



# Goals, Objectives, and Methods

## Making Changes by Addressing the Problem

**G**un shots ring out. Or lovers, long separated, arrive at the chosen time and destination. Or perhaps a young girl's hand reaches into an empty space under the floorboard.

Each of these incidents would be a gripping moment in a story because something significant, something climactic, is about to happen. Something will change the lives of the main characters forever. What happens next? What will change? The job of the storyteller is to provide the answers.

Similarly, a proposal story isn't finished until it too has reached a climactic moment and the reader's questions about what will happen next have been answered.

### **THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES SECTION**

The problem or needs section of a proposal describes the unmet needs of or problems faced by the story's main characters, the agency's clients. The hero agency must intervene and provide effective services. By doing so, the societal problem can be addressed. The unmet need can be fulfilled. The lives of the agency's clients can be improved.

What follows the needs section in the proposal narrative is a discussion about what changes are possible if the nonprofit agency secures the necessary grant funding, allowing it to respond to the problem and deliver vital services.

Because such change is prospective, this section is also prospective. When writing this section of the proposal, grantseekers are like sci-fi writers who envision the future. Of course, there is one critical difference: whereas sci-fi writers present fantasy, grantwriters discuss what is realistic and feasible.

To understand this concept, it may help to think in visual terms. Take a mental snapshot of the community where your nonprofit agency does its work today, at this very moment. What is the problem or unmet need that your agency addresses? Who are the people served by your agency? What more could your agency do if it had additional funds?

Now imagine taking a second mental photograph of this same community at the end of the projected grant period. Compare it with the earlier snapshot. What's different? How has the need been met? How have the clients been served? Most important, how have the lives of your agency's clients been altered and positively changed? You should "see" a noticeable difference between these two mental snapshots. (If you don't, then perhaps your agency's services aren't as effective as they could be.)

How the community and your story's main characters (your agency's clients) will have changed is portrayed in the goals and objectives section of a grant proposal. The challenge in writing this portion of your proposal story is to vividly and accurately describe to the reader the change(s) that will take place, as represented by those two mental snapshots. The change that occurs helps reduce or resolve the conflict (the problem or need).

Readers appreciate a story that has a believable, satisfying resolution. Program officers and others reviewing grant proposals do too. The validity of your request hinges on whether the resolution of the conflict rings true. If it doesn't, the story falls flat and short of the mark, no matter how well it is written or told.

### **The Difference Between Goals and Objectives**

It is typical for funders to ask applicants for a description of agency goals and objectives in the proposal narrative. Many people confuse these terms: goal and objective. I confess to having been confused myself early in my grantwriting career. So just what is a goal? What is an objective? And how do they differ?

**Goals** A *goal* is the ultimate result an agency hopes to achieve. Goals are big and broad. A goal is unlikely to be accomplished in the near future. In fact, arriving at an agency's end goal could be years or even decades away. It is possible

that the end goal will never be achieved. A small or medium-size nonprofit agency is likely to have only one or two, or perhaps up to three, primary goals. If your agency thinks it has more goals than that, then it may be in danger of being unfocused and trying to accomplish too much. Or the agency may be confusing goals with objectives or outcomes.

Large, complex nonprofit agencies, such as universities, hospitals, and leading cultural arts institutions, are the exception and are likely to have dozens, perhaps hundreds, of legitimate goals. For example, a major research university will have many institution-wide goals, and each of its dozens of departments (from theater arts to biotechnology) will have dozens of departmental goals.

Expressing agency-wide, departmental, or program goals can be challenging, especially when you or other agency staff haven't thought in these terms before. To help you, here are some examples of "big picture" agency and program goals:

#### Agency-Wide Goals

- End hunger in Center City
- Find a cure for breast cancer
- Save the black rhinoceros from extinction

#### Program-Specific Goals

- Provide arts education to every elementary school child in the Yuma Valley School District
- Provide free legal services to every indigent client who walks through our doors

**Objectives** In contrast to goals, *objectives* are capable of being achieved in the short term. People sometimes think of objectives as "mini-goals." To add to the confusion, funders may refer to objectives using other terms, such as outcomes or results. For consistency, I will continue to use *objectives* throughout the book.

For each overall goal, there can be one or more related objectives. It would be highly unusual to have six or more objectives related to any one goal. When I read a proposal with that many stated objectives, what I often discover is that the writer has confused objectives with methods. I will say more about this topic later in the chapter.

Objectives are realistic. They state what is most likely going to happen. They are time specific, meaning that change is measured during a specific period,

which typically coincides with the grant period. The strongest objectives are also capable of being measured. (One exception is with proposals for the arts. It is difficult, if not impossible, to measure the impact of a dance performance on the audience. However, audience attendance is capable of being measured.)

Typically, objectives measure the change that happens in your agency's client population during the grant period. Something is going to improve because of the services offered by your agency. Something is going to increase, decrease, expand, or be reduced. This change is generally reported in terms of percentages or numbers.

Is this all sounding too vague and confusing? I think a couple of examples may help.

Suppose an agency runs a teen pregnancy prevention program. The agency's overall goal might be stated as follows:

Because every child deserves to be wanted, our goal is to eliminate all unwanted teen pregnancies in our community.

This is a goal because it is an end result the agency hopes to accomplish, though it is not likely to do so in the immediate future. This statement is not an objective because it cannot be measured and is not realistic (at least not in the short term). However, the following are objectives that relate back to the agency's overall goal:

- To *increase* the number of teens participating in our agency's peer education program by 30 percent
- To achieve a 25 percent *decrease* in teen pregnancies in the next academic year at the two high schools participating in our agency's peer education program

If you're still unclear, let these concepts percolate for a time. From talking with a number of people who have taken my workshops, especially people new to the grantseeking field, I have learned that understanding goals and objectives is one of the most challenging aspects of proposal writing. It is a concept that is frequently best understood over time. Be patient. Review examples in other grant proposals. There are several examples presented in this book. In addition, read proposals written by other agency staff or colleagues working for other agencies. If you want to be a better writer, the best advice is summarized by three words: read, read, read.

### **Your Agency as Hero, Not Superhero: Keeping Objectives Realistic**

How do goals and objectives fit into the storytelling metaphor? Here's how. In the best stories, the characters don't do anything that isn't believable, especially at the climactic, pivotal moment. If the characters act otherwise, the storyteller risks losing the audience's trust and interest. This is also true in proposal writing.

To stay with this metaphor, nonprofit agencies should present themselves as heroes, not superheroes, in proposal narratives. Nonprofits can do and achieve the possible, not the impossible. Your nonprofit agency probably will not be able to save the planet. But it can do something. What your agency does is much more realistic than "saving the planet": its delivery of services has a positive impact on people living in the community—pretty heroic work in its own right. When developing objectives, keep them realistic. This is advice that you, as grantwriter, may need to give to your agency colleagues, particularly program directors. Sometimes they believe that objectives need to be large in order to impress potential grantmakers. Yet this is not the case.

What are realistic objectives? The answer to this question varies considerably from agency to agency and from program to program. What's realistic depends on several factors. These include, but certainly are not limited to, the complexity of the identified problem, the maturity of the program and how long it has been in existence, the specific nature of the agency's response to the problem, the receptiveness of its clients to the agency's response, and the experience and expertise of agency staff. In some situations, a 5 percent positive change would be considered terrific. Under other conditions, a respectable figure might be 15 or 25 percent. In others, an appropriate number may be something approaching 100 percent. It all depends on what is truly realistic and feasible given all the circumstances.

However, stating that your nonprofit agency will be able to double its service capacity or effect a 100 percent positive transformation for its clients is likely to raise a funder's eyebrow. At first blush, this appears to be a huge change. A program officer most certainly will wonder, "Is this objective possible? Is it realistic?"

It is, of course, not theoretically impossible for a nonprofit agency to substantially increase its services during the relatively short one-year grant period. (Yes, I used a double negative. I'm trying to make a point about just how unlikely it is for such dramatic changes or improvements to be made in any given time frame. Most often, real transformation occurs slowly over time.) If your agency thinks it has the capacity to significantly increase its delivery of services, your proposal story must thoroughly explain how this will happen.

Similarly, if your agency anticipates that it can effect a near-perfect result—say in the graduation rate of participating clients—then the narrative must clearly demonstrate why this is likely. Staying with the program graduation example, it is rare for everyone who begins a program to remain in the program for the duration and finish. People drop out for a variety of reasons. Why will your program be different? What does it offer people that motivates them to stay to the end?

To summarize, the goals and objectives section is the climactic moment in your proposal story. This is the moment when lives are changed—in many situations, forever.

### **Length and Format of the Goals and Objectives Section**

The goals and objectives portion of a proposal is usually one of the lengthier sections. In our hypothetical five-page proposal narrative, a discussion of goals and objectives could easily run a full page, and in a ten-page narrative, this section may run two to three pages. Together with the needs or problem statement, this is the core of your proposal story.

When it comes to formatting this portion of the proposal, you may want to consider using bulleted lists rather than narrative prose. Using bullets is an acceptable option. Bulleted lists help organize dense or complicated materials.

Examples 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 are three proposal excerpts that illustrate the goals and objectives section.

### **THE METHODS SECTION**

In mountain climbing, getting to the top of the peak is only half the journey. Successfully returning to base camp is just as important as the ascent. The same is true with a story. A storyteller leads the reader on a journey up the story arc to the pivotal moment, and then just as deliberately guides the reader back down. Following the proposal story's climactic moment, there's still more action. What comes next is the methods section.

The methods section (which may be called the program description) of a proposal describes all the strategies and activities your agency will use, the personnel who will be employed, and the other resources that will be marshaled in order to achieve the objectives stated in the proposal. Methods present your agency's plan of action.

Be careful not to confuse methods with objectives. Methods describe what the agency will do to achieve stated objectives. Objectives describe the change that

### **Example 6.1**

#### **Outcomes for a Child Advocates Program**

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During the grant period, the recruitment and retention efforts of our Volunteer Coordinator will allow 260 volunteers to serve 1,327 children. Additionally, we will achieve the following outcomes:

- 97% of the children we serve will have one volunteer advocate throughout the duration of their case, providing constancy and consistency at an otherwise unstable time.
- 92% of the children we serve will be impacted specifically because of the work of the volunteer advocate.
- 98% of the time the judge will agree with CASA's recommendation for a safe and permanent home for the children we serve.

*Note:* This excerpt was written by Jennifer Yeagley, formerly with Child Advocates San Antonio (CASA) and currently the grants manager at LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, San Francisco.

will occur. For example, "Provide on-site after-school tutoring for twenty middle school students during the winter term" is a method. "Academically, sixteen of the twenty students (80 percent) will improve at least one letter grade (for example, from a D to a C or from a C to a B) by the end of term" is an objective.

The temptation among grantwriters is to slide right past objectives and begin describing methods. To have a strong proposal, you must resist temptation. Make certain you have articulated realistic, measurable objectives before you launch into a description of the program.

#### **How Much Detail to Include in the Methods Section**

As just mentioned, the vast majority of grantwriters feel comfortable writing the methods portion of a proposal. They are generally very knowledgeable about how the agency goes about doing its work and providing its services. One of the challenges in doing a good job with this section is knowing just how much detail to include.

**Example 6.2**  
**Goals and Outcomes for the GRIP/Rubicon Resource Center**

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The goal of the GRIP/Rubicon Resource Center is to help homeless West County families stabilize their lives so that they can find permanent solutions to their housing needs. This goal is directly aligned with United Way's funding priority #10 for Contra Costa County: to enable the homeless and those with special needs to obtain appropriate housing. Outcomes to be achieved by the resource center are as follows.

**Intermediate Outcomes**

- 400 unduplicated individuals will be linked with temporary housing and other services each year.
- 170 adults will commit to partnership agreements, and 102 (60%) will find transitional or permanent housing each year.

**Long-Term Outcomes**

- Out of 102 individuals who find transitional or permanent housing through the program each year, 71 (70%) will remain in permanent housing for one full year.

*Note: This excerpt was written by fundraising consultant Susan Fox, coauthor of *Grant Proposal Makeover: Transform Your Request from No to Yes*.*

Savvy storytellers do not bog down their stories with lots of mundane details. They selectively include only the most pertinent facts that move the story forward. Do the same in your grant proposals. Funders want you to describe the key elements and components of a program, but not the minutia. Here's an example. Suppose you work for a nonprofit educational organization that provides vocation and career training for adult students. In a proposal narrative, it is important for you to tell the funder that your agency is committed to teaching in a classroom setting rather than offering students online learning. It is also appropriate to state that classes are offered evenings and weekends to best accommodate its primary

**Example 6.3**  
**Program Goals and Objectives for New Door Ventures**

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**Program Goals**

During the one-year funding period, we expect to employ 40 high-risk, transitional youth in this program. We will provide case management; life, academic, and employment skills training; mentoring; and supportive services to all program participants.

**Program Outcomes**

The key outcomes of our program are as follows:

- 85% of participants will successfully graduate from the six-month internship program.
- 85% of the program graduates will successfully transition into mainstream jobs and/or be enrolled in school.
- 90% of graduates will live in stable housing upon graduation.

*Note:* This excerpt was written by grantwriting consultant Carol Lena Figueiredo.

student population, namely adults working full-time. However, it is not necessary to include information about what color binders are used for the school's handout materials, or the names of the specific textbooks used in courses. This latter information is irrelevant minutia.

## ***Time to Write!***

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Let's see if the concepts presented in this chapter have had time to fully percolate. I'm going to ask you to write one overall goal for your agency or one of its major programs and at least one related objective (outcome or result) your agency or program plans to achieve in the coming year. Hint for success: your objective will be stronger if it is capable of being measured and it is realistic.

Funders generally prefer a “bigger picture” description of your program. They are more likely to be interested in understanding the rationale for why your agency selected the method(s) it has chosen. Continuing with the vocational school example, it is probably appropriate that your proposal include a discussion as to why it has chosen to meet the needs of adult students with classroom learning versus online learning. What are the benefits to the students? To the school? What research, if any, did your institution undertake to reach its conclusion?

Here are some of the broader questions to consider when thinking about your agency’s rationale for the method(s) it has selected:

- Is your agency continuing an existing program because it has proven to be successful?
- Is your agency enhancing and improving an existing program? If so, what are those enhancements and improvements?
- Is your agency adopting methodology that has been successfully used by other nonprofits elsewhere?
- Is your agency pioneering new methods or developing a pilot program that can be replicated by other agencies?

### **Tips About Timelines and Bulleted Lists**

Your work in drafting the methods section will be made easier if your agency has prepared a detailed timeline for the proposed program. A timeline will assist you and other agency personnel in identifying all those tasks and activities that need to take place during the grant period in order to achieve agency objectives. One of the benefits of having a timeline is that it will help you remember all the steps involved when the time comes to write the proposal. A timeline is usually an internal working document for the grantwriter and other agency staff members. On occasion, some grantmakers ask applicants to include a timeline with the proposal package. If they do, I usually provide one that is less detailed than the version used internally by the agency.

When presenting your program description, you may want to organize this information by a specific time period (for example, by months or quarters) in a bulleted-list format. This can help with clarity and readability.

Another formatting option is to group objectives with corresponding methods. Here’s an example for a program called Just Jobs.

### **Objective 1**

- To successfully place in full- or part-time employment 70 percent of the youth who complete the six-month Just Jobs program

### **Methods**

- During the first quarter, program staff will meet with each participant at least four times to determine skills, experience, aptitude, and individual interests by using interview techniques as well as skills and aptitude tests.
- Concurrently with individual meetings, staff will also conduct group workshops and training sessions on the job search process.
- Beginning in the second quarter, program staff will research job opportunities and create a job board that lists appropriate employment opportunities for youth in the community.
- Also beginning in the second quarter, program staff will start contacting local employers, providing them with information about the Just Jobs program. Staff intends to do an introductory mailing to local employers, which will then be followed up with personal telephone calls.

## ***Time to Write!***

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To sharpen your focus when writing the methods portion of a proposal, write down the three to five key elements that differentiate your program from others.

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### **Program Promises**

Other than the common pitfalls I've mentioned previously, drafting the program description or methods is usually not one of the sections that gives grantwriters difficulty. Think of the methods as the promise of what your agency will do to assist clients. Examples 6.4 and 6.5 are excerpts from agencies that wrote their promises exceptionally well.

**Example 6.4**  
**Methods in a Philanthropy By Design Proposal**

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Recommendations about which design projects to undertake are made by a Philanthropy By Design (PBD) committee composed of volunteer architects and interior designers, following site visits to the nonprofit agencies that request our help. PBD's board of directors reviews these recommendations and makes the final decision.

Once a project is selected, volunteers such as architects, designers, manufacturing professionals, and members of the general public work under a project manager to complete the job. Each project team works closely with the client agency to determine the exact scope of work and to set a realistic timeline.

PBD asks each client agency to pay a modest fee that ranges from \$100 to \$500, depending on the size of the project. When possible, PBD also requests agency involvement in the hands-on work of the project. For example, clients of the nonprofit agency and PBD volunteers frequently work side by side on "paint days." Involving those who will actually benefit from an improved facility (such as residents in transitional housing) helps ensure that the new furnishings and enhanced environment will be respected and maintained.

**Example 6.5**  
**Methods in a School Readiness and Family Literacy Program**

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Our school readiness and family literacy program serves 25 preschool children, all low income and all receiving government assistance. Families are Latino/Hispanic, and English is not their primary language. Our program is modeled after one pioneered by the Caridad Children's Center. It is designed to fully integrate early childhood education with culturally appropriate parent support and adult education. First, we evaluate each family's literacy needs. Working together, our staff and participating parents and guardians create a mutually agreed-on action plan. Plans may include parent enrollment in ESL classes, family participation in our "Raising a Reader" program, and parent attendance at workshops we will offer throughout the year. Our bilingual staff will meet with parents periodically during the year to assess how the plan is working and to discuss their child's progress.

## **SUMMARY**

A proposal story builds to the point where something is about to happen. That something is the objectives or outcomes the agency intends to achieve through the services it provides. In this chapter, I covered two major sections in any grant proposal: goals and objectives and methods. When drafting these components, keep the following in mind:

- Think broad (goals) and narrow (objectives).
- Think prospectively. Objectives and methods describe what your agency intends to make happen and how during the grant period.
- Take a mental photograph of the community served by your agency, before and after the grant. Objectives measure the change that occurs to this client population between the beginning and the end of the grant period.
- Keep your intended results realistic and measurable.
- Focus on the bigger picture in the program description: key elements and rationale for choosing the method(s), not minutia.