

Answering a call for proposals



WHAT IS THE PRINCIPLE OF A CALL FOR A PROJECT?

Donors are organizations which **provide the funds needed to carry out projects** and/or to cover the applicants' running costs. These applicants are, most of the time, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): associations, collectives, networks, cooperatives and other nonprofit actors. These CSOs all have one thing in common: **they work in the interests of human communities or of the environment** (human rights, economic development, ecology, social actions, etc).

However, **each funder has its own guidelines and criteria** regarding the actors and/or projects it wishes to fund (themes, geographical areas, values, nature of the applicant, etc.). Generally, it holds a given amount of funds that it wishes to distribute among several CSOs.

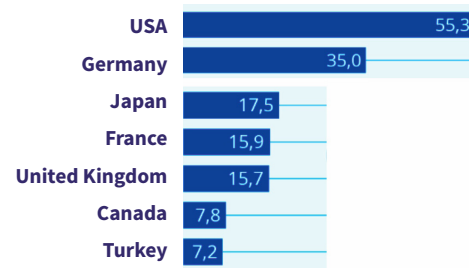
It is at this moment that the donors use **“calls for proposals”**: announcements to communicate their intention to fund actors/projects to a certain extent according to such or such criteria. CSOs write and submit proposals which will be evaluated and which may or may not be accepted.

WHO ARE TODAY'S FUNDERS ?

Today, most of the funds granted come from:

1. **a country through its “development agency”** (or other private and/or public entities): Great Britain (DFID), the United States (USAID), Brazil (BNDES), Germany (KfW), Japan (JICA), or France (AFD)
2. **a group of countries** through an international institution (IMF, European Commission, etc.) or a development bank (African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank).

The total amount of funding granted in the world is called **Official Development Assistance (ODA)**: approximately $\frac{2}{5}$ are granted in case 1 and $\frac{3}{5}$ in case 2. The funds mainly come from the following countries (amount granted to ODA in billions of \$) OECD*:



The IDEA D4D Hub is a project under the D4D Hub Initiative funded by the H2020 Framework Programme of the European Union (Grant Agreement 101017015), co-funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by five partners.



To learn more about the project,
please visit our website:
<https://d4dhub.eu/idea-project>

Contact us:
idea@d4dhub.eu

Funding countries and funded countries (or funded regions) are constant over time, which pushes to call into question these important financial flows. A growing number of actors denounce the **dependent situation in which the funded countries get entrenched**. In addition to this, the approach sustained by the ODA itself is brought into question, that is to say, the project-based funding. Many a study has recently highlighted, particularly thanks to the “do no harm” theory, the negative externalities of funding allocated not to the CSOs themselves but to their projects, limited in time. These questions take us directly to the first step of this practical guide : **how do I know if my CSO is ready to be funded?** Or in other words, can external funds unknowingly harm my CSO as it is now ?

STEP #1 ARE YOU READY TO BE FUNDED ?

LIMITATIONS OF PROJECT-BASED FUNDING

For reasons of limited budget, uneasy volunteer management, or red tape obstacles which are more or less hindering depending on the level of State control of civil society, **CSOs do not always manage to structure themselves and, when they do, to succeed in maintaining a long-term structuration** (turnover is also a factor weakening civil societies). If the CSO's strategic and organizational foundations are not strong enough, external funds are very likely to weaken it rather than strengthen it, against all expectations. Here are some reasons why :

1. **Dependence on external funds can generate a “race for calls for proposals”**: CSOs answer different calls to make sure to have a constant budget, and are likely to end up having several “scattered” projects without any real common thread between each of them. CSOs therefore adapt to donor guidelines, and not the other way around.
2. **This “dispersal” has the following consequence**: the CSO spreads out by multiplying activities with different targets (all falling under a fairly broad theme) and thus have a hard time increasing their skills and gaining in specialization. One wants to do everything and believes in being able to do everything.
3. **This scattering leads to an instability and dilution of skills** : the team assigned to a project leaves most of the time at the end of the project.
4. Instead of developing activities arising from a clear and stable strategy and developing key skills accordingly, **the OSC ends up specializing in the management of “project portfolios”** (with great skills management but no core business). In other words, it becomes an intermediary allocating resources.
5. Finally, **project-based funding maintains CSOs in an ephemeral position** : at each project, everything has to start from scratch. The common thread being thin, it is difficult to capitalize (except on the project management itself) and to evaluate the CSO' medium and long-term impacts.

In one sentence, external and project-based funding can turn out to be harmful **by turning CSOs into donors' adjustment variables**, instead of having donors who adapt to the needs and requirements of the field. Then, a vicious circle begins in which

project-based funding maintains fragile and easily diluted strategic foundations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HAVING AND MAINTAINING A STRONG DNA

- Prioritize donors financing your organization, even partly (financing of rent, wages, or other fixed costs, up to 50% for example)
- If it is not possible (you only find project-based funding), make sure before answering a call for proposal to :
 1. **Take up training (both you and your team)** on strategic planning and on the organizational management that follows
 2. **Develop a strong strategy** (see the toolbox) and your organizational processes before applying: have a clear theory of change, a roadmap on your objectives for the next 5 years, or any other document allowing your team to know who you want to be, what do you want to do and where you want to go
 3. **And most of all, set up a partnership roadmap**, that is to say a document setting out a clear framework of collaboration in case of financing, to be sent to the partner for information (prior to the [partnership agreement](#) which must come directly from it):

For example, the [CCFD Terre Solidaire](#) has developed an interesting [ethical charter](#).

IMPORTANT : Inviting donors to meet your targets in person in the field is an efficient way to help them understand why certain collaboration criteria are necessary while others are not.



The Theory of Change is a central strategic document. It aims to formalize the main logic of an organization : what is the problem, what its stance and approach on the issue, which activities does it choose to develop to tackle the issue, what are its achievements, what are the results it seeks to deliver,

and to generate what changes in the long run (or impacts)?



See the toolbox to develop your strategic plan



FOUNDATIONS OF THE PARTNERSHIP	
What is a partnership for you? Whether it be a financial or technical one. How does your team define it? To help you, if the partnership was a stool, list the 3 key elements that would represent the legs	Example : <i>Partnership is a relationship of equals in which at least two parties with compatible objectives agree to work in a spirit of reciprocity. Here the 3 key elements are: peer-to-peer relationship, compatibility and reciprocity</i>
What type of partnership do you want? List robust criteria precisng under which conditions you would accept a financial or technical partnership (identity of the partner, nature of the partnership, duration, and other criteria)	Example : <i>You can agree to only accept long-term partnerships (more than 5 years, more than 10 years, etc.) or think about precise criteria so that the financial partner respects operational deadlines which, for example, enable you to work in the long run with communities</i>

PARTNERSHIP TOLERANCE SPECTRUM

What we can tolerate:	<i>Example: The financial partner wants a room in your quarters to be personalized in its name</i>
What should be discussed/negotiated	<i>Example: The financial partner wishes to add a component to the project which does not destabilize its inclusive approach. Or, the level of flexibility in allocating funds.</i>
What we do not accept	<i>Example: The financial partner wishes to renew the targets per project cycle, which does not allow in-depth and quality work with them. Or as well, the fact that you do not have the last word on the objectives and indicators, and on the means to achieve them (fixed % of the budget allocated to the project inclusiveness for example)</i>

STEP #2 ATTRACT, CHOOSE AND UNDERSTAND THE DONOR

IDENTIFY FINANCING SOURCES

Responding to a call for proposals is a long and complex process, which you must anticipate and understand from A to Z. Before rushing into the search for calls, take time to carefully consider all of the financing options available to you :

1. **Governmental and local communities subsidies:** funding granted by local, regional or national authority
2. **Philanthropic foundations:** financial support from private or family foundations that share a similar mission or values
3. **Individual donors:** financial contributions from individuals who support the same vision as yours
4. **Private sector partnerships :** Local or national businesses can provide direct donations or sponsor events/ projects
5. **Local fundraising :** organize community events, sales of goods to raise money

5. **Crowdfunding :** use of online platforms to solicit contributions from the general public through fundraising campaigns
6. **Loans and credits:** get low-cost financing via bank loans (microfinance institutions), credit lines or social impact funding
7. **Patronage programs:** corporate or individual sponsorship for artistic, cultural or social projects.
8. **Impact investors/ angels :** private investors or investment funds which fund for-profit or non-profit social organizations to create a positive, social and environmental impact
9. **And finally, international donors:** foreign governments, international organizations (United Nations, European Union, World Bank, etc.), development agencies and banks

The following practical guide will give you a methodology applicable to most of the external funding sources mentioned.

MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN

To maximize the chances of being funded through calls for proposals, **the best way is to already be known (positively) by the donors.** Once you have identified the donors who suit you best, attract them. To do so, do some groundwork to highlight your DNA and principles:

- **Documents and publications:** brochures, newsletter, intuitive and clear website, social networks. Take care of the content as well as the form.
- **Presentation text:** write a presentation summing up your DNA and activities with images and brief descriptions to be used as soon as necessary in emails or otherwise.
- **Ask for advice:** asking a donor for specific or technical advice is a first contact which can give the donor the opportunity to get to know you more

BUILD A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Once your partnership roadmap is well established (stemming directly from your strategic DNA and planning), **you should naturally know towards which actor you should move.** And you are much more likely to receive funds when a direct contact is established and maintained from human to human, whether they are distributed through a call for proposals or not.

The best advice is therefore **to build personal relationships with donors**. This is a true investment.

Each communication with the donor must be **thought out and reflected to nourish this relationship**. Thus, it is important to understand what level of proximity is necessary depending on the donor : some enjoy regularly receiving newsletters or updates on how your CSO evolves, others value physical contact or even appreciate being invited to your private events.

ZOOM : Tips for building a relationship of trust

- Focus on your similarities
- Communicate directly and clearly
- Focus on the positives and don't underline on the negative ones
- Be diplomatic and friendly but without exaggeration
- Preserve your self-esteem
- Speak honestly when asking for funds without begging for them

FILTER OUT CALLS FOR PROPOSALS & UNDERSTAND THE DONOR

If you could have direct contact with the donor or make yourself known by those you prioritize, it is still possible to answer a call for proposals. **But don't forget to filter them according to your partnership roadmap**. Don't fall into the trap of getting scattered by deviating from your core business and/or strategy. It is better to tighten your belts for a while rather than getting into the vicious circle described above.

Once you find a call for proposals you are in line with, don't do anything until you understand who designed it. This will save you considerable time in the writing phase !

WHAT TO LOOK FOR?

1. **The donor's areas of interest. You must know :**
 - What topics do they support : gender, human rights, climate, etc.?
 - What geographical areas do they cover

- Particular interests: within the themes, some donors are sensitive to specific issues such as GBV or participatory citizenship

2. **Its values:** they will help you understand its beliefs and guiding principles.
3. **Its motivations.** They can be very diverse : real interest in a subject, responsibility/duty towards a particular issue, namely for religious donors, personal experience/sensitivity (of decision-makers if the donor is a legal entity); or even personal/institutional benefits)
4. **Its operating mode :**
 - One-time or ongoing funding
 - Project-based funding or funding of the organization itself
 - Eligibility: under what conditions CSOs can submit an application
 - Precise financing lines: what expenses are authorized?
 - Payment scheduling
 - Flexibility vs. rigidity of monitoring

HOW TO LOOK FOR IT ?

- **Sift their websites**, newsletters, social networks and brochures (history, vision, mission, activities)
- On the website, **look at which CSOs and projects already received funds**
- Try to contact CSOs who have already collaborated with them **to get their feedback and advice**, or more precise information (notably operating methods)

STEP #3 PREPARE THE CALL

AN-TI-CI-PATE AND APPOINT A RESPONSIBLE PERSON

Beginners in proposal writing think that the most important thing is to complete the template or canvas provided. Error ! The preparation phase is the most crucial one and investing in it will make the whole process much faster

But what exactly does “preparing a call for proposals” involve?

- **Appoint a responsible person, it is plainly essential.** Although writing a proposal is usually based on teamwork, someone needs to be responsible for (i) gathering everything together (ii) combining the documents based on the template provided by the donor and (iii) writing with a coherent style throughout the application.
- **Do a research/literature review.** Adding references to your proposal will make it much more credible. It will allow you to (i) better analyze and precisely establish the “problem/need” section (ii) provide information on other already existing solutions and position yourself accordingly
- **Assemble the annexes and core documents, so that they are already ready:** material on organizational capacities, on similar projects previously carried out, list of former and current partners, presentation brochure, etc.

ASSIMILATE THE CANVAS AND UNDERSTAND ITS LOGIC

The canvas designates the proposal model to follow, provided by the donor. It generally contains the same core sections to which are added specific requirements according to the donor. It consists of a set of questions and tables to complete. The “essential” sections are often the following ones :

- **Context:** describe the context, the environment in which the problematic you wish to address takes place
- **Problem:** to what problem do you want to propose a solution ?
- Primary and secondary **targets**
- General and specific **objectives**
- **Action strategy /solution :** what do you plan to achieve your objectives
- **Approach and activities:** how you will actually proceed
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** how to quantify and qualify your results and impacts
- **Sustainability/ scalability of the project:** how will the project keep on existing after financing?
- **Resources and means:** your human, material and financial needs to do all this
- **Budget**
- **Annexes**

ZOOM : Annexes or possible additional sections

- **Organizational experience and capacity:** This is where you will show that you are the best suited CSO to carry out this project, namely by presenting your history.
- **Staffing :** This is the opportunity to highlight the team’s profiles
- **Governance:** In this section, you can demonstrate that you have the internal organization and transparency required to take on the given project (how your CSO is managed, how decisions are made, what internal processes and commitments in terms of inclusion, etc.)
- **Risk analysis :** Here, you can show the donor that you have perfect knowledge of the project risks and the potential solutions: both internal risks linked to the resources or to your CSO, and external ones, linked to the region, to the partner communities, types of activities, etc.



TOOL | A donor’s reading grid

Budget	Is the budget realistic?
Impact	Will your project have a significant impact?
Sustainability	What will be the continuity of the project once the funding has expired?
Collaboration	Do you include the project stakeholders? Are you collaborating with another actor? Is the collaboration relevant?
Ability	Do you have the capacity to carry out the project you are proposing?

CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORDS

Responding to a call for proposals requires convincing (with rational arguments) **but also persuasion** (thanks to subjective elements). When writing, we often overlook the importance of using certain words more than others, **and yet it has a powerful affect on the reader**. Before starting, copy-paste the keywords/expressions that come up the most in the donor's documentation. To what is it sensitive to? Using the donor's specific vocabulary:

- **Shows you have a serious consideration** for its objectives and values, thereby strengthening your CSO's credibility
- **Encourages you to express more clearly** how the proposed project will contribute to achieving the expected results
- **Facilitates communication** and mutual understanding between you and the donor, favoring a fruitful collaboration
- **Favorably influences the donor's decision** by showing that you have taken the time to "enter its world"

STEP #4 THE BODY OF THE PROPOSAL

It is in the body of the proposal that you have the space to convince the donor that you have the idea, the means and the necessary grounding to carry out this project, and that this project will be impactful.

PRESENT THE PROBLEM AND THE ISSUE

Here, **you must show that you are knowledgeable about the context and the problematic**, and that you have done a lot of research for it. Hence the need to prepare the call for proposal in advance! Concretely, it is about proving that:

- The project is **anchored** in the needs of those affected by the problem
- That the latter are **involved** in all phases of the project (and other key stakeholders)
- That you have anticipated the **constraints** related to the context and the field (local, regional, national or international contexts) and that you know their implications on the people concerned

- That you can make the **connection** between the context of the project and your CSO's mission/objectives

ATTENTION :

- Avoid long narratives that simply present "the situation": be sure to introduce your own analysis of the context
- Do not repeat contextual information provided by the donor
- Keep it simple and concise



TOOL | Framing the problem

What	
What is the problem ?	
When and where	Who
When and where does it occur?	Who is affected by the current situation and who would benefit from the issue resolution ?
Why	How
Why does this problem exist (causes)?	How does it impact people? What are its effects (consequences)?

OBJECTIVES & INDICATORS

Your general objective formulates **the change you want to see through this project**, what it will achieve. It is recommended to write it in the form of a statement in the present tense. From this general objective will result **specific objectives or sub-objectives** which contribute to the achievement of the general objective (see the practical sheet in the "going further" section).

Your objectives must be SMART (**Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely**) in order to be evaluable. To evaluate them, it is recommended to have both qualitative and quantitative indicators (also see the practical sheet in the "go further" section).

This is also the section where you will make **the link between the project objectives and its longer-term impact** by linking it with other possible activities that you carry out and the objectives of your CSO (see logical framework below).

EXAMPLE : “improve local inhabitants’ quality of food” is not a clear objective. Instead use “by the end of the project, in 3 years, this village will have 25% of its land cultivated in an agroecological manner”



TOOL | Logical framework template

The logical framework enables you to represent in table form **the link between the general objective, the specific objectives, the desired results, the activities to achieve them and the indicators**. Today, almost all international cooperation actors encourage their local partners to adopt results-oriented planning, thanks to the logical framework tool.

Main objective	Specific objectives	Indicators	Main activities	Expected results	Start date	End date
			1.			
			2. ...			
			1.			
			2. ...			
			1.			
			2. ...			
			1.			
			2. ...			

STRATEGY AND ACTIVITIES

Strategy is **the logic by which activities are accomplished**. In other words, it reflects your approach. It can concentrate on training, capacity building or on raising awareness for example. The resulting activities will generate a series of “expected results”.

If we take the example of the following result “150 farmers are trained in agro-ecology”, you must explain in this section **how you intend to proceed**: what workshops, what support ? Mentoring ? Peer learning? What tools are provided? How will you choose the farmers? How will you ensure that women participate in the training? How will you verify that the training has been understood and implemented?

It is very likely that your project will include several activities with different results and deliverables. It is therefore recommended **to provide a work plan**.



TOOL | Action plan template

Key activities	Responsible	Expected results	Deliverables	Beginning end	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6
1.1										
1.2										
1.3										
2.1										
...										

RISKS & HYPOTHESIS

Most donors require the formulation of **hypotheses** on which the proper functioning of the project will be based. These are directly linked to the risks and their possible answers, detailed above. Hypotheses reflect how you think things will happen in terms of impact and success of the project. They must be specific, logical and relevant to your project. For example :

- **Hypotheses :** “by the end of the training program intended for young people of the given locality, we assume they will use these skills to apply for jobs, which will reduce the unemployment rate locally”

Risks are internal and external “**problems**” that you may face during project implementation. Risk reduction refers to the actions or steps you can take to minimize the impact of these risks. If the risks are too high, donors may not want to fund your project. For example :

- **Risk:** “There is a risk that the government-run training center will not be able to provide the necessary technical assistance based on the project schedule. In this case, we will seek assistance from universities.”



TOOL | Risk matrix

RISKS		
Context-related	Project-related	CSO-related
These risks are external and are out of the CSOs’ control (for example: natural disasters, political instability, absence of public infrastructure)	These risks are linked to the design and implementation of the project, and may result in the project failing to respond to the beneficiary’s needs or even harming them (for example: insufficient capacity, poor performance, etc.	These risks are linked to the CSO’s inherent factors, that is to say beyond the project, such as human resources or CSO processes (for example: financial management system)

POST-PROJECT PLAN

For all the reasons mentioned in the introduction, **donors attribute a great deal of importance to the project sustainability or scalability after financing**. In other words, does the CSO have the means to keep the project alive afterwards or will the dynamic stop with the end of the funds ? The continuity of the project reflects the CSO’s capacity to be “**self-sustained**” thanks to its own resources (human, physical and financial) or those of its ecosystem. Project sustainability is one of the biggest challenges faced by CSOs, as it is difficult to guarantee. Here is some food for thought:

1. Implementation **of income-generating activities** during the project, which will be maintained after financing, and which will hold the run of activities
2. Search for **co-financing**
3. Launching projects in parallel, with different or even successive calendars, **in order to cover activities over time**
4. Plan partnerships to **have in-kind support** and build a network for joint efforts/pooling of resources
5. **Providing services** to other actors to generate funds

MONITORING & EVALUATION

This section is essential. Nowadays, donors only commit if they are sure the CSO can and will have the means to evaluate the project. In other words: **if there will be a “return on investment”** and if the CSO is able to learn from its actions (to capitalize). To ensure effective means to monitor and evaluate your projects, a strategy may, for example, consist of adding 5% of the budget for monitoring and evaluation costs (% to be negotiated with the donor).

Therefore, in this section of the proposal, **you should detail your overall approach in terms of monitoring and evaluation**, from initial research regarding the baseline situation to the final evaluation and impact measurement. Note that most donors have standardized approaches for monitoring and evaluation, as well as financial and narrative reporting templates, and that you will need to comply with these. However, how you make “daily” monitoring and how you use the data for project management will be up to you. Concretely, you must specify the methods, tools, resources and planning for monitoring and evaluation activities, in other words, a monitoring and evaluation plan.

ATTENTION : monitoring differs from evaluation

Monitoring : Continuous process that allows you to check whether the project is progressing as planned. It focuses more on activities.

Evaluation : Comparing expected and actually achieved results. In other words, it consists of measuring whether we have achieved our objectives or not, and to what extent, thanks to indicators.



TOOL | Monitoring-evaluation table

Frequency	Measuring tool	Indicators		Activities	Results	Main objective
		External	Internal			
...	...	...	...	...	...	...



Wording	Indicator	Definition	Initial situation	Target situation	Data source	Measurement frequency
Objective: Reduce youth unemployment by 50% on the island by 2030	% youth unemployment on the island	Youth is defined as the age group from 18 to 24 years old. Unemployment concerns anyone who is neither studying, nor working/training	70% of youth unemployed in 2020	Reduce youth unemployment to 50% by 2030	From governmental censuses	The census is led every 5 years
Objective: 50% of young people who participated in the training got a job in the following 6 months	% of young people who got a job 6 months after the training	The job in question was not taken before or during the training	NA	NA 50% of young people trained got a job within 6 months	Telephone surveys	Once
...	...	...	...	...	...	...

STEP #5 DEVELOP THE BUDGET

THE GIST

Making a budget means calculating **all the direct and indirect financial costs** of the project in a precise and organized way. It is therefore based on projections you make of the amount of these costs. This allows to :

- Ensure you have the **necessary resources** to achieve the objectives
- **Specify** the cost of the project implementation
- Provide a **tracking tool** to compare actual costs and estimated ones

THE STEPS

1. **Start with listing everything the project will require in terms of expenditure** : what should we buy? How many people do we have to pay? Will we need to pay for transportation? What equipment will you need to obtain? Will the project participants need to be fed and/or housed? Do we need to purchase an insurance? Will we have external services to pay for?
2. **Estimate and quantify** the number needed of each item listed
3. **Then group the expenditures** : once the expenses have been sorted by activity, group them by nature to get "budget lines". The most common are:
 - Catering and accommodation (support)
 - Transportation (local and international separately)
 - Materials and equipment
 - Operating costs: energy and maintenance bills
 - Human resources: wages and external services separately
 - Works and constructions
 - Communication and awareness



ANNEX - DETAILED BUDGET -Table of forecast project expenses in €							
N°	Sections	Modes of calculation	Tranche 1	Tranche 2	Tranche 3	Total	% of total budget
	1 to 6 subheadings (maximum preferably), indicate the subtotals by heading, insert lines accordingly						
1	Real estate investment						
	One line per subheading						
2	Technical and furniture investment						
	One line per subheading						
3	Financial transfers						
	One line per subheading						
4	Supplies and consumables						
	One line per subheading						
5	Studies or expertise						
	One line per subheading						
6	Staff						
	One line per subheading						
7	Activities (must be detailed)						
	One line per subheading						
8	Capacity building						
	One line per subheading						
9	Services external to the OSC						
	One line per subheading						
10	Reporting						
	One line per subheading						
11	Monitoring-evaluation						
	One line per subheading						
12	Coordination and capitalization						
	One line per subheading						
13	Communication						
	One line per subheading						
14	Others (to be detailed – must remain marginal)						
	One line per subheading						
15	Subtotal direct costs						
16	Miscellaneous section and unforeseen costs (5% maximum of 15th line)						
17	Total direct costs (15+16)						
18	Administrative or structural costs: 12% maximum of 17						
19	TOTAL GENERAL (17+18)						

STEP #6 SEND

APPEARANCE OF THE PROPOSAL AND SUBMISSION

It may look like the simplest part of the writing process, yet the appearance of the proposal will have a huge impact on the interlocutor's conscious and unconscious perception.

- **Be neat :** the document must be beautiful and attractive (with your colors if possible!)
- **Be very organized when presenting the documents,** when choosing their format and when arranging the annexes
- **Check who within your CSO** is authorized to sign any submission letter
- Check if any **signed receipt is required**
- Always be aware **of the time the proposal must be submitted** (and the time difference!)

WHY APPLICATIONS ARE DENIED

There are different reasons why some proposals fail to convince the donors. Here are some of the most common ones :

1. **Non-compliance with guidelines and procedures:** Most donors have specific guidelines and templates (submission method, topics sought, format and deadlines). Many CSOs do not take them seriously and submit their proposals without really integrating them.
2. **The proposal is not sufficiently supported by facts and data:** Many CSOs write proposals which are more subjective than objective. You can have a compelling story, but unless you have facts to back it up, the donor won't pay much attention to it.
3. **The proposal is not clear and explicit :** Many NGOs write proposals without clearly describing the problem, the targets, the objectives and activities. This makes the proposal "fuzzy" and the donor fails to clearly understand why you want to get funds.
4. **Neglected presentation :** As a proposal represents the foundation of your relationship with the donor, the presentation is insightful. Sometimes, proposals are poorly written and poorly presented, and the interlocutor ends up misunderstanding the meaning.
5. **Absence or negligence of the monitoring and evaluation plan:** Donors only finance projects that have a viable and serious M&E plan. The presence of a monitoring-evaluation plan in the proposal gives a very good impression.
6. **Submission after deadline:** A surprising number of CSOs submit the proposal after the deadline.
7. **The submitted project does not correspond to the donor's topics and areas :** If the CSO has not sufficiently studied the donor, it is unlikely that the proposal will closely match its mission and objectives.
8. **Incomplete proposal/ missing documents :** Many CSOs submit files that are incomplete or do not answer all questions/sections of the template.

ARE YOU READY TO SUBMIT YOUR PROPOSAL?

THE CHECKLIST !

Yes **No**

You have designed your CSO's theory of change and have a clear idea of your vision, mission, activities and strategy over the next 3 years (see toolbox)	☐	☐
This strategic planning resulted in a partnership roadmap which details the type of funder you wish to have and your ideal conditions of collaboration.	☐	☐
You have written a partnership charter	☐	☐
You are aligned with the donor's interests, motivations and values	☐	☐
You understand and are aligned with its mode of operation, the expenses it finances and those it does not finance, and its payment schedule	☐	☐
You have enough time to prepare the proposal	☐	☐
You have designated a person responsible for writing it	☐	☐
You have carried out preparatory work to substantiate the context of the problematic and positioned yourself according to existing solutions	☐	☐
The project title is clear and you have formulated SMART objectives with indicators	☐	☐
You have developed the logical framework of the project	☐	☐
You have detailed a work plan for the project	☐	☐
You have integrated a serious and realistic monitoring and evaluation plan	☐	☐
You have included a section on the sustainability of the project after financing	☐	☐
Your budget is complete, clear and readable	☐	☐
You have completed the donor's canvas/model in a precise and specific manner	☐	☐
You have complied with all instructions issued by the donor	☐	☐
Your proposal is attractive and reflects your branding	☐	☐
All pages are numbered with a summary at the beginning of the document	☐	☐
All requested data and documents are included	☐	☐

#TO KNOW

DO

- **Anticipate** enough not to write the proposal in a rush
- Show that you know **who** else is **working** on the same issue, what they are doing, and what has been done before (including what worked out and what didn't).
- Involve **several** people in writing the proposal (but only one manager)
- Explain all **acronyms** from their first use (even the most common ones)
- Keep it as **short** as possible and never longer than the donor specifies (without lowering quality)
- Show that you are not “**just**” looking for money, that you are serious and keen to have an impact
- Find a **balance** between the “human” and the “academic” writing : let the human story shine through, but do not be excessively subjective or emotional.
- Make contact with a **real** person in the funding organization team as much as possible, then send the proposal to that person.

DON'T

- Do not ensure that the project corresponds **at all costs** to the donor's criteria at the expense of what you consider to be necessary
- Do not use one proposal for **all** donors. It must always result from your specific donor.
- Do not include items in the budget that are **not relevant to the project**.
- **Do not hide data** or information that the donor should know or to which the donor should have the right to access.
- Do not send too **many** annexes (beyond what is requested)
- Do not assume that the donor **knows** your CSO
- Don't use **unnecessary** jargon (but use jargon when necessary)

BUDGETING IN STEPS

1. Identify the objective of the project

2. List the activities to achieve it

3. List all the expenditure for each activity

4. Quantify the elements of each expense

5. Research the costs for each expense

6. Compile activities, expenses, quantities and amounts into a table

7. Group expenses by type/budget line

#GO FURTHER

LINK TO TEMPLATES AND TOOLS

1. Understanding [project cycle management](#)
2. Building good [governance](#)
3. Develop [a strategic plan](#) for your CSO
4. Analyze [the initial context](#) of the project (the baseline)
5. Setting [objectives](#)
6. Develop [indicators](#)
7. Develop a logical [framework](#)
8. [Measure the impact](#)
9. [Evaluation](#)
10. [Monitoring-evaluation](#) plan

WEBSITES LISTING CALLS FOR PROPOSALS

[Indev Jobs](#) lists numerous calls for projects by country around the world

[Coordination Sud](#) brings together numerous calls for projects by country

[L'Agence Française de Développement](#) is launching numerous calls for projects around the world by theme

Jamaity is an initiative which aims to bring together Tunisian associations on a platform allowing them to promote the causes they defend. [It lists](#) numerous calls for projects.

[L'association Burkinabé de Fundraising](#) lists several calls for projects and opportunities in the country.

[Different actors](#) of the French cooperation issue calls for projects in Burkina Faso

EXAMPLE OF PROPOSAL STRUCTURE

Section/ part	Standard content	Comment
Cover page	- Name of the donor to whom the proposal is submitted - Name and address of your CSO, registration, logo - Name of the contact person in the OSC - Date	The title of the project should reflect its gist in a short sentence
Executive summary	Summary of the proposal : - what is the location, the current context - the specific problem tackled by the project - the added value of your CSO to cover this issue (+ justification of the approach) - highlight how the project will be managed and supervised to maximize its impact - what will be the impacts - who will be the main targets - the planned schedule - the overall cost	Summarize to the essence of the project
Body of the proposal	Depends on the donors : - Context (about one page) - Topic/ problematic related to the donor's guidelines - Objectives and targets - Strategy/approach - Monitoring and evaluation plan (2 to 3 pages) - Calendar of activities/work plan	- Briefly describe the context with relevant facts/figures - Explain how affected people will be involved in identifying the problem and solution - Indicate why your CSO is qualified to lead the project - Details of the main project stakeholders - Indicate the objectives and their logic via the logical framework (see toolbox)
Conclusion and budget	Restate in a simple and punchy way what you are asking from the donor and why, by including a summary of the budget	The detailed budget will be included in the annex. Here, only give the main budget lines and the totals over the entire duration of the project. You can also summarize your financing plan if there is co-financing.
Annexes	Detailed technical description of the project, methodology, schedule, detailed budget, audited financial statements, examples of internal policies (gender, inclusion, governance, etc.). The donor will specify what is required.	This is the place where you can provide details without weighing down the body of the proposal
Bibliography	List all the references you used, in the order you mentioned them in the text	