

Rubric item (Pre-Award)	What we review (QA)	Typical red flags	How we improve it (concrete examples)	Deliverable (proof of work)
<b>1) Donor alignment (fit, eligibility, focus)</b>	Donor priorities, geography, eligible population, funding amount/duration, evaluation criteria	The proposal “could fit any donor”; doesn’t address criteria; eligibility is uncertain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Matrix: “donor criterion → where we answer it”</li> <li>- Rewrite intro/summary to reflect donor priorities</li> <li>- Adjust scope (population/country/budget) to match the call</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Criteria alignment matrix</li> <li>- Go/no-go eligibility list</li> <li>- Recommended angle/ framing</li> </ul>
<b>2) Problem clarity + evidence</b>	Diagnosis, data, baseline, who is affected, causes, magnitude	“Big problem” with no data; too much context; unclear who benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Convert the problem into 2–3 quantified messages (what, who, where, how much)</li> <li>- Add minimum viable evidence (sources, figures, studies)</li> <li>- Separate causes vs. symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rewritten problem paragraph + citations</li> <li>- Mini “problem tree” or cause–effect bullets</li> </ul>
<b>3) Theory of Change (causal logic, assumptions)</b>	Causal chain, critical assumptions, risks, external conditions, contribution logic	Logical jumps (“we train → policy changes”); assumptions not explicit; outputs confused with outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draft/adjust a 1-page ToC (inputs→activities→outputs→outcomes→impact)</li> <li>- Make 3–5 critical assumptions explicit and how they’ll be managed</li> <li>- Align ToC language with the donor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>ToC</b> (diagram + narrative)</li> <li>- Assumptions list + mitigation</li> </ul>
<b>4) Program design (realistic activities, timeline)</b>	Activity–results coherence, logical sequencing, roles, milestones, operational capacity	Generic activities; impossible timeline; no owners; unclear deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Turn activities into work packages with verifiable deliverables</li> <li>- Adjust timeline to realistic milestones (simple Gantt)</li> <li>- Define responsibilities (light RACI)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Timeline (table or Gantt)</li> <li>- Deliverables list by activity</li> <li>- Roles/owners</li> </ul>
<b>5) MEL (measurable indicators, verification)</b>	SMART indicators, baseline, targets, means of verification (MoV), frequency, responsibilities	Vague indicators (“improve capacities”); no targets; no MoV; M&E too costly or impractical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rewrite indicators into measurable format (what + unit + population + time)</li> <li>- Set realistic targets and feasible MoV (surveys, records, assessments)</li> <li>- Build an operable MEL plan (who measures, when, with what tool)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete <b>MEL matrix</b></li> <li>- Prioritized indicator list (core vs. complementary)</li> </ul>
<b>6) Budget (coherence, allowability, proportionality)</b>	Traceability to activities, allowable cost categories, indirects, cost assumptions, unit costs	Budget doesn’t “tell the same story”; prohibited lines; indirects applied incorrectly; numbers don’t reconcile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Matrix: “activity ↔ cost ↔ result”</li> <li>- Normalize unit costs (# trainings, participants, days, rates)</li> <li>- Adjust indirects to donor rules + justify assumptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reviewed budget</li> <li>- Budget narrative/notes</li> <li>- List of eliminated red flags</li> </ul>
<b>7) Organizational capacity (track record, risks)</b>	Relevant experience, team, governance, partners, financial/operational capacity, institutional risks	Generic CVs; “we’re great” with no proof; risks unaddressed; unclear consortium roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rewrite capacity with evidence (achievements, numbers, similar projects)</li> <li>- Clarify partners’ roles and comparative advantages</li> <li>- Institutional risk matrix + mitigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthened “capacity” section</li> <li>- Partner/roles matrix</li> <li>- Institutional risk matrix</li> </ul>
<b>8) Sustainability and scalability</b>	Post-funding continuity, local ownership, cost model, institutionalization, replication	“It will be sustained” with no plan; scalability as a wish, not a strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Define 2–3 concrete mechanisms (financial, institutional, community)</li> <li>- Identify who absorbs costs and what remains in place</li> <li>- Scalability: conditions for replication + rough marginal costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sustainability plan (action bullets)</li> <li>- Scaling note (what/where/under what conditions)</li> </ul>
<b>9) Cross-cutting approaches (gender, inclusion, safeguards)</b>	Real (not decorative) integration of gender/inclusion; do-no-harm; safeguarding; accessibility	Copy-paste section; not reflected in activities/indicators/budget; risk of harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adjust activities to include specific measures (accessibility, participation, safety)</li> <li>- Add disaggregated indicators (sex/age/other relevant)</li> <li>- Incorporate minimum safeguards required by donor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Updates reflected in ToC/logframe/MEL and budget</li> <li>- Applicable safeguards checklist</li> </ul>
<b>10) Formal compliance (annexes, format, limits)</b>	Required sections, annexes, signatures, format, page/word limits, file naming	Missing annexes; sections out of order; limits exceeded; inconsistencies across documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compliance checklist + cross-checks (amounts/dates/names)</li> <li>- Align format/structure with donor template</li> <li>- Final “pre-flight check” (like before takeoff)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>QA-signed compliance checklist</b></li> <li>- <b>Final annex list</b> + consistency cross-check</li> </ul>