



Guidelines for Submitting a Strong Grant Proposal

Introduction:

Advice on how to write a strong grant proposal can vary based on the funder as well as current trends. The guidelines provided below should be followed in general, but will certainly benefit applicants of the [2026 OSPF Youth-Led RFP](#).

In addition to the guidelines below, readers may refer to a glossary of terms at the end of this document.

I. Writing to the Rubric

- a. Many grants publish a rubric that will be used to grade proposals.
- b. Applicants should tailor their proposal to what reviewers are looking for – all of which is laid out in the rubric.
- c. Before submitting a proposal, applicants should ensure that all of the details specified by the rubric are included in their proposal.
- d. Example: The 2026 OSPF Youth-Led Grant RFP will award up to three points for proposals that detail who their project will impact. Not including this detail will lower the final score.

II. Following Directions

- a. RFPs often include precise directions and deadlines for contacting the grantor as well as submitting a proposal. Failure to follow directions may reflect poorly on the applicant and/or lead to disqualification.
- b. Example: The 2026 OSPF Youth-Led Grant RFP has a 3-page limit for the Project Narrative. Applicants that submit a shorter Project Narrative risk the ability to satisfactorily meet the requirements of the rubric. Narratives that exceed three pages may be disqualified to save reviewers from having to take additional time with that application.

III. Organization

- a. Applicants should organize their proposal to mirror the rubric or the RFP. This makes it easier for reviewers to grade and confirm that all requested details have been added to the final proposal.



- b. Example: In the 2026 OSPF Youth-Led Grant RFP, one of the last details requested is a timeline for completing the proposed project. When reviewers grade the applicant's proposal, they will expect to see this information toward the end of the applicant's Project Narrative. If the applicant included this information toward the beginning of their proposal, the reviewer may award zero points for the proposal timeline because they didn't realize the timeline was included elsewhere in the proposal.
- c. Applicants should consider where to place spaces and page breaks (which signal the end of one page and the beginning of another) to make it easier for reviewers to navigate the proposal.
- d. Applicants should use page numbers to make it easier for reviewers to direct one another's attention to a particular page.

IV. Readability

- a. Proposals should match the formality of a grant, including:
 - i. Third person (e.g., the Sources of Strength Peer Leaders will..." as opposed to "we will...");
 - ii. Correct grammar and spelling;
 - iii. Consistent font types, sizes, and color (black or blue);
 - iv. Consistent formatting, including spacing.
- b. Unless directed otherwise in the RFP, applicants may use headers, bolded font, and italics to help specific sections and words stand out. This approach can act as a lighthouse for reviewers who might otherwise struggle to find specific answers to the section of the rubric on which they're working.
- c. Outside of the expectation that proposals reflect high writing standards, proposals with correct grammar, consistent font, etc. are easier to read and allow reviewers to focus on the proposal as opposed to distractions caused by changes in formatting or confusion caused by incorrect spellings.
- d. Finally, applicants should consider that reviewers will be between the ages of 14 and 19. Applicants are encouraged to use language that is appropriate for this age group and to avoid jargon or technical language that may be more difficult for youth reviewers to understand.



Glossary (as used in this document or in the 2026 OSPF Youth-Led Grant RFP)

- Applicant: an individual or organization who is applying for a *grant*.
- Budget Narrative: provides additional details on how funds will be used by the *applicant*. Budget narratives may be used to summarize entire budgets, but as included in the 2026 Youth-Led Grant RFP, Budget narratives are requested for each line item in the budget.
 - E.g.,

Line Item	Budget	Budget Narrative
Printing 988 flyers	\$100	\$0.10 a copy for 1,000 flyers that will be given to each student at the beginning of our event.

- Fiscal Officer: an individual, such as an accountant responsible for financial matters within an individual organization, or an organization that takes care of financial matters on behalf of another organization.
- Funding/Funds/Funding: shorthand for money, including *grants/grant funds, awards, or donations*. E.g., “We received funding for our school!”
- Grant/Grant Funds/Award: money that has been awarded to an individual, organization, or state in return for activities or items listed in a *grant proposal*. *Grant* is used more frequently than *award*.
- Grantee/Awardee: an individual, organization, or state that has been selected as the recipient for a *grant/award*. *Grantee* is used more frequently than *awardee*.
- Grantor/Funder: an individual, organization, or government entity that is providing *grant funds* in return for activities or items requested in a RFP. *Funder* is used more frequently than *grantor*.
- Notice of Award (NOA): a document created by the *funder* and given to all *applicants* whose *proposals* have been approved for funding. Applicants who receive a NOA become *grantees*.
- Proposal/Application: short for *grant proposal/grant application*; a document created by an *applicant* that summarizes what they would be willing to do to fulfill the requirements of the RFP. Funders may distinguish between *proposals* and *applications* by regarding the face sheet, project narrative, and budget as the *proposal*; and using *application* to encompass all components (*proposal, W-9, signed conditions and assurances, budget etc.*).



- Request for Proposal (RFP): a document created by the *funder* that summarizes *funding* they'd be willing to provide to a *grantee(s)* in return for a series of activities and/or achievements.
- Review Team: a group of *reviewers* charged with reviewing and grading *grant proposals*. After the *review team* completes their review of individual *proposals*, the *review team* will come together to review *proposal scores* and determine which *proposals*, if any, will be awarded *funding*.
- Reviewer: an individual who works for or volunteers with the *funder* and is a member of the *review team*. Reviewers are assigned a certain number of *grant proposals* to review, or grade (usually only a small number of the total received *proposals*). They will complete a *rubric* for each *proposal* and will often meet with other *reviewers* assigned to the same *proposals* to discuss their scores and determine the final score for that *proposal*. After this step, the *review team* will discuss final scores and determine which *proposals*, if any, will be awarded *funding*.
- Rubric: a scoring guide that helps *reviewers* grade individual *proposals*. Scores often start at zero and can range from no credit to full credit.