

Action Proposals

In the business world, a proposal is a prospectus of some work (research, study, analysis, project) that the writer's group proposes to perform for a sponsor or management group which has the power to fund or authorize the work. The purpose is to sell the idea and document the competence of the work group to the sponsor.

In a group like the Abalone Alliance, the purpose is similar — to convince all the local member-groups that an action has merit, convince them that the Alliance can adequately carry it out, and persuade as many people as possible in each member-group to work on the action. A proposal provides an opportunity to communicate with everyone (in a written, unambiguous way) what will be done, by whom, when, and to what purpose. In a group as large and dispersed as the Abalone Alliance, this communication is essential. Everything needed by everyone who must approve the proposal should be in the proposal — all the information, all the opinions, all the thought that has gone into it.

Preparing a proposal takes time and energy, but this effort is often repaid many times over by not having to explain the purpose of the action repeatedly to new people and by avoiding miscommunication (and the bad feelings it often causes).

To be effective, a proposal must clearly show that:

- 1) the action will achieve an important short-term goal and also long-term strategic value in building the movement for social change and creating a better world;
- 2) enough background study has been done: the group understands the context in which the action will be carried out, the resources available to it, and why the action will be effective;
- 3) the group has planned the work meticulously, knows how to proceed, and has considered contingencies if things don't work out as planned; and
- 4) the group has worked out a budget and time schedule consistent with the situation and the abilities of everyone who will be involved.

To accomplish this, the proposal normally contains at least eight major sections:

- 1) The **Introduction** quickly summarizes the action and explains the history of the proposal, who has worked on it, and why they were inspired to work on it.
- 2) The **Background** explains the need for the action, a history of actions leading up to this one and how this action improves upon or continues these earlier actions, the political context in which this action will be undertaken, the rationale for undertaking this action (versus some other action or no action at all), and how this action utilizes the strengths of the Alliance.
- 3) The **Goals/Objectives** section is a very specific listing of the realistic objectives that the action hopes to accomplish. It should not list rhetorical demands/statements-of-unity (these should be included as part of the Description of Action), but it should present specifically who and what is to be affected by the action. For example it should include important outreach goals (“involve 1,000 people directly in the action who have never done any kind of political action before,” “expose 4,000 people to the information in the action handbook,” “prepare 2,000 people for nonviolent action,” “reach 1 million people through television news coverage with the message that many people are opposed to nuclear power and will put their bodies on the line to stop it,”) and morale goals (“excite people enough so that another major demonstration can easily be mounted in 6-months”).

The list should be as clear as possible about who will be affected (utility officials, the Governor, people in the local areas, the people of California, the participants in the action), how they will be affected, how much they will be affected, and what actions they will take as a result. The goals should be specific enough so that at the end we can determine whether the action actually accomplished its goals, and realistic enough that we do actually accomplish most of them.

- 4) The **Description of the Action** should describe in detail what will be done, who will do it, when, where, who it is directed at and how it will reach them, whether it will be effective and how, why this approach was chosen, how many people are necessary at a minimum and what skills they must have to accomplish the goals, how those people will be attracted, the types of outreach that will be done, how decisions will be made, etc., etc. Contingency plans should be included (what if it rains?, what if too few people show up?, too many?, what if the landowner providing the staging areas is intimidated?, what if the authorities agree to negotiate?).

5) A **Time Schedule** is important to show when each major task (during and leading up to the action) will be worked on and completed. A time schedule makes it possible to know whether there is enough time to adequately prepare for the action without burning out all the organizers. A graphical representation is easiest to interpret. For example:

	2002				
	January	February	March	April	May
Handbook written	X-----X				
Editing and approval		X-----P---A			
Typeset			X-----X		
Printed				X---X	
Distributed				X-----X	
Leaflets prepared		X-----X			
Printed			X-----X		
Distributed			X-----X		X-----X

6) A **Budget** indicates how much it will all cost and where the money will come from. Will the action bring in money? How will it be distributed? Are there ways to lessen the cost? What is essential and what not?

7) **Possible Problems/Concerns** is a listing of the objections that have been raised about the proposal in preliminary discussion along with satisfactory solutions if they exist. This provides a place to address all the nay-sayers and skeptics and also to indicate areas where additional work is needed.

8) The **Approval Schedule** explains the procedure for Alliance approval and when each local group must consent-to/reject the proposal.

Note also, the Abalone Alliance Process handbook specifies (p. 4): "Proposals for actions must include the text of any Nonviolence Code intended for that particular action. Endorsement proposals for actions must also include any Nonviolence Code in use for that action."

— Prepared by Randy Schutt, P.O. Box 608867, Cleveland, OH 44108 <<http://www.vernalproject.org>>. OK to copy for non-commercial purposes.