FREE CHECKLIST

Grant Proposal Red Flags Checklist (Free PDF)

Fifteen warning signs reviewers notice in a grant proposal, grouped by section, each with a quick fix and a box to tick once your draft is clear of it.

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> Reviewers read many applications against the same criteria. These are fifteen things that make them doubt a proposal. Tick each box only when your draft is clear of the problem. The list comes from common review practice and is not a statement of any one funder's rules.

Draft details

Proposal title:

Funder:

Deadline:

Reviewed by:

Fit and instructions

- [ ] **1. The project does not match the funder's stated priorities.** Fix: quote the priority you are answering. If you cannot find one, reconsider applying.
- [ ] **2. A required section, question or attachment is missing.** Fix: build a checklist from the instructions and tick off every item.
- [ ] **3. Page, word, font or formatting limits are ignored.** Fix: check the final file, not the draft. Limits are rules.

Need

- [ ] **4. The need is described with no local evidence.** Fix: add one or two local figures with source and year.
- [ ] **5. The need is about the organization's finances.** Fix: describe the gap in the community, not your budget.
- [ ] **6. Statistics have no source.** Fix: give a source and year for every figure, or remove it.

Project design

- [ ] **7. Activities do not connect to the outcomes promised.** Fix: trace each outcome back to an activity that could produce it.
- [ ] **8. Objectives cannot be measured.** Fix: state who will change, by how much, by when and measured how.
- [ ] **9. The timeline is missing or unrealistic.** Fix: list each activity with an owner and dates inside the grant period.

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Capacity and evaluation

- [ ] **10. Capacity is claimed with adjectives, not facts.** Fix: replace "experienced" with what you did, when and with what result.
- [ ] **11. Partners are named with no confirmed role.** Fix: describe what each has agreed to do, backed by a letter.
- [ ] **12. The evaluation plan lists activities, not measures.** Fix: for each objective, name the measure, the tool, who collects it and when.

Budget and finish

- [ ] **13. The budget does not match the narrative.** Fix: check every number, role and activity appears in both.
- [ ] **14. Budget lines have no explanation.** Fix: show how each amount was calculated and what it supports.
- [ ] **15. Typos, unexplained jargon, mixed terms and leftover text from another application.** Fix: one person reads the whole thing cold, start to finish.

Your fix list

Write down the red flags you found and who will fix each one.

Red flag number	What needs to change	Who	By when

> **Want help with this?** The Complete Grant Architect is a free 16-week grant writing course, and you can hire a grant writer for your next proposal. Both are at subthesis.com.

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