



Winning Fundraising Proposals: SA Context

Writing a winning proposal is part science and part storytelling. To stand out in the South African non-profit landscape, you need to balance strict compliance with a compelling narrative of change. Below are the refined principles of fundraising, rewritten for clarity and updated with essential "missing" elements and South Africa-specific context.

1. The Golden Rule: Follow the Map

The donor's guidelines are not suggestions; they are the law.

- **Read twice, mark once:** Highlight specific requirements like page limits, font sizes (often Arial or Calibri 11/12), and margins.
- **The Checklist:** Create a simple "compliance checklist" before you start. If they ask for a 5-page limit and you send 6, many donors will discard the entire application without reading a word.
- **Submission Method:** Check if it's an online portal, email, or physical drop-off. If it's a portal, register **now**—don't wait until the deadline day when servers might crash.

2. Timing is Everything

A rushed proposal looks like a "copy-paste" job.

- **The 48-Hour Buffer:** Aim to submit at least two days before the deadline. This accounts for load shedding, internet outages, or last-minute signatory absences.
- **Professionalism:** Starting early allows you to gather necessary annexures (NPO certificates, tax clearance, etc.) that often take time to retrieve.

3. Don't Guess—Ask

If a section of the application is vague, reach out to the designated contact person.

- **Clarify Constraints:** If you aren't sure if your project location fits their "catchment area," ask. It saves you days of wasted writing.
- **Stick to the Channel:** Only contact the official liaison mentioned in the call for proposals to remain ethical.



4. Be Clear, Not Decorative

Reviewers often read dozens of applications a day. Don't make them hunt for your point.

- **The "So What?" Factor:** Every paragraph should explain what you are doing, why it matters, and what the result will be.
- **Executive Summary:** Even if not asked for, a 3-paragraph summary at the start can "hook" a tired reviewer.

5. Innovation vs. Proven Impact

While donors love "new" ideas, they love "sustainable" ones more.

- **The South African Twist:** Innovation in SA often means finding ways to do more with less—using WhatsApp for data collection, solar power for centers, or asset-based community development (using what the community already has).

6. Prove the Problem with Data

Don't just say there is "a lot of poverty." Use "Evidence-Based" language.

- **Localize your Stats:** Use StatsSA, recent South African Police Service (SAPS) bulletins for safety projects, or Department of Basic Education (DBE) reports.
- **Internal Data:** Use your own organization's "drill-down" stats. Showing you track your own progress via Excel dashboards or databases proves you are a "thinking" organization.

7. Speak Human, Not "NGO-ese"

Avoid heavy jargon or overly academic language.

- **The "Cold Reader" Test:** If someone outside your field can't understand your solution in five minutes, it's too complicated. Use simple, active verbs (e.g., "We train" instead of "The implementation of training was facilitated").

8. The Peer Review

Fresh eyes catch "invisible" mistakes.

- **Logic Check:** Ask a colleague to check if your **Activities** actually lead to your **Objectives**. If you want to "reduce hunger" but your activity is "painting a hall," the logic is broken.



9. Integrity & Originality

Plagiarism is an instant disqualifier.

- **Cite Sources:** If you use a quote from a White Paper or a news article, credit it.
- **AI Ethics:** If using AI to help draft, ensure the "soul" of the project is yours and the facts are verified.

To be truly competitive in the SA context, your proposal must also include these four pillars:

- **B-BBEE & Compliance:** Most local corporate donors (CSI) require your **B-BBEE Affidavit** and **Section 18A Tax Exemption** status. Ensure these are valid and attached. Mentioning your beneficiary percentage (e.g., "95% Black African beneficiaries") is often a mechanical requirement for their reporting.
- **Sustainability (The "Exit Strategy"):** Donors are tired of "handouts." You must explain how the project continues after the grant ends. Will it be self-funded? Will the community take over?
- **Risk Mitigation:** In SA, we face unique challenges. Briefly mention how you handle **load shedding, safety/security** in volatile areas, or **water shortages** to show you are realistic and prepared.
- **The "Active Architect" Approach:** Shift the narrative from "helping victims" to "empowering citizens." Focus on how your beneficiaries are active participants in their own development, not just passive recipients.

The Core Principle of a Good Proposal:

The Alignment: A good proposal is a perfect "match" between the **Donor's Goals** and your **Community's Needs**. You aren't asking for a favor; you are offering the donor a way to achieve *their* mission through *your* expertise.