Proposal Basic Outline

1) Title of Proposal
2) Name/s of who Proposal is for
3) Intro/Welcome
4) History of organization or initiative – Why us
5) Vision for the future - Why now/why you
6) Call to action

Proposal Expanded Outline

Introduction—On this page, give a brief introduction to your project: include the problem that needs to be solved, the solution, why it matters, and a soft ask. The idea here is to convey everything that is to follow. At the end of this page, the terms of the document should be very clear—but the page should also spark reader interest and discuss why the project matters on a higher level.

History of the Organization/why us—On this page, further describe the problem, and prove why your organization is the one worthy and capable of solving it. One goal of this page is to justify the severity of the problem: you need to convince the donor that the problem is worthy of action against it. so be aware, in this section, of any questions the donor might have against the problems urgency. Another goal is to discuss the history of your organization. You might highlight past accomplishments, talk about the organization’s mission statement, talk about what you do, past work, etc. The idea here is to prove that if the donor gives you the money that you would be responsible with it, and that you have the capacity to accomplish the solution to the problem. Justification for why you can’t currently solve the problem is also useful in this section, if it fits for the given case.

Vision for the future/why you why now—This is where you reveal the solution to the problem, and then discuss why the donor him or herself should be the person to help. It is a technical section where you prove to the donor that you know, in detail, what you will do once you have the money. This requires you to succinctly and concisely describe the most important aspects of the solution in clear language. If you’re proposing a new building, this might mean including schematics and detailed descriptions of specific rooms and what will happen inside them. It might include highlighting how a new scientific program will be conducted (exactly)—it might detail new research that will be done once funding is secured. Whatever project you are describing, describe it well and don’t waste words doing so (not always easy).

The second objective of this section is to prove to the donor that they specifically should be the one to give and make the project possible. This is the part where you can begin to turn the donor into the hero that saves the day. Why this gift in particular? What would make it so great? What would the gift allow you to do that you couldn’t do without it? Why should this donor in particular be the one to give? Answer these questions here, and in doing so, flatter the donor—but do not flatter because you want the money, do it because if the donor gives the gift they deserve to be flattered. Write to the donor as if he/she has already given the gift, and in so doing, avoid appearing needy and avoid treating the donor like an atm—in other words: don’t overdo it. Be rational, yet passionate.

Call to action—This is the crescendo, the climax, the reasons for giving and meaning behind the project are
clearly established at this point and this section emphasizes them as a way to end the proposal with emotional or logical resonance. As such, this is not a section for technical information about the project: it is for why the project matters. This is also the section where you ask for the money. It should be specific, direct, and clear. Do you want a onetime gift of one million dollars? Do you want them to give it over time? Write a check? Is it a planned gift? Call someone to discuss it in more detail? This is the place for clear and technical information on the gift process—however, stay conversational in tone. And it is almost always advisable to end this section on an emotionally resonant note.