What is a concept paper?

A concept paper is a one or two page document that lays the groundwork for the new activity or program proposal. It is the core document for a technical proposal. CP sometimes referred to as a pre-proposal, and reserved for longer proposals. Just as in a position paper, the concept paper or pre-proposal should contain all of the main arguments and evidence you will use to convince your reader to give you something.

Elements involved to convince reader:

Convince the reader that:
- There is a problem that needs to be solved
- You (or the company or organization you represent) know the solution to the problem
- You are the best person or team to solve the problem
- Proving that you know the subject matter (e.g., previous actions that have been taken to solve this or similar problems)
- Proving that you are a good risk.
- Presenting clearly and concisely an action plan that is efficient, logical, realistic, and economically feasible.
- Detailing how both you and the reader(s) will benefit from supporting your request.

How will the concept paper be used?

The concept paper is a central document from which the needs assessment, the detailed program development, and the full formal proposal flow. Here are several ways how a concept paper can be a valuable tool:

1. CP communicates your intent to create a new activity or program to clients or stakeholders (e.g. your branding program, identity and product development).
2. CP enables reviewers to give approval to proceed with the needs assessment and full proposal development.
3. CP provides the information on the essentials of the new program/activity.

4. CP enables rethinking and revision if needed before further effort and time are spent on the details of the program/activity and formal proposal.
5. CP gives operational and stakeholder groups an "initial reference" to the new program/activity, and allowing them to make 'approval'
6. CP as frame of reference assists all parties with framework on program development and operational planning.
7. CP provides the platform on details of the proposal document, and its appendices (the CP is part of the appendix to the proposal).
8. CP provides general promotional copy for banner, web site, and other publicity materials.
9. After implementation of the program, CP will become the internal communication audit OR review reference on program development, accountability and sustainability.

What information is in the concept paper?

Outline for a Concept Paper

I. Introduction
   • Statement of the problem
   • Statement of the solution
   • Brief statement of how the solution will benefit the reader(s)

II. Background
   • Explanation of key terms
   • Proof that you know the issues surrounding the problem
   • Proof that you know what action has been taken to solve similar problems
   • Proof that you (or someone you are associated with) can carry out the action plan

III. Action Plan and Requirements
   • A set of objectives (what your plan will accomplish)
   • An action plan (who will do what and when) keyed to the objectives
   • A description of what you need to implement the plan
   • A cost/benefit analysis of the plan

IV. Benefits
   • An explanation of why the plan will work
   • A set of outcomes keyed to the objectives
   • A description of how you and the reader(s) will benefit
   • Proof that you are the best person or team to carry out the action plan
   • A statement demonstrating that your plan is the best approach to solving the problem