## *Steps to Take for Finishing and Submitting Your Grant Request*

Even if you’re writing a proposal under a tight deadline, you always want to take the time to revise and refine it. You can assume that your reader has stacks and stacks of proposals or online documents to consume. You want yours to be a pleasure to read. The following checklist offers general reminders for preparing your proposal. Many of them represent steps we’ve overlooked or mistakes we have made ourselves.

### Writing and Revision Checklist

**How well do the proposal parts fit together?** For example, if your statement of need emphasizes three themes, do you include goals and objectives for each of those three needs? Is every goal and objective addressed through one or more of the proposal’s methods? Is every method evaluated to see if you have met your goals and objectives? Is the cost of every activity your proposal describes covered in your budget?

**How are your sentences working?** Have you used active, specific verbs to construct your sentences (as opposed to is, are, am)? Have you varied the length and structure of your sentences? Have you avoided excess verbiage (phrases like “the fact that”)? Have you avoided jargon? Is your proposal readable and engaging?

**Have you given it a close read?** Just because you work on a computer with spelling and grammar checking features doesn’t mean that your text is likely to be perfect. In fact, one false move in a spell check review can transform a frequently used word into one that makes no sense, and it is easy to leave behind stray bits of sentences when you move text around. Reread your proposal, imagining that you’ve never read it before. (Better yet, get a careful second reader to review it for you.) We have a close friend who swears by reading her proposal sentences in backward order to find her mistakes!

**Did you sleep on it?** We highly recommend finishing the proposal the day before it must be submitted and taking one last look when your mind is fresh. We always find (and correct) mistakes this way. Many online systems will permit you to prepare a draft and then pause before pressing “submit.”

**Did you save and submit the “final” version?** Often you will have shared some of the writing or editing of your grant request with a colleague and tracked changes while working on it. (That’s how we co-authored this book!) Particularly if you are applying to a foundation that accepts or requires electronically submitted proposals, double-double check that you’re uploading the final version of your request without the edits or comments before you submit it. Unless the foundation requests another format, we recommend that you save and upload the final version of your proposal as a PDF.

**Did you press “send”?** Some foundations’ online application systems permit you to develop and revise your application on their sites. Once you have finished your proposal, you likely will choose to save the document, but often you face one more critical step: Press “send.” Otherwise the foundation can tell that you have written something, but cannot see your application.

### Preparation and Presentation Checklist

**Know your instructions.** Recipes often tell you, “read everything before doing anything,” and that rule applies to proposal writing. Review all the detailed application information before you begin to write. We recommend taking this step at least one month before you plan to submit a proposal. If parts of the proposal have to be limited to a certain number of words or characters, test your sentences in advance to be certain that they fit into the form.

**Double-check the dates.** As part of the first item on the list, make sure you understand when the proposal is due at the foundation. Although this sounds like a “no brainer,” some deadlines are for the date by which your proposal must be postmarked (“a postmark deadline”) and some are for the date (and sometimes the hour) by which the proposal must be received (“a receipt deadline”). Some are the date by which it must be uploaded, and that hour specifies a particular time zone. Funding sources may be very exacting about these deadlines. We know of a proposal that was due at noon and rejected when the grant writer hit the “submit” button on the foundation website at 12:01 p.m.

Also, double-check when the funds are likely to be awarded. If your project needs to take place at a specific time, you want to be certain that the money may be available when you need it.

**Do you need an account?** The federal government and some other public and private funding sources require you to create an online account before you may prepare and submit an online application. Be sure to do take any steps required to register in advance of the proposal deadline. Often the process can be completed in a day or two, but we recommend that you register two weeks ahead of your deadline in case any questions arise that cause delays.

**Who needs to sign it?** If you’re writing a proposal for a project within a large institution — a university or hospital, for example — it is likely that you’ll need to “route” it through a number of offices for approval before it can be submitted. You want to know who has to sign off on your submission and how long this “routing” process is going to take. Prepare your proposal early and follow it closely through the sequence of approvals to make sure this process is completed in time. If you’re using a fiscal sponsor (see Chapter 2), you probably need a signature or brief letter of support from its director, and your sponsor will want to see at least a draft of your proposal before it is due.

**Speaking of which, whose support do you need?** If your proposal requires letters of recommendation or references, contact your letter writers or references at least three weeks before the proposal is due. To make things easier for your letter writers, you may provide sample letters for them. (If you’re providing such a letter to several writers, make sure you vary it.) If you’re working with staff of a local legislator’s office, you want to make time to meet with them and brief them about your project.

**Do you have all of the required enclosures in hand?** You may need to scan, edit, and upload photographs, digital media, reports, newspaper articles, and other back-up materials, and the funder’s instructions may specify particular formats or sizes for your files and images. Similarly, do you have in hand resumes or vitae for all of the project’s key leaders? Is your own resume up to date and ready to enclose?

**How many copies are needed, and is a particular format required?** Some foundations bind proposals into informal books for staff review or compile them in ringed binders. Others will only accept them as electronic submissions.

Some funders feel strongly about recycled paper, two-sided copying, or electronic submissions. If the funding source provides instructions about wanting hole-punched paper, specific margins, and special copying formats, or if it provides other format guidelines, double-check these details and follow them. We once sat in the lobby of one foundation removing staples, re-ordering pages, and punching three holes in hundreds of pages. Don’t follow our example!