

Guest blog by Sami Fournier of [Element Exercise](#).

Faced with the prospect of submitting a grant proposal, consider what a great opportunity you have before you. Beyond being a challenge and a bit of a chore, the grant writing process can define your organization's work in a way that also improves the leadership of your team.

A looming grant deadline can be a team-building experience.

Let's take the example of applying to a foundation for a general support grant.

Your first instinct as Executive Director might be to sequester yourself in your office and just write it.

But consider this alternative possibility: Get your team together (on a rational, roomy timeline, if possible) and build an outline using the funder's guidelines and requirements. Suppose you start with something like this:

- Intro
- History and Background
- Statement of problem and need
- Goals and objectives
- Solution to the problem
- Budget
- Timelines
- Applicant qualifications
- Evaluation
- Organizational Sustainability

Carve out assignments for your team members, knowing that each will review and edit and feed into the main narrative as well.

Whoever is drafting the narrative is not working in a vacuum. That person is hopefully starting from the organization's strategic plan and building on the organization's mission and goals.

The main job of the narrative writer is to organize and delve into the details of the *how* and each step along the path to the goals. The proposal should describe clear goals, activities and tasks you will do toward each goal, the target audience, and the intended impact. Be honest and direct about your organization's strengths and weaknesses, and make it clear how you will evaluate the success of your efforts.

Now, back to your team. Perhaps you had a lead and some other folks (board? staff?) assisting with various sections, or perhaps it was a set of reviewers providing input. No matter how you organized yourselves, the process helped each team member feel pride of ownership, and the end product gave them more guidance in their work.

That's how you got the multiplier effect of improving and developing staff as they work through drafting and presenting your organization's proposal to a funder. Throughout, you can be making process improvements and tweaks, and finding and developing leadership qualities in each staffer.

By this time, you have a proposal that can be submitted as a centerpiece of your group's work. It describes a problem, but puts much more emphasis on your approach to solutions and their execution. In the process, you came away with a tighter team, and more direction and sense of purpose. The support you got from the funder went well beyond the financial benefit. You arrived with stronger leaders and greater skill than ever to go forward. No matter what, make sure to tell the funder how much you grew in the process.

*Sami Fournier has a Bend, Oregon-based consulting company called "Element Exercise," which sounds like a personal training outfit, but actually specializes in grant writing in the field of alternative transportation. She formerly directed the League of American Bicyclists' Education programs. Sami can be reached at [elementexercise@gmail.com](mailto:elementexercise@gmail.com). <http://www.Elementexercise.com>*