

How to Develop a Concept Paper

A concept paper can play a valuable role in the initial stages of the grant seeking process. It serves as an initial outline of your project, providing a framework to guide discussions with potential partners, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, and funding agency program officers. A concept paper should be brief (1-3 pages) and succinct. Use language that is definite. Instead of stating, “We may carry out this task,” project confidence in the proposal and assert, “We will carry out this task.” Act as the salesperson for your idea by avoiding conditional language that minimizes your ability to carry out the project, such as “if,” “however,” and “but.” Depending upon what will be helpful in planning your proposal, a concept paper may include the following sections:

Purpose

- Describe the question, problem, or need that will be addressed. Briefly note any evidence of this need (such as a statistic).
- Identify how the project will address this need.
- Identify how the project fits the mission/priorities of the funding agency.

Project Description

- What activities will take place?
 - For example, will you be developing curriculum, starting a mentoring program, or holding a training workshop?
- How is your approach unique, inventive, and/or transformative?
 - Distinguish yourself from the sea of proposals the funder will receive. Define why the agency should fund you instead of someone with a similar idea.
- Who will benefit?
 - Think in broader terms than merely answering a research question. Consider the project’s effects upon students, curriculum, faculty professional development, the institution’s research environment, and society in general. The broader impacts should appeal to your targeted agency’s goals and funding priorities.

Objectives

- What do you hope to achieve?
 - Objectives are more specific than the project’s overall goal(s) and should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.
- What are your research questions?

Methodology/Project Design

- How will the project be carried out?
- What inventive techniques, processes, or methods will be employed?
- What is the anticipated timeline (in general terms)? How many months or years will the project span?

Project Needs

- Make a general list of what you will need to carry out a project and, if possible, anticipated expenses.
 - The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs can help you brainstorm what your needs may be and assign appropriate figures to those needs.
- Consider what you may need within the following categories:

- Personnel – Don't forget to include undergraduate or graduate student support.
- Equipment (> \$5,000)
- Supplies (< \$5,000)
- Travel – Do you need to travel for research purposes or dissemination?
- Consultants or subcontractors – Individuals under this category must be outside of the UW System. Partners employed within the UW System can be included as personnel.
- Participant support
- Space – Will you need to rent facilities off-campus?

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