

WRITING A CONCEPT PAPER

The concept paper reflects the general elements of a proposal. At SAU, it ensures all involved in planning and implementation agree on what will be contained in the proposal. The concept paper is included with the **Intent to Submit** form for internal routing.

In addition, funders may ask for a brief 1-3-page concept paper prior to requesting the submission of a full proposal. Funders will use the concept paper to save time by eliminating ideas that are not likely to be funded. Yet, it can also serve as a guide for further discussion with the funder's program officer (PO).

Concept papers may be used to:

- Obtain internal and external (PO) feedback to strengthen the full proposal
- Determine if a project idea is fundable
- Generate interest from potential funders
- Develop potential solutions or investigations into project ideas
- Promote relationship building with partners and PO
- Obtain letters of commitment from your partners
- Serve as the basis for a full proposal

Note: Funders may have a specific form to use but if not, a concept paper generally follows this format:

INTRODUCTION

Briefly summarize (1) the significant problem or gap you will address and why it is important; (2) the expected outcomes; and (3) the potential broad impact.

Be sure to include how and where the applicant's mission and the funder's mission intersect or align. You can also introduce the partners and why they want to participate in the project.

Note: The **first sentences are important**. Capture their interest; engage them to continue reading the rest of your concept paper.

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE OR NEED OR RATIONALE (3 paragraphs)

In simple terms, state the problem that your project will address or the need that your project will fulfill. Provide evidence as to why this problem is important. Include supporting documentation like statistical data. Cite what others have accomplished, your expertise in this area, what more needs to be done and the significance of your project (why the project should be supported).

In some cases, these first two sections are merged into a **Background** section that both introduces the alignment between the two organizations' missions and provides the need statement.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (4 paragraphs)

Briefly state your **proposed solution** to the problem, the answer to the need, or the investigation that will fill the knowledge gap. Address your unique, unusual, distinctive, innovative, and/or novel aspects of the approach, showing why you have the most compelling/best solution worthy of funding.

The project description includes the project's Goals, Objectives, and an overview of the project's **Methodology** (also called Project Activities or Action Plan).

- **Goals** – Reflects a concise statement of the whole purpose of the project or your overall aim of what you want to accomplish.
- **Objectives** – Discussed **who** is going to do what, **when** they will do it, and **how** it will be measured but **NOT** how those results will be accomplished.
- **Methodology** - Outlines the specific activities that support **how** you will meet your objectives. It is task oriented, specific, and detailed.

Note: The goals, objectives, and activities need to align closely with each other and be accomplished within the proposed timeline.

EVALUATION (1 paragraph)

Briefly state your intended outcomes and how you will measure success.

BUDGET or PROJECT NEED (1 paragraph)

In general terms (not detailed), state the resources you will need to carry out the project. It contains either (1) an outline of the main budget categories for the requested project support or (2) a single bottom-line amount of the request and a brief discussion/narrative of how that amount will be used. Some concept papers may not even include an amount requested.

Impact of Project (1 paragraph)

Solidify the funder's final impression of your project as being important and aligned to their mission and funding priorities.

Very briefly restate why the project is important, describing how the expected outcomes will impact the targeted population, the department, university and beyond, and how it will add new knowledge to your field and inform policy and practice.

This represents a suggested general outline for a concept paper. However, if a given funder provides a specific template or format, the applicant must use the prescribed structure.