

GrantSAT
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GrantSAT

Grant Proposal Self-Assessment Tool

Outreach in Action.

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Introduction

Welcome to the Grant Proposal Self-Assessment Tool (GrantSAT). The U.S. Department of Energy Carlsbad Area Office (CAO) and the Westinghouse Electric Company (WEC) created GrantSAT to achieve the following:

- Assist U.S. educational institutions and non-profit organizations in writing winning grant proposals
- Provide U.S. educational consultants and businesses with a tool to use commercially

During the transfer of over 4,000 grantwriting course packages (*Writing Winning Grant Proposals I and II*) to U.S. organizations and citizens, CAO and WEC received dozens of requests from recipients for diagnostic tools to assist them in evaluating their grant proposals prior to submission. With GrantSAT, CAO and WEC seek to address these needs.

GrantSAT employs a systematic approach to grant proposal assessment and improvement. For years, large corporations have been successfully employing systematic approaches in the development of commercial proposals and award applications. In developing GrantSAT, a WEC grantwriting expert analyzed over 300 grant-related documents, including the following:

- Requests for proposals (RFPs) and guidelines—government, corporate, and foundation
- Proposals—winning and losing proposals involving a cross-section of grant giving and seeking organizations
- Evaluator guides—used by some organizations to award grants
- Grantwriting courses
- Grantwriting literature

Using the analysis results, the author identified 100 core characteristics of a winning grant proposal. Then, the author created and tested an assessment model. Based on test results, the author modified the assessment model, eliminating and combining items to create the 75-item instrument found on the following pages. The CAO and WEC hope that you find GrantSAT to be a useful tool in writing winning grant proposals.

Instructions

1. *Browse through the Self-Assessment section criteria before you begin writing the grant proposal.* This is a good way to stimulate grantwriting ideas, organize your thoughts, and identify supporting documentation to be gathered.
2. *During the grantwriting process, refer to the Self-Assessment section criteria as necessary to stay on task.* Remember the maxim, “Can’t see the forest for the trees.”
3. *Score your draft grant proposal.* For each criterion in the *Self-Assessment* section, mark the number that you believe best represents the content of your draft proposal. For example, if two-thirds of your draft grant proposal is written in the *passive* voice, you might evaluate the active/passive voice criterion as a “②”:

Passive voice					Active voice
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥

However, if two-thirds of your draft proposal is written in the *active* voice, you might evaluate the active/passive voice criterion a “⑤.” Be honest and don’t agonize over the scoring—go with your first choice.

4. *Compile the results on the Tabulation Sheet following the Self-Assessment section.*
5. *Use the Interpretation and Action Key to evaluate your results and establish a course of action for improving your proposal.*
6. *Revise your proposal as indicated to systematically improve your grant proposal.* Good luck!

Self-Assessment

1. General Style, Content					
Proposes a project that is incompatible with the mission and objectives of the grant giver. (<i>such as requesting funding from a computer manufacturer's foundation to purchase hardware from a rival manufacturer</i>) ①	②	③	④	⑤	Proposes a project that is compatible with the mission of grant giver ⑥
Written to a generic audience; sounds canned ①	②	③	④	⑤	Written to the grant giver; addresses grant giver's interests, needs ⑥
Lengthy, rambling with anything and everything thrown in that <i>might be</i> of interest ①	②	③	④	⑤	Short, concise ⑥
Pages not numbered ①	②	③	④	⑤	All pages numbered ⑥
Disparages competitors; mentions them by name ①	②	③	④	⑤	Does not disparage competitors; does not mention them by name ⑥

Fails to communicate energy, enthusiasm for project ①	②	③	④	⑤	Communicates energy, enthusiasm for project ⑥
Written in first and/or second person ①	②	③	④	⑤	Written entirely in third person ⑥
Written in long, verbose, fuzzy sentences ①	②	③	④	⑤	Written in short, clear, crisp, vivid sentences ⑥
Has not been reviewed by an objective third party ①	②	③	④	⑤	Has been reviewed by an objective third party ⑥
Contains numerous exaggerations, manipulated statistics and/or untruths ①	②	③	④	⑤	Always factual ⑥
Contains numerous statistics and statements that are undocumented, unsupportable ①	②	③	④	⑤	Statistics and statements are documented; references and sources are cited ⑥
Contains sweeping generalizations, platitudes ①	②	③	④	⑤	Does not contain sweeping generalizations, platitudes ⑥

Key elements are embedded in straight narrative (no <i>road map</i> for reader) ①	②	③	④	⑤	Key elements are highlighted with bullets, italics, headings, subheadings, boldface type, color, borders, charts (contains clear <i>road map</i> for reader) ⑥
States or suggests that none of your organization's resources will be expended on the project unless you receive the grant ①	②	③	④	⑤	Provides evidence that preliminary work is being/has been done ⑥
Written in passive voice ①	②	③	④	⑤	Written in active voice ⑥
Contains complex sentence construction ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains simple sentence construction ⑥
Sloppily typed, unreadable (tiny point sizes), unprofessional looking ①	②	③	④	⑤	Neatly typed, readable, professional looking ⑥
Contains poor grammar, misspellings, typos ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains good grammar and spelling; no typos ⑥
Has little white space in layout ①	②	③	④	⑤	Has plenty of white space in layout ⑥

Jargon filled ①	②	③	④	⑤	Jargon free ⑥
Filled with non-specific words (<i>very, develop, increase, maintain, encourage</i>) ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains concrete, specific language (<i>end</i> instead of <i>terminate</i> ; <i>begin</i> instead of <i>institute</i>) ⑥
Acronyms not defined ①	②	③	④	⑤	Acronyms defined ⑥
Presents key elements in a unclear, hodge-podge manner ①	②	③	④	⑤	Presents key elements in clear manner ⑥
Contains needless arguments (such as trying to convince the foundation of a telecommunications firm of the importance of providing Internet access to our nation's classrooms) ①	②	③	④	⑤	Does not contain needless arguments ⑥
Assumes that evaluator has extensive knowledge of the subject/field ①	②	③	④	⑤	Assumes that evaluator may not be familiar with the subject/field ⑥
Does not include graphs/charts ①	②	③	④	⑤	Includes graphs/charts that depict key information ⑥

Graphs/charts are impossible to interpret in 5 seconds ①	②	③	④	⑤	Graphs/charts are easy to interpret within 5 seconds ⑥
Required forms not fully completed ①	②	③	④	⑤	Required forms fully completed ⑥
Fails to quantify benefits to recipients ①	②	③	④	⑤	Quantifies benefits to recipients ⑥
Fails to quantify payback to grant giver (grant giver's return of investment) ①	②	③	④	⑤	Quantifies payback to grant giver (grant giver's return of investment) ⑥
Ignores guidelines (margins, spacing, type size, paper size, proposal length) ①	②	③	④	⑤	Follows guidelines (margins, spacing, type size, paper size, proposal length) ⑥
Fails to present information in the order presented in grant giver's guidelines ①	②	③	④	⑤	Presents information in the order presented in grant giver's guidelines (same headings used) ⑥
Addresses only a few of the bullets or criteria in the grant giver's guidelines ①	②	③	④	⑤	Addresses every bullet or criterion in the grant giver's guidelines ⑥

<p>Presents financial information in a non-standard format</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Presents financial information in a columnar format (in accordance with general accounting/bookkeeping principles)</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Required resumes, curricula vitae, biographies are out of date</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Required resumes, curricula vitae, biographies are up to date</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Presents schedule presented in narrative form</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Presents schedule in graphic form</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Boring to read</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Interesting, exciting to read</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Sounds like a hundred other proposals, existing projects</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Unique, innovative, improvement over existing programs</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Fails to convey action orientation and enthusiasm for project</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Conveys action orientation and enthusiasm for project</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Written in a tentative tone: <i>We could . . .</i></p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Written in a positive tone: <i>We will . . .</i></p> <p>⑥</p>

2. Cover Letter, Executive Summary

<p>Title states activities only (<i>Proposal to Request Funding to Develop an Education Evaluation Model</i>)</p> <p>①</p>	<p>②</p>	<p>③</p>	<p>④</p>	<p>⑤</p>	<p>Title states a benefit (<i>Improving Transfer of Knowledge from the Classroom to Work through the Development of an Evaluation Model</i>)</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Lacks a cover letter</p> <p>①</p>	<p>②</p>	<p>③</p>	<p>④</p>	<p>⑤</p>	<p>Contains a cover letter (typed on letterhead) describing how your project will further the grant maker's mission</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Lacks an executive summary</p> <p>①</p>	<p>②</p>	<p>③</p>	<p>④</p>	<p>⑤</p>	<p>Has an executive summary (one page or less)</p> <p>⑥</p>

<p>Fails to define the following in the executive summary:</p> <p>WHO is applying for the grant? WHERE is the proposing organization located? WHO is being requested to fund the grant? WHY is the grant needed? WHAT will be the grant money be used for? WHEN is the funding requested? HOW much money is being requested?</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Defines the following in the executive summary:</p> <p>WHO is applying for the grant? WHERE is the proposing organization located? WHO is being requested to fund the grant? WHY is the grant needed? WHAT will be the grant money be used for? WHEN is the funding requested? HOW much money is being requested?</p> <p>⑥</p>
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3. Problem Statement/Needs Assessment					
<p>Lacks a problem statement, needs assessment</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Clearly establishes a compelling problem or need</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Fails to support problem, need with statistics</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Supports problem, need with statistics (references cited)</p> <p>⑥</p>

4. Objectives, Benefits					
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Lacks project objectives ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains project objectives ⑥
None of the objectives are measurable ①	②	③	④	⑤	All objectives are measurable ⑥
Contains objectives that are obviously unrealistic ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains realistic objectives ⑥
Lacks a statement of desired outcomes, success indicators ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains a statement of desired outcomes, success indicators ⑥
Fails to establish how grant will help the grant giver ①	②	③	④	⑤	Establishes how grant will help the grant giver ⑥
Fails to indicate a willingness to share project information with other organizations ①	②	③	④	⑤	Clearly indicates a willingness to share project information with other organizations ⑥
Project will help your organization only: your model will be difficult to replicate in other organizations (internal impact only) ①	②	③	④	⑤	Project could be helpful to many organizations; easy to replicate model (possible national impact) ⑥

Promises benefits that are obviously out of reach ①	②	③	④	⑤	Projects benefits that are within reach ⑥
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5. Qualifications

Lacks a qualifications statement: fails to demonstrate that your organization has skills, knowledge, and ability to make project a success ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains a qualifications statement: clearly demonstrates that your organization has skills, knowledge, and ability to make project a success ⑥
Contains a lengthy organizational history ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains a <i>brief</i> organizational history illustrating qualifications to undertake project ⑥
Fails to make a case for why your organization is the one to perform the project; too modest ①	②	③	④	⑤	Makes a case for why your organization is the best one to perform the project without being boastful ⑥
Fails to define each partner's project roles and responsibilities ①	②	③	④	⑤	Clearly defines each partner's project roles and responsibilities ⑥

6. Methods

Lacks a solutions section: methodology, proposed scope, and activities are vaguely described ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains a solutions section: methodology, scope, activities clearly described; creates a vivid mental picture ⑥
Fails to show that any other option was considered before selecting methodology to address the problem, need ①	②	③	④	⑤	Shows that other options were considered before selecting methodology to address the problem, need ⑥
Project will employ old technologies ①	②	③	④	⑤	Project will employ new technologies ⑥
Proposes that your organization will perform all of the work ①	②	③	④	⑤	Proposes that your organization will partner with other organizations ⑥
Lacks a schedule (timeline) or contains an unrealistic one ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains a realistic schedule (timeline) ⑥

7. Budget					
Lacks a budget ①	②	③	④	⑤	Has a detailed budget ⑥

<p>Fails to identify long-term funding sources</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Identifies long-term-funding sources</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Budget numbers don't add up</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Budget numbers add up</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Budget contains unrealistic, inflated prices for materials and services</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Budget contains realistic prices for materials and services</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Budget contains no local matching money, in-kind contributions</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Budget contains local matching money, in-kind contributions</p> <p>⑥</p>
<p>Budget asks for more than your organization needs (proposed budget is padded)</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Budget asks only for what your organization needs (proposed budget is lean)</p> <p>⑥</p>

8. Evaluation					
<p>Fails to identify concrete benchmarks to monitor progress and maintain focus</p> <p>①</p>	②	③	④	⑤	<p>Identifies concrete benchmarks to monitor progress and maintain focus</p> <p>⑥</p>

Fails to tell how your organization will let the grant giver know the results ①	②	③	④	⑤	Clearly tells how your organization will let the grant giver know the results ⑥
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9. Conclusion, Attachments					
Ends abruptly; lacks a conclusion statement ①	②	③	④	⑤	Concludes with a paragraph restating amount of request, problem, solution, impact, and benefits ⑥
Lacks required attachments ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains required attachments ⑥
Does not contain letters of commitment, support from partners identified in the proposal ①	②	③	④	⑤	Contains letters of commitment, support from all partners identified in the proposal ⑥
Attachments not labeled ①	②	③	④	⑤	Attachments clearly labeled ⑥

Tabulation Sheet

1. Add the numbers (points) you marked in each section of the self-assessment to determine the section's raw score. Record the raw scores in the "**Raw Score**" column below. Total the section raw scores and record the total in the last cell of the "**Raw Score**" column.
2. Divide each raw score by the possible points to determine the percentage score. Record the figure in the "**Percentage Score**" column. For example, if you had a raw score of 160 for Section 1, "*General Style, Content*," you would divide 160 by 240 (possible points) to determine the percentage score (67%)

Note: Be sure to calculate the total percentage score by dividing the total raw score by the total possible points for the assessment (450). **DO NOT** calculate the score by averaging the nine percentage scores: doing so will give you an incorrect score.

3. Turn to the next page to interpret the results.

Section	Raw Score	Percentage Score
1. General Style, Content	_____ out of 240 possible points	_____%
2. Cover Letter, Executive Summary	_____ out of 24 possible points	_____%
3. Problem Statement/Needs Assessment	_____ out of 12 possible points	_____%
4. Objectives, Benefits	_____ out of 48 possible points	_____%
5. Qualifications	_____ out of 24 possible points	_____%
6. Methods	_____ out of 30 possible points	_____%
7. Budget	_____ out of 36 possible points	_____%
8. Evaluation	_____ out of 12 possible points	_____%
9. Conclusion, Attachments	_____ out of 24 possible points	_____%
TOTAL	_____ out of 450 possible points	_____%

Interpretation and Action Key

First, take a look at the big picture by finding your **total** percentage score in the first column in the table included below. Then, read across (columns two and three) to determine the likelihood of winning grant, and to identify necessary improvement actions.

Total Percentage Score	Likelihood of winning the grant	Explanation/Necessary Improvement Actions
90% or greater	Superior	<p>Congratulations! Your proposal is innovative and superbly written. This proposal is likely to do well under the most competitive circumstances. If all <u>section</u> scores are above 70%, this proposal is ready to ship.</p>
75% to 89%	Above Average	<p>Good news—you have an innovative, well-written grant proposal. This proposal stands a good chance of winning, particularly if competition is light.</p> <p>Increase your chances by revising sections with scores less than 70%. If all section percentage scores are more than 70%, review the 75 items in the instrument and fix the areas that you marked as a “1,” “2,” or “3.”</p>
50% to 74%	Average	<p>Good news: you have a proposal that meets most conventional grantwriting criteria. Bad news: unless the competition is light (and usually it is not), your proposal stands only a fair-to-middling chance of winning. Evaluators are used to seeing dozens of proposals like this one.</p> <p>Upgrade your proposal to make it stand out in the crowd. Revise sections with scores less than 60%. Review all 75 items in the instrument and fix the areas that you marked as a “1” or “2.” During testing of the GrantSAT instrument, the author noted that most proposals scoring in the Average category were weak in innovation and partnering, and involved projects that would be difficult to replicate.</p>
20% to 49%	Below Average to Remote	<p>Do not submit this proposal without revising it; it is unlikely that you will win under competitive circumstances. What is the harm in submitting a proposal in this condition? Look at the grant proposal as a job interview. If a person does poorly in a job interview, it is extremely unlikely that she or he will be called back later to interview for other open positions. However, if a person does well in an interview but is not selected for the job, she or he still stands a good chance of being called back to interview for other positions. Focus on fixing all sections with percentage score of less than 40% and individual items that you marked as “1.”</p>
19% or less	No Chance	<p>Sorry! Back to the drawing board. This proposal needs a total rewrite. Use the 75 criteria in the assessment to guide you.</p>

Final Thoughts

- *Be sure to submit the requested number of copies of your grant proposal.* Sometimes, grant givers will ask for five, 10, even 15 copies of a proposal. Making extra copies may seem like cruel and unusual punishment as you sprint to meet the submission deadline. However, look at it from the grant giving organization's perspective: 50 proposals from different organizations x 10 evaluators = 500 copies that someone in the grant giving organization would have to make.
- *Submit proposal on time.* All of this is for naught if you submit your proposal after the deadline.
- *If you win, use your proposal as a reference for future proposals.* Learn from your successes. Develop and continue to refine a template from your winning grant proposals.
- *If you lose, don't be discouraged.* Keep trying, keep improving, and your day will come.