

Writing a Budget Narrative

Also known as a budget detail, budget description, or budget justification, the budget narrative explains what the numbers in the budget table or spreadsheet represent and how you arrived at them.

Benefits

- Requires you to get down to your project's nitty-gritty details by laying out who will accomplish what and when, as well as how you arrived at costs.
- Tells the USDA exactly how you will spend its investment, item by item.
 - Ensures you did research and that your project costs are reasonable and well thought out.
 - Ensures your project is within the USDA's funding range and/or it includes a plan to seek additional funding.

Basic Cost Categories

- *Personnel* – Include the hours, wages, and duties of each grant-related position.
- *Fringe benefits* – List all employment related costs, such as FICA, workers compensation, health insurance, and retirement benefits.
- *Travel* – Cover mileage, airline tickets, taxis, car rentals, mileage reimbursements, parking fees, tolls, tips, and per diems for lodging and meals.
- *Contracts* – Specify contract services, such as leases, consultants' fees, and trainings.
- *Equipment* – List all purchases for items with a life span of (usually) three years or more, such as furniture, computers, copy/fax machines, lab equipment, telephones, and software.
- *Materials/Supplies* – Include short-lived items needed to run an office, such as paper, envelopes, pens and pencils, CDs, and staples, etc.
- *Capital Expenses* – Include the purchase and/or construction and renovation of land, buildings, and accompanying fixtures.
 - *Other Costs* – List items, such as rent, reproduction, telephone, Internet, janitorial or security services, by major type and show the basis of the computation.

S.M.A.R.T. Objectives

Specific

Does your objective specify who, what, where, when and how?

Measurable

Does your objective have quantifiable outcomes?

Attainable

Are your objectives in line with your organization's mission, services and clients?

Realistic

Are your objectives in line with your organization's capacity and capability?

Time-bound

Can your objectives be reached during the grant period?

Sample goal: Increase the number of farmers and ranchers from socially disadvantaged communities who attend online agri-tech training webinars.

Sample objective: By the end of year one provide 75 African American farmers in South Georgia with new laptops, training and one-year of internet service to participate in the online agri-tech training webinars.

Needs Assessment

- Describes the target population to be served
- Defines the community problem to be addressed and the need in the geographical area where the organization operates
- Is related to the purposes and goals of the applicant agency
- Is of reasonable dimensions - not trying to solve all the problems of the world
- Is supported by relevant statistical evidence
- Is supported by relevant anecdotal evidence
- Is supported by statements from authorities
- Is stated in terms of clients' needs and problems - not the applicant's
- Is developed with input from clients and beneficiaries
- Is not the "lack of a program", unless the program always works
- Makes no unsupported assumptions
- Is as brief as possible
- Is interesting to read
- Is free of jargon
- Makes a compelling case

Types of Objectives

There are at least four types of objectives:

Behavioral - A human action is anticipated.

Example: Seventy-five African American farmers in South Georgia will participate in agri-tech webinars.

Performance - A specific time frame within which a behavior will occur, at an expected proficiency level, is expected.

Example: Seventy-five African American farmers will attend agri-tech webinars within twelve months and earn certificates of completion.

Process - The manner in which something occurs is an end in itself.

Example: We will document the level of computer competency, identifying those with the highest level of skill.

Product - A tangible item results.

Example: A manual will be created to be used in teaching agri-tech principles to African American farmers in South Georgia in the future.

Evaluation of Objectives

- Presents a plan for evaluating accomplishment of objectives
- Presents a plan for evaluating and modifying methods over course the program
- Tells who will be doing the evaluation and how they were chosen
- Clearly states evaluation criteria
- Describes how data will be gathered
- Explains any test instruments or questionnaires to be used
- Describes the process of data analysis
- Shows how evaluation will be used for program improvements
- Describes any evaluation reports to be produced

Budget Must-Haves

- Tells the same story as the proposal narrative
- Is detailed in all aspects
- Includes project costs that will be incurred at the time of the program's implementation
- Contains no unexplained amounts for miscellaneous or contingency
- Includes all items asked of the funding source
- Includes all items paid for by other sources
- Includes all volunteers
- Includes all consultants
- Details fringe benefits, separate from salaries
- Separately details all non-personnel costs
- Includes separate columns for listing all donated services
- Includes indirect costs where appropriate
- Is sufficient to perform the tasks described in the narrative.

Proposal Format

- Cover
- Margins
- Spacing
- Evaluation Process
- Number of Pages
- Fonts and Size
- Headers and Footers
- Headings and Sub-heads

Tips on Writing the Narrative

- What do you want?
- What problem will be addressed, what solution will be offered and why it is important?
- Who will benefit and how?
- What specific objectives can be accomplished and how?
- How will results be measured?
- How does the funding request relate to the USDA's purpose, objectives and priorities?
- Who are you and how do you qualify to meet this need?

General Tips

1. Begin early.
2. Apply early.
3. Don't forget to include a cover letter with your application.
4. Answer all stated questions and attempt to pre-empt all unstated questions.
5. If rejected, contact the OASDFR program director for a feedback session and apply next year.
6. Give the USDA what they want. Follow the application guidelines exactly.
7. Be explicit and specific.
8. Be realistic in designing the project.
9. Make explicit the connections between your goals and objectives, your objectives and methods, your methods and outcomes and your outcomes and reports.
10. Follow the application guidelines exactly. (This tip is repeated because it is very, very important.)