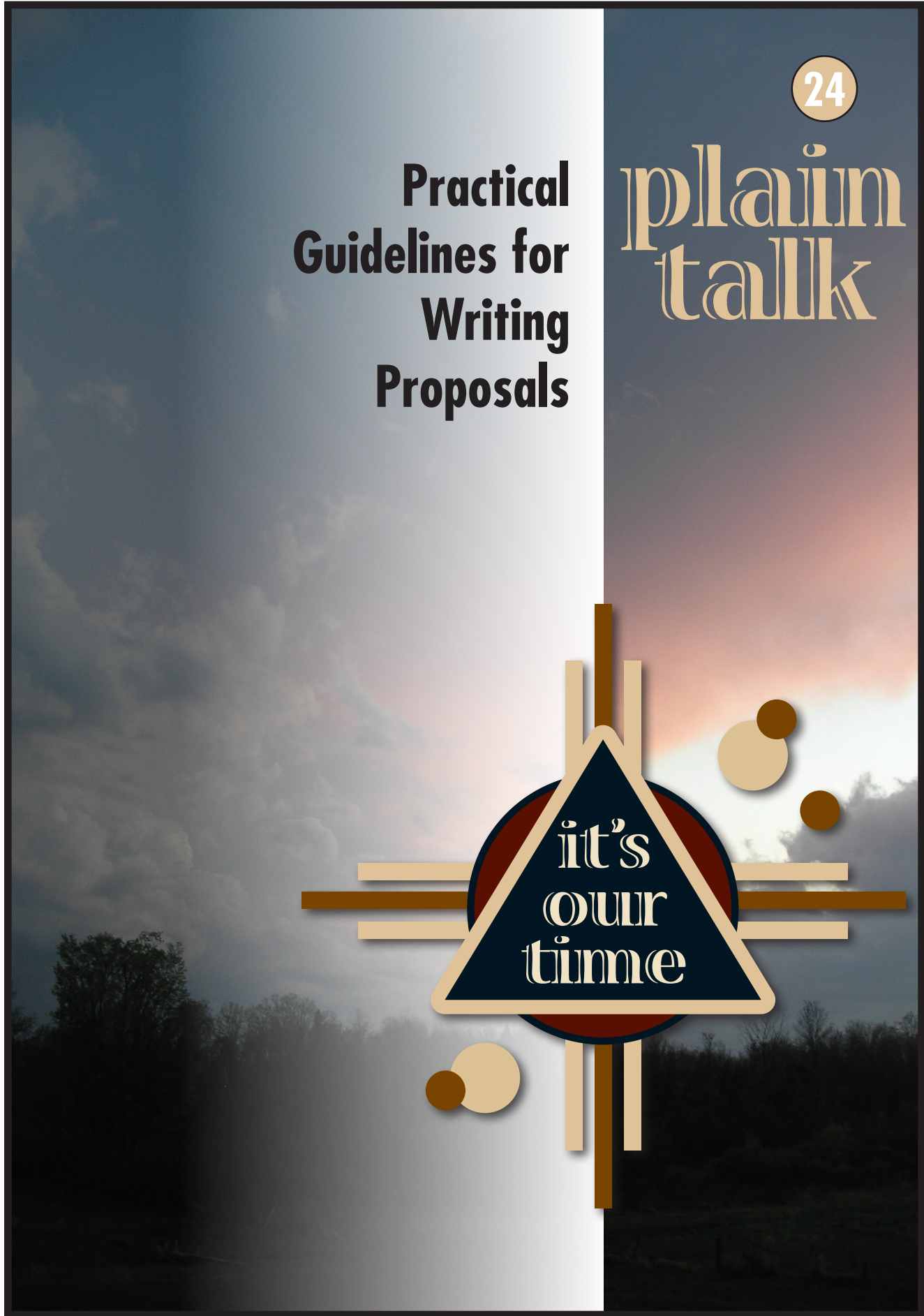**24**

plain talk

Practical Guidelines for Writing Proposals

it's our time

it's our time...

Let's face it. There is never enough money to do what you want to do—to provide for your students the way you'd like, to provide training for staff, to engage the community, to implement new programs, or to acquire equipment.

Of course your resources will only stretch so far. But sometimes there are other sources. Federal, provincial and municipal governments and private sector organizations often have money earmarked for new programs, for training, or for upgrading facilities, expansion or renovations. You just have to find it.

Do your homework. Research prospective funders. Target funding sources that have an interest in your program. As you do your research, you may find that, in order for a particular project to be eligible for funding, the original concept may need to be modified to meet the criteria of the grant program.

Once you have found the source of the money, then you have to go after it. That usually means an application and a proposal. In essence, a proposal is a written description of a problem and a detailed set of activities to deal with/solve the problem.

Keep in mind that the people who are responsible for approving your proposal want to give you the money. That is what it is there for. The problem is that there are usually more applications than there is money available and the easiest way for a reviewer to cut the pile of applications down to a manageable number is to reject any proposals that don't immediately qualify. If the deadline is missed, if the information is incomplete, if the budget doesn't add up, if the required format is not followed, your proposal may be tossed. Period. End of story.

Make it easy for the reviewers to fund your proposal. Do not make them struggle to understand. Do not assume that they know everything. In fact, don't assume that they know anything. Spell things out. Be complete. Be clear. Keep it simple. Communicate your enthusiasm for the project. Communicate your competence and experience.

Parts of a proposal

A successful grant proposal is one that is thoughtfully planned, well prepared, and concisely packaged. There are nine basic components in a solid proposal.

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1. Summary

Considerable effort and thought should be spent in preparing a well-written summary. The summary is the foundation of the proposal. The summary is the first thing that reviewers read. The first impression it gives will be critical to the success of your application.

The summary appears at the beginning of the proposal and outlines the project. It should be clear. It should be brief—no longer than two or three paragraphs that outline the objectives, project activities, and expected outcomes. The amount of money sought should be stated clearly and unequivocally.

It is usually helpful to write the summary last, after the rest of the proposal has been completed.

2. Introduction

Most proposals require a description including past, present, and projected operations. What is your group or organization? What is the background? What are the group's qualifications? Be concise, specific and compelling. Highlight the connection between you and the potential grantor. Briefly describe your goals and philosophy. Any success stories you include should be relevant to the goals of the potential grantor and should reinforce your group's credibility.

3. Problem Statement

What need is your group addressing? Why does this problem need attention? Who is the target population? If there has been any kind of needs assessment, describe its process and results. Use statistics to support the existence of your problem or issue.

4. Objectives

State the objectives and the expected outcomes of the project in clear and measurable terms. Explain the expected results and benefits of the project. Be realistic.

5. Methodology

Outline the tasks that will be accomplished with the available resources. How will your group or organization implement and manage the project? Are the appropriate resources and staff available or to be acquired or hired? It is helpful to structure the project method as a timeline. Early in the planning process, list the tasks that will have to be completed to meet the goals of the project. Break these into smaller tasks and lay them out in a schedule over the grant time period. This will provide a chance to consider what personnel, materials, and other resources will be needed to carry out the tasks. Make sure your methods are realistic. Describe why you have chosen these activities. Justify them over all other approaches your organization could have taken. Show your knowledge of the bigger picture. Include a timetable of major milestones.

6. Evaluation

How will you and the funding agency know if the project was a success? It is important to define carefully and exactly how the objectives will be met and how success will be measured. Include information about the type or types of evaluation instruments to be used. Ask yourself what you expect to be different once the project is complete. Be ready to begin evaluation as you begin your project. Identification of performance indicators measured before, during and after the end of the project will help track the impact of the project.

7. Future Funding

Look to the future. Will the project continue? If so, will funding be required? If so, what are the expected sources?

8. Budget

State the total amount of funding sought. Funding sources require different amounts of detail in the budget. If the funding source requires a specific format, you must provide a budget in that format. The numbers should be specific. Rounding an item to nearest thousand dollars does not inspire confidence. It also suggests you have not done much work preparing the budget. The reviewers will do a lot of work studying your budget. They expect you to do a lot of work putting together the budget. Include all relevant budget items: salaries, consultants, equipment purchases/rental, utilities, travel, etc.

9. Appendices

Add any supporting documents required by the funding source.

Tips for a strong proposal

- Avoid errors in logic and project design (methods not described properly, adequate controls not included, etc.)

- Avoid errors in presentation and expression.

- Read and reread the application guidelines.

- Proofread to correct any typos, grammatical errors, etc.

- Ensure that your background and/or expertise are appropriate.

- Don't be unrealistically ambitious. Do not propose much more work than can possibly be achieved during the requested grant period.

- Ensure that the budget is reasonable.

- Double check the budget numbers for accuracy.

- Clearly lay out the relationship between the budget and the activities.
- Check for errors and omissions.

- Ensure that the proposal is directed toward the mission of the granting agency.

- Start the proposal with a Title Page that includes the project title, name of your group/organization, name of funding agency.

- Add a Cover Letter that summarizes the issues addressed, the proposed solution, the qualifications of your group/organization, and a request for assistance.

Describe what you are looking for,
why you want it,
how it will impact your situation,
and
how you will manage and implement
whatever it is that you want.

*It takes a village
to raise a child.
Omaha*

it's
our
time