

The *Grant-Ready* Proposal Checklist

23 things every funded proposal has — and most rejected ones are missing. Review this before every submission.

23
CHECKLIST ITEMS

5
PROPOSAL SECTIONS

20
YEARS EXPERIENCE

\$200M+
MOBILIZED

*Built from 20+ years of institutional fundraising experience across the **World Bank, IMF, UNICEF, Save the Children, and Oxfam** — supporting proposals and funding mechanisms ranging from **six figures to multi-million-dollar awards**.*

FROM GRANT GROWTH HUB · FREE FOR NONPROFITS & FUNDRAISERS

After 20 years of grant writing, I can tell within the first paragraph whether a proposal will be funded. It's almost never about the mission. It's **almost always about clarity, structure, and specificity.**

This checklist captures the 23 elements that separate funded proposals from rejected ones. Run through it before every submission — it takes less than 10 minutes and can save months of waiting for a rejection.

♦ **BEST FOR**

✓ Small & grassroots nonprofits	✓ First-time grant writers	✓ Organizations applying for foundation grants	✓ Teams without a full-time development director
---------------------------------	----------------------------	--	--

Trusted by nonprofit founders, executive directors, and first-time grant writers — *used by grassroots and community-based organizations across the country.*

⚡ SEE THE DIFFERENCE IN 10 SECONDS — QUICK WIN EXAMPLE

✗ WEAK

"Youth in our community face many barriers."

✓ STRONG

"In East Baton Rouge Parish, 42% of low-income youth ages 10-17 lack access to after-school academic support, contributing to a 31% middle school reading gap."

What changed: Named location → Named population → Local statistic → Stated consequence. That's Section 1 done right. The checklist below shows you how to apply this logic to every section.



Read carefully

Each item has a reason



Check what's in

your proposal



Fix missing items

before you submit



Submit with

confidence

THE REVIEWER MINDSET

What Program Officers Are Silently Asking

ORGANIZATION

Can this team actually execute? Have they done it before?

EVIDENCE

Are these numbers real, local, and believable?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Will I know if it worked — and by when?

STEWARDSHIP

Is every dollar calculated and justified?

🔍 Section 1 — Problem Statement Funders must feel the urgency before they consider your solution

- A specific population is named** MOST MISSED
Not "the community" — a defined group by age, location, or circumstance (e.g., "single mothers ages 18-35 in [City]")
- At least one local statistic or data point is included**
Numbers from your county, city, or region — not just national stats. Local data proves you know your community.
- The consequence of inaction is stated**
What happens if nothing changes? Funders are motivated by urgency — give them a reason to act now.
- No vague language like "various challenges" or "multiple barriers"** COMMON FAIL
Every problem mentioned should be specific and named. Vague language signals unclear thinking.



Section 2 — Organization Overview *Prove you're the right team — with results, not adjectives*

- A past outcome or result is mentioned with a number** MOST MISSED
"In 2023, 87% of our participants secured employment within 90 days." Not "we've helped many people."
- No adjectives replacing evidence**
"Passionate," "dedicated," and "committed" are not proof. Replace every adjective with a fact or number.
- Grant management experience is referenced**
Mention past funders or total funding managed. This removes a major funder concern: can you handle the money?
- Key staff credentials or relevant experience mentioned**
Who is leading this project and why are they qualified? One sentence is enough.

✗ NEVER WRITE THIS

"We are a passionate organization dedicated to making a difference in the lives of those we serve."

✓ WRITE THIS INSTEAD

"Since 2018, we've served 2,400 residents and maintained an 84% program completion rate across \$1.2M in grants."

THE RULE

For every adjective in your org description, ask: "Can I replace this with a number?" Usually you can.



Section 3 — Project Description *Funders must be able to picture exactly what they're funding*

- A specific number of people to be served is stated** MOST MISSED
Not "many families" or "up to 100 participants." A firm number: "75 single mothers."
- Activities are named and described — not generalized** COMMON FAIL
"Wraparound services" means nothing. Name the actual activities: workshops, coaching sessions, job placement assistance.
- A timeline is included (start, milestones, end)**
Fundors want to know when things happen. A simple month-by-month or quarter-by-quarter plan adds credibility.
- The connection between activities and outcomes is clear**
Don't make the funder guess. Explicitly state: "These activities will result in X outcome because..."
- No "we will strive to" or "we hope to" language**
Fundors want commitment, not hope. Replace with "we will" followed by a specific, measurable action.

A program officer asks 4 questions while reading your proposal. Make every answer obvious.

? Is the problem real & urgent?

? Can this team actually do it?

? Will I know if it worked?

? Is my money being used wisely?

Section 4 — Goals & Outcomes

Every goal must be countable, dated, and verifiable

- Every goal includes a specific number or percentage** MOST MISSED
"80% of participants" not "most participants." Numbers signal planning maturity and accountability.
- Every goal has a deadline ("By [Month, Year]...")**
Open-ended goals are unaccountable goals. A date turns an intention into a commitment.
- Every goal states how it will be measured or verified** HIGH IMPACT
Survey results, bank records, pre/post assessments, certificates — state your verification method for each goal.
- Goals are outcomes, not activities** COMMON FAIL
"We will conduct 10 workshops" is an activity. "80% of attendees will demonstrate skill X" is an outcome. Funders want outcomes.

Section 5 — Budget

Funders read budgets like detectives — every dollar must be traceable

- Every line item is calculated (unit × quantity × rate)** MOST MISSED
"\$12,000 — supplies" is a red flag. "\$12,000 — workbooks (\$8 × 75 participants) + printing (\$45/month × 12)" passes the test.
- Participant numbers in budget match the narrative**
If your narrative says 75 people but your budget funds 50, a reviewer will catch it and lose trust in your planning.
- No unexplained round numbers** WATCH OUT
\$5,000 for "training" with no explanation looks like a guess. Calculate it: \$500/session × 10 sessions = \$5,000 ✓
- Indirect/admin costs are explained** OFTEN MISSED
State your indirect rate and its basis (e.g., "15% of direct costs per organizational policy"). Don't leave it unexplained.

Personnel lines include role, FTE, and salary

"Staff — \$45,000" is not enough. "Program Coordinator, 1.0 FTE × \$45,000/yr" tells the funder exactly what they're paying for.

✗ BEFORE — TYPICAL REJECTED PROPOSAL

PROBLEM STATEMENT

"Youth in our community face many challenges including academic barriers and a lack of support systems that prevent them from reaching their full potential."

✗ No location. No statistic. No consequence. No specific population.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

"We are a passionate and dedicated team committed to serving our community and making a lasting impact on the youth we work with."

✗ Four adjectives. Zero numbers. Zero proof.

GOALS & OUTCOMES

"We hope to help as many youth as possible improve their academic performance through our after-school programming."

✗ "Hope to." No number. No date. No measurement method.

✓ AFTER — FUNDER-READY VERSION

PROBLEM STATEMENT

"In East Baton Rouge Parish, 42% of low-income youth ages 10–17 lack access to after-school academic support. Without intervention, these students are 3× more likely to drop out before high school graduation."

✓ Named location + population + local stat + consequence of inaction.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

"Since 2019, we have served 1,847 students across 6 Title I schools, achieving an 89% grade-level advancement rate and managing \$740,000 in foundation and federal grants."

✓ Year founded. Specific count. Measurable result. Grant history.

GOALS & OUTCOMES

"By June 2026, 80% of the 60 enrolled students will advance at least one grade level in reading, as measured by pre/post Dibels assessments administered by our licensed literacy coach."

✓ Deadline. Firm number. Measurable outcome. Verification method.

The **Grant Proposal Makeover Template** includes 5 complete rewrites like this — with fill-in prompts for every section, so you know exactly what to write.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Score Your Proposal

Use this before you submit to find your weakest section. Be honest — reviewers will be.

SECTION	WHAT TO RATE (1-5)	YOUR SCORE
Problem Statement	How specific and data-driven is your problem section?	<input type="text"/>
Organization Overview	How well do you prove past results with numbers?	<input type="text"/>
Project Description	How clearly can a stranger picture what you'll do?	<input type="text"/>
Goals & Outcomes	How measurable, dated, and verifiable are your goals?	<input type="text"/>
Budget Narrative	How well is every dollar calculated and justified?	<input type="text"/>
△ Score 1-2: Rewrite This section will likely cause a rejection. Rewrite before submitting.	🔧 Score 3: Strengthen Passable but not competitive. Add specifics and numbers.	✅ Score 4-5: Strong This section is working. Move on.

YOUR NEXT STEP

→ If your proposal scored below a **4 in any section**, start with the Makeover Template — it shows exactly how weak sections get rewritten into funder-ready language, word for word.

READY FOR THE FULL FRAMEWORK?

See 5 Real Proposal Sections Rewritten **Line by Line**

- ✓ 5 complete Before & After makeovers (like the one above)
- ✓ Fill-in prompts for every section — know exactly what to write
- ✓ The Funder-Ready Formula used across \$200M+ mobilized
- ✓ 5 proposal killers to eliminate before you submit

Get the Full Template

→ Grant Growth Hub

Turn vague proposals into funder-ready applications

© Grant Growth Hub · @grantgrowthhub on Instagram · This checklist is free to use and share with your team. Not for resale. Built from 20+ years of institutional fundraising experience across the World Bank, IMF, UNICEF, and international NGOs.