

ITEMS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE WRITING YOUR ONE-PAGER (OR SIMILAR DOCUMENTS FOR DECISION-MAKERS)

Preparing the one-pagers is an important exercise that illustrates, and hopefully improves upon, your ability to communicate with decision makers. Over the last two years, common problems have arisen with the writing style of the one-pagers, usually requiring revisions before being posted on the web. Few people, if anyone, can write the one-pager in 30 minutes – so you probably should not try. Writing something brief often takes more time and thought than a longer paper. Below are guidelines (not rigid rules) for you to consider. Some of them may seem obvious; however, they would not be included if violations were not common.

- Include a title and your name. Follow formatting instructions (or your submission may be returned to you before the Program Office reviews it).
- Tell the reader what she/he needs to know, not what he/she already knows, and do not provide excessive detail. For example, don't use a full paragraph to tell the reader that our society is aging unless you think she/he is unaware.
- As a guideline related to writing for decision-makers in general, beyond the one-pagers for the project, identify your reader(s) and think of the following:
 - Does he/she absorb best through written or oral presentations?
 - Will he/she read long documents? (even if so, a short summary is always useful)
 - Can your reader make a final decision or will her/she need to convince others, e.g., the Board? If so, what information will your reader need to take to higher levels.
 - Are there multiple readers or audiences who will be involved in making any decisions?
- Describe your project. A common problem with past submissions is a lack of clarity about what is ongoing in the organization (some of which may need to be described as context) and what your contribution will be.
- Outline before you write. Full-sentence outlines are a good discipline. However, if you are having writer's block, which virtually all of us get occasionally, just write down your thoughts in any order, and then outline.
- Subtitles are helpful.
- Look at each sentence. If it does not contribute to your message, delete it. Also, watch the order of sentences and paragraphs – look at each one in turn. If the ordering could readily be changed, you probably have not thought through the logic of your presentation.

- Avoid unnecessary trite statements, slogans, superlatives, and adjectives generally. Words such as pioneering, comprehensive, optimal, synergistic, breakthrough, novel, and unique are rarely helpful. The facts and logic should speak for themselves. Avoid vague statements.
- Use first person (I, we, ours) sparingly. (We didn't say "never.")
- If you use initials or abbreviations, make sure reader will know what they mean, or define them.
- Put yourselves in the shoes of your reader and think about what information he/she needs to make a decision. For example, many of the project summaries prepared for the Practice Change Fellows program call for a feasibility study to see if the project is plausible, e.g., will the costs be reasonable in relationship to the expected outcomes. Can a preliminary study be done early on (or even before presenting the proposal)?