

From Donor-Ready to Competitive Proposal

E-book summary

From Donor-Ready to Competitive Proposal is a practical e-book that helps proposal developers, organizations, cooperatives, research centers, consultants, and institutional teams strengthen an existing proposal so it can compete more effectively for a specific donor's funding.

The e-book starts with an actual proposal: an early draft, an advanced version, or one that is almost ready to submit. Its aim is to make the final transformation from a technically sound proposal to one that is strategically aligned, clear, persuasive, and competitive.

1. The problem this e-book addresses

Many proposals are unsuccessful because they do not compete strongly enough, even when their design is sound.

A proposal may have a clear problem, logical activities, suitable indicators, and a coherent budget, yet still fail to stand out. Problems arise when the proposal:

- Does not clearly show why it meets that specific donor's needs.
- Matches the donor's topic but not its priorities, criteria, and expected results.
- Mixes up activities, outputs, and outcomes.
- Contains evidence that is scattered or poorly placed.
- Has a weak or overly general executive summary.
- Lacks a central argument that is easy to remember.
- Uses lengthy, technical language that does not help decision-makers.
- Does not explicitly address the evaluation criteria.
- Completes the application form but does not make it easy for the evaluator to award a high score.

The e-book addresses this gap. It helps readers examine their proposal from the donor's perspective, asking whether it is complete and whether it can be understood, trusted, assessed, and justified against competing proposals.

2. What you will build

By the end of the process, readers will have a Competitive Proposal Tailored to the Donor: a stronger, better-aligned version, ready to submit or adapt to a specific call for proposals.

The main deliverables are:

Deliverable	Status
Initial Competitiveness Assessment	☐ Complete
Donor Alignment Map	☐ Complete
Outputs and Outcomes Table	☐ Complete
Evidence Bank to Strengthen the Proposal	☐ Complete
Strategic Adjustment Plan — Individual Session 1	☐ Complete
Persuasive Proposal Structure	☐ Complete
Human Story Supported by Evidence	☐ Complete
Concise Paragraphs for Donor Decision-Makers	☐ Complete
Proposal Review Matrix Based on Donor Evaluation Criteria	☐ Complete
Final Adjustment Plan — Individual Session 2	☐ Complete
Competitive Proposal Tailored to the Donor	☐ Complete

The outcome is not a perfect proposal or a funding guarantee. It is a clearer, better-aligned proposal that is easier to assess and better prepared to compete.

3. How IGROW guides the process

IGROW structures the entire e-book, guiding how readers review, strengthen, and make the case for a proposal to an actual donor.

IGROW stage	How it applies in this e-book
I — Issue / Intent	Clarifies your purpose and the competitiveness problem to solve. The e-book starts with a challenging question: is your proposal written to explain your project or to compete for an actual donor's funding? This stage identifies weaknesses that could reduce the score.
G — Goal	Defines what to achieve by the end of each section. Each part produces a specific deliverable: an alignment map, outputs and outcomes table, evidence bank, persuasive structure, evaluation matrix, or adjustment plan. Review leads to tangible improvements.
R — Reality	Examines where the proposal is currently losing strength. Readers identify common errors: superficial alignment, evidence that does not support the argument, vague outcomes, a weak summary, technical language, or partially addressed criteria.
O — Options	Provides practical tools to improve competitiveness, including templates, matrices, before-and-after examples, checklists, and guiding questions to decide what to strengthen, put first, move to annexes, or remove.
W — Way Forward	Ends each section with a clear next step. Each exercise produces a component that informs the next. The e-book becomes a connected process of strategic improvement rather than a collection of tips.

4. What this e-book promises

This e-book does not promise that the proposal will secure funding. It promises that, by the end of the process, the proposal will make a stronger case to a specific donor.

In summary:

The e-book turns a donor-ready proposal into a competitive one: better aligned with the donor, clearer about its outcomes, stronger in evidence, more persuasive in its argument, more human in its narrative, more concise for decision-makers, and better prepared to meet actual evaluation criteria.