded by the state.” Active verbs give strength to the writing.
- Use the terms and language of the Request for Applications (RFA) to show that the state understands what the Administration on Aging wants.
- Justify and support your claims with data and research. Do not use subjective terms (e.g., “our state has the *best* Alzheimer’s disease programs in the country”).
- Use visuals, such as charts, flow diagrams, tables, and text boxes to make the proposal easier to read.
- Include a table of contents and arrange your proposal accordingly to facilitate easy location of all components of the project.
- Follow proposal requirements for submission (e.g., mandatory sections, page limits, font size, and specific letters of commitment that may be required).
- Spell check and grammar check the proposal. It is embarrassing and unprofessional to submit a proposal with misspellings and grammatical errors.

Getting Started

- Familiarize yourself with the Request for Applications to understand what the Administration on Aging is trying to accomplish. Participate in the informational call with the Administration on Aging about the grant announcement and be prepared to ask questions. If you have technical questions, submit them to the Administration on Aging staff person whose name appears in the Program Announcement.
- Establish a time schedule, including due deadline, early in the proposal process. Be sure to leave adequate time for substantive and administrative review, revision, and approval. Plan on finishing at least one day earlier than you think you need so that you have adequate time to submit the proposal to grants.gov. A proposal that is submitted late will not be accepted.
- Develop an outline of the proposal with the number of pages for each section and who is responsible for writing each section.

- Involve knowledgeable researchers in the planning and proposal writing process. Good researchers will have proposal writing experience and can help design the evaluation component of the proposal.

Process Tips for Writing the Technical Proposal

- Early in the process, present a broad outline of your planned approach to stakeholders and knowledgeable individuals to obtain substantive suggestions and to gain buy-in for the general approach. Take the feedback you receive seriously.
- Develop “winning themes” that articulate why your state’s proposal should be funded and use them in writing the proposal. For example, if your proposal is part of a state-approved dementia care plan, stress that fact in the proposal. Emphasize how your proposal will advance the goals of the Administration on Aging.
- Complete a rough draft of the proposal about two thirds of the way through the proposal period. For better objectivity, ask some experts to review a draft of your proposal. Take their feedback seriously. Give them (and yourself) time to review the proposal and to incorporate their comments.
- Research and facts should be referenced using a standard citation style, such as that of the American Psychological Association (<http://www.library.cornell.edu/resrch/citmanage/apa>). A good source of statistical data about Alzheimer’s disease is the Alzheimer’s Association’s *Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures*, which is available at http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_facts_figures.asp. Additional resources are found at the end of this toolkit.
- If at all possible, the proposal should focus on one or two overall goals. Objectives should specify how the project will meet its goals. Although goals are broad and abstract, objectives should be measurable and achievable within the grant period. The evaluation plan will measure whether the project met the objectives.
- The proposal needs to provide a clear description of the intervention that the state is proposing to implement. This section is the heart of the proposal. It should answer the questions: What will you do? How will you do it? Who will do it? Provide as much detail as you can within the space allotted. Be concrete and specific. The most common proposal weakness is a lack of detail on what the grant will actually do. A lot of jargon and general discussion about “integration” and “coordination” will not fool the reviewers if the applicant has not thoroughly conceptualized what is going to be done in the project.
- Explain the role of the state and the community partners. Remember that letters of commitment from the community partners are required.
- The project should measure *outcomes* (e.g., changes in caregiver burden), in addition to *outputs* (e.g., number of training sessions provided). Measures of outcomes are better than measures of satisfaction (e.g., how satisfied were participants with the training provided?). Evaluations of program effectiveness usually compare measures across time or groups. Evaluations may compare measures before and after the same people participate in the intervention or compare measures before and after the intervention for people who receive the intervention and those who do not. The comparison groups should be as comparable to the population receiving the intervention as possible. Obtaining input from

researchers concerning the evaluation component of the project will strengthen the proposal.

- The Alzheimer's Disease Supportive Services Program is a "demonstration" program. It is not intended to provide long-term funding. The applicant should give serious consideration to how the project will continue after project funding ends. If the program is successful, the state should have a plan for integrating or "embedding" the intervention into ongoing state programs. Systems change is a high priority for the Administration on Aging.

Personnel and Budget

- Tailor the personnel descriptions of staff who will be working on the project to the specific tasks in the proposal. Tell the reader what each person's role and time commitment (e.g., .5 FTE) will be in the project. Use a consistent format for all personnel descriptions.
- To the extent possible, limit the staffing to a few people who will commit a significant proportion of their time to the project. Reviewers downgrade proposals that include large numbers of people for small amounts of time because it diffuses accountability and dilutes commitment to the project.
- Budget realistically for the tasks that need to be done. Be sure to budget for all people who will need coverage to implement the project.
- Be realistic about the time schedule. Many projects have a long start-up time.

Additional Resources on Alzheimer's Disease

- Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center, National Institute on Aging: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/>.
- Alzheimer's Association's Virtual Library: <http://www.alz.org/library/index.asp>.
- Medline Plus, "Alzheimer's Disease": <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/alzheimersdisease.html>.
- U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Fast Facts on Alzheimer's Disease": <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/alzheimr.htm>.