Writing effective proposals – the industrial aspect

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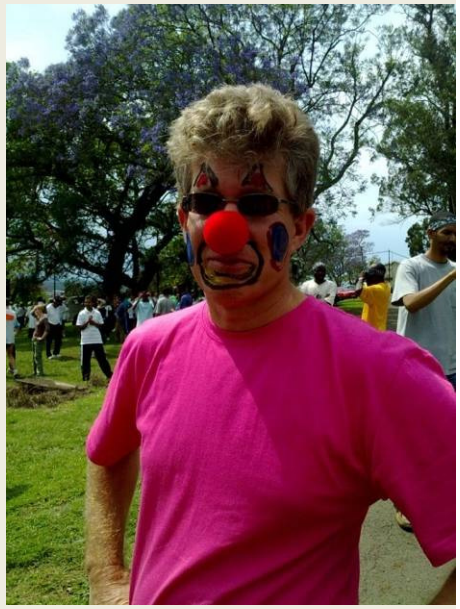
General points



- Proposals need structure
  - Often prescribed by funding agency
  - Stick to format & guidelines!
- Keep proposals brief
  - Provide all important details
  - Don't deviate from agency's terms of reference
  - Show that work is important & value for money
- Portray image of professionalism
  - Ensure proposal is well written

Structure: main components

1) Cover page
2) Executive summary
3) Introduction (motivation)
4) Project objectives
5) Deliverables
6) Key personnel (time & costs)
7) Budget
8) Appendices (additional information)

(1) Cover page

- Project title
  - Clear & concise
- Name & contact details of project manager
  - Postal address, telephone numbers & e-mail address
- Date of proposal
  - Avoid confusion with previous versions

(2) Executive summary (= abstract)

- Concise (Not more than 250 words)
  - Use to ‘sell’ your project
- Provide key information
  - Refer briefly to agency’s terms of reference (in tender/call for proposals)
  - Outline main objectives in context of TOR
  - Include project time frame
  - Include total costs of project

(3) Introduction (motivation)

- Provide background information
- Highlight importance of project
  - Link with agency's TOR
- Explain how project will address funder's needs
  - Solving problem(s) at hand
  - Value to broader community
  - Transformation
  - Capacity building (e.g. training students)

(4) Project objectives

- List main objectives/questions
  - Progress measured against these
  - Link with agency's TOR
- Include Work Plan
  - Summary table of activities
  - Link each objective to time (year, month)
  - Allows agency access to work schedule

Example of Work Plan

Objective	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
2011												
Task 1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Task 2						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Progress report						X						
2012												
Task 3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Task 4				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Progress report						X						
2103												
Task 5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Task 6			X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Final report										X		

(5) Deliverables

- List benefits for funder
  - Relate to details in TOR
  - Progress reports and/or oral report backs
  - Final report with recommendations
  - Peer-reviewed publications
  - Popular articles, conference presentations etc
  - Funders acknowledged in all outputs

(6) Key personnel

- Streamline research team
  - Implications for budget
- Provide details on all personnel (table)
  - Names
  - Highest qualification
  - Years of relevant experience
  - Roles & responsibilities
  - % time (hours) spent on project
  - Charge-out rates (R/hr; % salary etc)

Summary Table (personnel)

Name	Highest qualification	Research experience	Function	Time spent	Charge-out rate
Terry Olckers Senior Lecturer	PhD	20 years	Project management & supervision	30% of time	30% of salary
PhD student	MSc	3 years	Research	Full time	Bursary
MSc student	BSc (Hons)	1 year	Research	Full time	Bursary
MSc student 2	BSc (Hons)	1 year	Research	Full time	Bursary
MSc student 3	BSc (Hons)	1 year	Research	Full time	Bursary
MSc student 4	BSc (Hons)	1 year	Research	Full time	Bursary
Research assistant	Senior Certificate	1 year	Research support	1440 hours	R25/hr

(7) Research budget

- 5 main components
  - Personnel costs (PC)
  - Overhead costs (OC)
  - Running costs (RC)
  - Profit mark-up/administration levy (MU)
  - VAT (V)

- Price quotation = PC + OC + RC + MU + V

Personnel costs (PC)

- Most expensive component
- Based on ‘cost to company’ of all project staff
  - Includes salaries & benefits
- Companies stipulate <u>charge-out rates</u>
  - Hourly & daily rates which vary with rank (post level)
  - Full research year = 180 working days (36 weeks)
  - PC= proportion time x daily rate x 180

Overhead costs (OC)

- Indirect costs of project
  - Claim costs of support services, maintenance, depreciation, facilities, management etc
- Set as % of personnel costs
  - Varies with company policy (50-100%)
- Example (Company charges 70% OC)
  - Post Level 5 working at 50% time
  - PC = 0.5 x R802/day x 180 = R72 180
  - OC = 0.5 x R561/day x 180 = R50 490

Running costs (RC)

- All direct costs of project
  - Subsistence & travel (R/day)
  - Transport costs (R/km)
  - Contracted personnel (not employed by company)
  - Student bursaries
  - Equipment
  - Consumable materials
  - Other services (e.g. biometry, taxonomy)

* Allow for inflation over subsequent years (8-10% increase)

Other items

- Profit mark-up (MU)
  - Company policy & varies from 10-30% of total costs
  - MU = 0.1 (PC + OC +RC)
  - May be replaced by Administration Levy (e.g. universities)

- VAT (V)
  - 14% Total costs & profit
  - V = 0.14 (PC + OC + RC + MU)
  - Student bursaries are VAT exempt

Different funding philosophies

- Total cost recovery approach
  - Charge client for everything
  - Used by research councils, consulting agencies etc

- Collaboration approach
  - Both parties invest proportion of funds (e.g. 70:30 split)
  - Used when agencies collaborate with other (e.g. funding agencies & universities)
  - Personnel costs, overhead costs (facilities) are not charged but reflected as your contribution

(8) Appendices

- Useful additional information that may be requested
  - Summarized curriculum vitae of principal researchers (1 page)
  - List of recent & relevant publications/research outputs
  - Anything else requested

Final touches

- Check document for typographical errors
- Check budget carefully (revise)
- Consult financial & legal departments for approval
- Ask colleague(s) to proof-read proposal
- Submit on time!!