

Strategies for Effective Proposal Writing



Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition



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Foreword

The Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition is pleased to present the second edition of our resource manual: *Strategies for Effective Proposal Writing*. Whether you are nervously anticipating writing your first grant proposal or are a seasoned grant-writer, it is our hope that this manual will assist you in developing a coherent and fundable proposal.

Originally developed as a companion resource for a Proposal Writing Workshop, this manual has evolved into a resource that can also be used on its own. It provides some guidelines to help your organization decide whether or not to apply for funding and a step-by-step process by which to proceed.

It is important to remember that just as every community is different, so too are funders. Your own research is critical in developing suitable funding contacts in your area and to tailoring your approach appropriately.

Although we obviously can make no guarantees, we wish you every success as you put pen to paper. Let's get started!



OHCC wishes to thank its funders:
Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care
Ontario Trillium Foundation

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I. Introduction



The Funding Environment

This is a very challenging time to raise funds for non-profits, charities and community organizations.

Increased competition due to the many new organizations being created and government cutbacks at various levels mean greater demands on foundations, corporations and other funders. Lower interest rates have resulted in smaller grant budgets for foundations. There is also increased competition for revenue from other types of fundraising (i.e. special events, Nevada tickets, raffles and lotteries etc.).

Increasing demand for grants means that funders are becoming more focused, especially in the following ways:

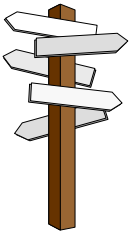
- a strong desire to make every cent count
- requirements for increased accountability are becoming more stringent (i.e. internal book-keeping and auditing processes, formal organizational structure and evaluation practices)
- increased emphasis on effective governance and management (i.e. competence, being fiscally sound and proof of long-range planning)
- increased emphasis on project-specific funding
- expectations that groups who have similar objectives will work together to:
 - share resources and expertise
 - minimize duplication
 - bring all of the right people to the table to increase the potential for successful project outcomes
- greater emphasis on sustainability
- requirements for cross-sectoral collaboration.

Types of Foundations

Although there are many different types of funders, foundations are frequently approached through the grant proposal process, which is why we mention them here.

There are two types of foundations: those who raise money and those who give it away. Some of the hundreds of foundations in Canada who are actively making grants include:

- Family foundations (e.g., McConnell Family Foundation)
- Government foundations (e.g., Ontario Trillium Foundation)
- Corporate foundations (e.g., Royal Bank of Canada Charitable Foundation)
- Community foundations (normally established to serve a particular geographic area)
- Special purpose foundations (e.g., Hospital for Sick Children Foundation)
- Service club foundations (e.g., Lions, Rotary Club, Shriners etc.).



II. Laying the Groundwork

Do Your Homework

We cannot stress enough the importance of being prepared and doing your research thoroughly *prior* to developing your proposal.

Have a clear understanding of your own goals and objectives.

Identify funders who are best positioned to help your organization:

- areas of interest
- geographical location
- target populations
- type and size of grant
- type of funding
- eligibility.

Research your “top prospects” to learn more about them:

- what are their funding objectives?
- what have they funded in the past?
- what are their funding guidelines?
- what are their backgrounds and interests?
- if it is a corporate foundation, what do you know about the corporation?
- who do you need to speak to?

Save yourself, and the potential funder, valuable time and effort.

It is very important to keep track of all of your contact information. It often works best if you keep it in one place as you are doing your research and your community relationship building.

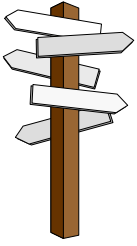
The chart on the following page may help you to organize this information.

Contact Charts

| Funders | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------------------|------|
| Name | Organization | How to Reach Them | Date |
| | | | |
| | | | |

| Community Partners | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------|------|
| Name | How to Reach Them | Comments | Date |
| | | | |
| | | | |

| Written Agreement | Support |
|-------------------|---------|
| | |
| | |



Make a Personal Connection

Develop a relationship with your top prospects. Depending on the funder, this can take many forms:

- writing a letter of introduction, accompanied by information about your organization
- making a phone call
- inviting them to a special event or sending a copy of your newsletter
- enlisting a member of your board of directors, steering committee, public official or community leader to contact foundation representatives on your behalf; they may know a foundation board member and be able to provide helpful information about what the foundation is looking for.

Be sure to study the funding guidelines in detail. Try to get feedback on whether your initiative matches the funder’s mandate. Ask if they require a “letter of intent” prior to receiving your proposal.

Are You Ready?

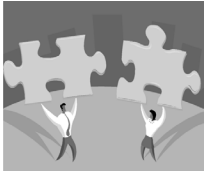
Readiness is an important element of a successful proposal. Funders will want to know if you are an accountable organization. The following chart will help you self-assess your strengths and weaknesses by taking a look at the “workings” of your organization.

- Why does your organization exist?
- Who implements your goals and objectives? (the “work”)
- How do you do it? are you a formal or informal organization? do you work well with others? do you leverage small successes into bigger ones (i.e. dollars, partnerships, timing)?

Are You Ready? A Readiness Checklist

| Why | In Place | Need | Who | By When |
|---|-----------------|-------------|------------|----------------|
| Vision | | | | |
| Mission Statement | | | | |
| Values Statement | | | | |
| Goals | | | | |
| Existing Programs/Services (and relationship to above) | | | | |
| Who | | | | |
| Board of Directors (or Steering Committee) | | | | |
| Staffing (paid and/or volunteer) | | | | |
| How | | | | |
| Financial Information (formal/informal) | | | | |
| Strategic Plan | | | | |
| Planning Processes | | | | |
| Brief History | | | | |
| Service Record | | | | |
| Strategic Alliances | | | | |
| References | | | | |
| Levers | | | | |
| Other | | | | |

OHCC, adapted with permission from the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.



III. How's the Fit?

Sometimes, the lure of new funding can distract us from our “work”: what we exist to do or accomplish. We need to ask ourselves if the proposed project/program is a good fit with our organization. Does it contribute to the realization of our goals and objectives? The following chart will help you honestly examine (and rate on a scale from 1 to 5) whether this is a suitable undertaking for your group.

Fit With Your Organization

| Item | Your Organization | The Project | Fit (1-5) |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Service/Program | | | |
| Target Group | | | |
| Experience | | | |
| Expertise | | | |
| Budget | | | |
| Community/Location | | | |
| Leverage/Alliances | | | |
| Supporters | | | |
| Sustainability | | | |

Adapted with permission from the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.

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IV. Putting Pen to Paper



Once you are satisfied that you are indeed ready to develop your proposal and are targeting the appropriate funder, it is time to put pen to paper.

General Writing Tips for a Strong Proposal

- Most foundation boards prefer short, succinct proposals that show clarity of thought and purpose.
- If you don't have solid writing skills and experience, ask for help from someone who does.
- Ensure key goals and planned outcomes are clearly stated - get to the point early.
- Use the active rather than passive voice (e.g., "we will help street youth" instead of "street youth will be helped").
- Describe the human element of your project instead of concentrating on theoretical ideas.
- Don't leave readers to assume anything.
- Be honest about your organization's strengths and weaknesses.
- Use an enthusiastic and positive tone, but remain credible.
- Write a complete first draft before attempting an edit.
- Be certain that you can achieve the project objectives you make in your proposal: if approved, your proposal becomes a legal agreement.
- Identify a contact person: someone who is readily available and able to answer questions about the proposal.

Key Elements of a Proposal

Although different funders have different requirements - and it is imperative that you do your homework - most proposals would include the following components:

| | |
|------|--------------------------|
| i | Summary |
| ii | Introduction |
| iii | Definition of the Issues |
| iv | Desired Results |
| | - Outputs |
| | - Outcomes |
| | - Impact |
| v | Resources and Activities |
| vi | Budget |
| vii | Evaluation Plan |
| viii | Sustainability |
| ix | Conclusion |
| x | Appendices |



Summary

The summary is probably the most important section of the proposal. It is an umbrella statement of your case and an overview of the entire proposal. It should be written last but presented first. The summary should:

- be no longer than two pages - be clear and concise
- state the overall vision for your project
- stress how and why your initiative will affect your target audience and community
- briefly mention your group's "track record", the issue(s) to be addressed, key outcomes, and the methods you will use
- list any resources that have already been committed, or other confirmed funding sources
- be positive and exciting - you want to convince the reader to keep reading and that this project should be considered for funding.

Introduction

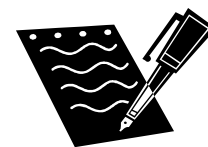
Here you will provide a brief introduction to your organization and why it is the right one to carry out the proposed activities.

- Write this section second-to-last.
- Describe what your group or organization does (e.g., purpose, goals, programs, activities).
- Establish your group's credibility.
- Describe a past success or include testimonial from a stakeholder.
- Provide statistics that support your group's accomplishments.

Definition of the Issues

In this section, clearly describe the issue(s) or need(s) that your initiative will address or the problem(s) that you are planning to solve.

- Specify how your initiative will address the issue(s): there must be a logical connection between your group's mission and the issues.
- Be realistic about what you can accomplish
- Present the issue in terms of the clients' or community's needs (not your group's needs).
- Be clear about the specific target audience or segment of the community affected by the issue.
- Briefly describe the legal and political environment, stakeholders, the literature and previous evaluations.
- Provide up-to-date statistics to support your statements about the issue and make sure that reference material is cited accurately.



Desired Results

This section identifies the desired or intended results of your project or program by outlining what you expect to achieve in the short and long-term. It is based on *the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide*. Desired results can be divided into three subcategories:

- a) Outputs
- b) Outcomes
- c) Impact

a) *Outputs*

- Outputs are the direct results of your program activities.
- They are normally described in terms of the size and scope of the products and services delivered or produced by the program (e.g., the number of workshops conducted, hours/days of service provided, new tools or resources developed and distributed).
- They should be concrete and easily measurable.
- For each program activity, identify what outputs will be, and be specific about the intended audience(s) or client(s).

b) *Outcomes*

- Outcomes are specific changes in attitudes, behaviours, skills, knowledge, program utilization, etc. that you expect to result from your program activities. There may be unintended outcomes of your project as well; the actual outcomes of the project can only be identified at its conclusion.
- They are most commonly expressed at the *individual* level.
- Short-term outcomes are achievable within 1 to 3 years, while longer-term outcomes are attainable within 4 to 6 years.
- It may be helpful to determine your outcomes first, prior to identifying outputs, impact, activities and inputs.
- You may have one or more outcomes; each outcome should be stated in one sentence.
- Expected outcomes should be S*M*A*R*T:
 - ✓ Specific
 - ✓ Measurable
 - ✓ Achievable
 - ✓ Realistic
 - ✓ Timely/Tangible
- They are usually introduced with action statements such as:
 - ✓ “there will be an increase in...”
 - ✓ “there will be a decrease in...”
 - ✓ “there will be a reduction of...”
 - ✓ “the elimination of...”



c) Impact

- impacts are organizational, community and/or system level changes that you expect will result from your program activities.
- In most cases, these changes will take place 7-10 years after program activities have been completed.
- These may include improved quality of life measures, increased capacity or changes in policy e.g., improved health status, more diverse or self-reliant local economy, reduction in degree of social inequalities, wide participation in decision-making
- For projects with short-term goals and a narrow or limited scope, it may not be necessary to discuss long-term impacts in much detail.

Resources and Activities

This section describes how you will go about implementing your program and the resources you will need to succeed. Resources and activities should logically tie in to the desired results. Note that resources and activities are sometimes referred to as “inputs”.

a) Resources

- Include the human, financial, organizational and community resources that the program requires to carry out the work.
- Specify number of staff/volunteers and their relevant expertise and qualifications (profiles or resumé of key staff members may be included).
- Describe other resources at your disposal, e.g., Board members, individuals and groups in the community, research libraries, and equipment.
- Convince the funder that you have the right people and partners at the table.

b) Activities

- Be specific: create a step by step work plan.
- Explain why each activity was selected, i.e., after consulting with stakeholders and experts in the field, research on best practices/successes in other communities.
- Describe specific assignments and be clear who is responsible for what:
 - ✓ financial management
 - ✓ program outcomes
 - ✓ reporting.
- Be realistic: present a reasonable scope of activities that can be conducted within a reasonable timeline, and with the resources available.
- If it is a long-term initiative, break it into phases and indicate how long each phase will take.

The table on the following page will help you to develop your action plan.

Developing an Action Plan/Workplan

| Expected Outcome | What we will do (activity) | Who will do it | When we will do it (Start and Completion) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| | | | |

Adapted with permission from the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.



A note about partnerships:

- Funders often favour proposals that include some degree of collaboration between or among groups or organizations with complementary or synergistic characteristics.
- Describe the role of your partners: why they are involved, and what each partner brings to the table.
- Be sure to work out details of arrangements with partners prior to completing the proposal: be specific about who will be responsible for what and the resources each group will contribute.

Budget

The budget section should demonstrate your organization's ability to manage money in an effective and responsible manner.

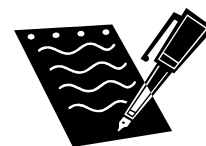
- Present a realistic estimate of the funds required to achieve the program's objectives.
- Clearly outline the total cost of the initiative
- Specify other sources of funding; in some cases, committed funding can provide "leverage" to influence the granting of new/additional dollars.
- Present a budget statement in a tabular manner, listing income sources and amounts first and then expense items and amounts.

Income includes items such as:

- ✓ earned income, e.g., sales of products or services
- ✓ contributed income, e.g., donations, grants, fundraising activities
- ✓ donations in kind, e.g., donations of labour, meeting space, use of equipment.

Expenses include items such as:

- ✓ salaries and benefits
 - ✓ contract payments
 - ✓ rent and administration
 - ✓ program materials
 - ✓ travel and lodging.
- Base figures on sound research.
 - Clearly state any assumptions you make and explain unusual items using footnotes/endnotes.
 - Make sure that all calculations are accurate and that the budget balances.
 - Indicate your intention to follow accepted accounting procedures and keep an audit trail.



Evaluation Plan

Evaluation is an important process through which you determine whether the program’s expected outcomes are achieved and how effectively the program was implemented. In this section, you will describe how you plan to assess your program’s results and/or the effectiveness of the program activities.

- For medium to long-term projects, consider including a plan for evaluating success at various stages of the project and for modifying your activities or plans if required.
- Include evaluation costs in your activity budget; estimate your costs, including staff time, materials and services required (including in-kind contributions).
- Try to involve potential program participants and key project stakeholders in developing evaluation criteria.
- Establish measurable indicators of success for short and long term outcomes.
- Whenever possible, evaluation plans should include both quantitative and qualitative methods:
 - ✓ *quantitative* methods focus on things that can be counted or directly measured, e.g., number of participants involved, number of sessions conducted,
 - ✓ *qualitative* methods are generally used to provide more in-depth information about individual experiences, perspectives and context, e.g., subjective benefits or changes in attitudes or perceptions reported by program participants.
- Describe how the data will be collected, analyzed, and stored:
 - ✓ methods of collecting quantitative data include structured choice survey questions, tracking forms and service utilization
 - ✓ methods of collecting qualitative data include open-ended survey questions, focus groups, in-depth interviews, diaries/journals, or forums.
- Describe how you will use and communicate the evaluation results (be sure to obtain consent from participants before using any information that they provided).
- You may find it helpful to develop a chart or “logic model” showing the link between activities, outcomes and indicators of your initiative (see below).

Example:

| Activities | Outcomes | Indicators of Success |
|--|---|--|
| Develop and hold a series of five free composting workshops for residents in a high-density neighbourhood (200 participating households) | Increased understanding of the benefits and methods of composting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of participating households complete the composting workshop series • Composting bins are being used properly 3 months after the training |
| Establish an award system to promote composting | Increased participation in composting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30% of participating households are composting regularly one year after program start |
| Hire local youth to build and maintain 5 convenient composting stations within the neighbourhood | Decrease in proportion of waste going to landfill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The composting bins are at 90% capacity after one year |



Sustainability

This section is necessary if there is an expectation that activities will continue past the program or project completion date. By developing a strategy for future sustainability, the potential funder will not feel that the benefits gained by the program will be lost after the grant period expires.

Show how the initiative will be supported in the future:

- if applicable, describe your plans to continue the activities beyond the granting period (e.g., continue as a volunteer-run initiative, collaborate with other organizations)
- present a detailed plan to obtain future funding or support from alternative sources.

Conclusion

Here you will make your final comments in support of the proposal. In one or two paragraphs, briefly restate what you want to do and why it is important.

- Emphasize 'leverage':
 - ✓ strategic alliances or partnerships
 - ✓ sustainability
 - ✓ value for the money
 - ✓ coordinated timing.
- Express confidence in your proposal.

Appendices

Generally speaking, all of the really important information should be included in the body of the proposal. The appendices include supplemental information such as the following:

- Board of Directors list
- the names and contact information of references
- testimonials, endorsements or letters of support
- legal documents
- financial documents
- annual report
- publications including brochures or newsletters
- relevant articles or summaries of reports
- media clippings or publicity items.

If you are including references, ensure that the referees have consented and are familiar with your organization *and* with the proposal. Send them a copy of your proposal in advance and be sure to follow-up with a call to discuss it.

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V. “Packaging” Your Proposal



Some final tips to consider as you apply the finishing touches:

- use an easy to read font such as Times Roman, or Arial; avoid using more than two different fonts within the same page or section
- allow some white space without leaving any large gaps:
 - 1.5 space (instead of single or double space)
 - 1 1/4” to 1 1/2” margins
- number your pages
- bullets or a number format may be appropriate when listing more than three points in a paragraph
- use a neutral tone of paper
- avoid expensive or flashy packaging
- spell and grammar check your document
- ensure that external references are documented properly, using a recognized footnote or endnote format
- place proposal and accompanying documents in a folder or binder
- include a cover letter.



VI. Proposal Appraisal

Before you submit your proposal, it is recommended that you ask a friend or colleague to take a final look. At this point, we are often so intimately connected to the proposal that we “can’t see the forest for the trees”. The template on pages 18-19 will provide some guidelines and focus for their critique.

These charts can also be used in an interview with the funder to evaluate the proposal and to assess the strengths and identify the areas that might need a little work.

Be sure to leave enough time for a thorough review and still get your proposal in *on time*.



VII. Post-Submission Thoughts

- Be aware of the funder’s granting cycles: you may have quite a wait before you hear from them.
- On occasion, the funder will ask for more information: this is not to be difficult, but is intended to produce a stronger proposal.
- Understand that granting is a competitive, rigorous process.
- If your proposal is unsuccessful, contact the funder for suggestions about how to make your next application stronger.
- Remember that grant-making is a craft; it involves both art and science, and takes some practice to get it right!



Proposal Appraisal

| Component | Yes | No | Rating (1-5) | Comments/Suggestions |
|--|-----|----|--------------|----------------------|
| 1. Overall Impression 1.1 Title 1.2 Logical Flow 1.3 Layout/Visual Attractiveness 1.4 Grammar 1.5 Spelling | | | | |
| 2. Summary 2.1 Appears at the beginning of the proposal 2.2 Identifies the grant applicant 2.3 Includes at least one sentence on credibility 2.4 Includes at least one sentence on expected outcomes 2.5 Includes total cost, funds already obtained and amount requested in this proposal 2.6 Is brief/succinct 2.7 Is clear 2.8 Is interesting 2.9 Is motivating | | | | |
| 3. Definition of Issues 3.1 Relevance 3.2 Evidence 3.3 Logic | | | | |
| 4. Credibility 4.1 History 4.2 Track record 4.3 Partners/Advisors | | | | |
| 5. Desired Results 5.1 Specifies outputs, outcomes and impact 5.2 Specific 5.3 Measurable 5.4 Attainable 5.5 Realistic 5.6 Timely 5.7 Describes the specific population that will benefit | | | | |
| 6. Resources and Activities 6.1 Relates to Desired Results 6.2 Clear 6.3 States reasons for the selection of activities 6.4 Describes sequence of activities/timelines | | | | |

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| Component | Yes | No | Rating (1-5) | Comments/Suggestions |
|--|-----|----|--------------|----------------------|
| 6.5 Describes project staffing e.g., names, titles, qualifications, tasks 6.6 Presents a reasonable scope of activities that can be conducted within the time and resources of the program/project | | | | |
| 7. Evaluation Plan 7.1 Presents a plan for evaluating accomplishment of outcomes 7.2 Presents a plan for evaluating and modifying methods over the course of the program/project 7.3 Identifies who will be doing the evaluation and how they were chosen 7.4 Clearly states criteria of success 7.5 Describes how data will be gathered 7.6 Explains any tools or questionnaires to be used 7.7 Describes the process of data analysis 7.8 Describes how evaluation results will be shared | | | | |
| 8. Budget 8.1 Income 8.2 Expenses 8.3 Evidence that cost estimates are based on sound research | | | | |
| 9. Leverage 9.1 Alliances/Partnerships 9.2 Sustainability 9.3 Demonstrates clear “value for the money” | | | | |
| 10. Conclusion 10.1 Concise 10.2 Demonstrates a level of confidence | | | | |
| 11. Things to Omit | | | | |
| 12. Things to De-emphasize | | | | |
| 13. Things to Emphasize More | | | | |
| 14. Any other comments ... | | | | |

OHCC, adapted from the Grantsmanship Centre Training Programs and The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.



VIII. Web Sites for more Information & Ideas

Proposal Writing

charitychannel.com/gfr.shtml

- the “Grants and Foundation Review” section of this web site contains articles about the grant-proposal writing process, and discussion forums offer writers a chance to swap ideas

fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html

- free online proposal writing short course

philanthropy.com/jobs/2003/05/01/20030523-367388.htm

- resources to help create better grant proposals

www.npguides.org/

- free web-based grant writing resources for non-profit organizations, including sample proposals

www.tgci.com/magazine/proposal.asp

- articles related to proposal writing/grant seeking from The Grantsmanship Center

www.mapnp.org/library/fndrsng/np_raise/np_raise.htm#anchor4293050175

- more resources and links for grantwriting, proposals and fundraising

Fundraising

www.mapnp.org/library/fndrsng/np_raise/fndraise.htm

- overview of nonprofit fundraising sources and approaches

www.charityvillage.com/cv/guides/guide3.asp

- Charity Village’s extensive guide of fundraising resources

www.ec.gc.ca/fund_e.html

- list of funding programs for environmental groups compiled by Environment Canada (also in French)

www.pch.gc.ca/progs/pc-cp/pubs/e/fr4gras1.htm

- Fundraising Ideas That Work for Grassroots Groups, by Ken Wyman (also in French)

www.grassrootsfundraising.org

- practical tips and tools to help you raise money for your organization

Program Planning and Evaluation

www.wkkf.org/Programming/Overview.aspx?CID=281

- W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide and Evaluation Handbook

www.thcu.ca/infoandresources.htm

- Information and resources on Health Promotion Planning and Evaluation from The Health Communications Unit (some resources available in French)

national.unitedway.org/outcomes/

- United Way of America’s Outcome Measurement Resource Network

www.innonet.org/

- Innovation Network provides tools and instruction for creating detailed program and evaluation plans (free registration required)

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References

The information contained in this manual was compiled from a variety of sources, including the following:

Big Online: Canada's Leading Source of Funding Information
Metasoft Systems - www.bigdatabase.com

Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, Karen Liberman
"Writing Effective Funding Proposals: Practice Makes Perfect"

W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Logic Model Development Guide - www.wkkf.org/Programming/Overview.aspx?CID=281

Kiritz, Norton J.
Proposal Checklist and Evaluation Form, The Grantsmanship Center

The Ontario Trillium Foundation
Presentation Notes: Joanne Richmond, Jacqueline Powell, Inga Lubbock

The Foundation Centre
A Proposal Writing Short Course - fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse/prop1.html

van Rotterdam, Ingrid
Building Foundation Partnerships - Chapter 5: p. 49 - 64
Canadian Centre for Philanthropy

Your comments on this manual are most welcome! Please contact our central office:
phone: (416) 408-4841
toll free: 1-800-766-3418
email: info@healthycommunities.on.ca

To learn more about OHCC, please visit our website: www.healthycommunities.on.ca