Proposal Budget Alignment Checklist

Your budget is the proposal written in numbers. Reviewers read it alongside the narrative, and every gap between the two raises a question about whether you can deliver. Use this checklist to make the story and the numbers match, whoever the funder is.

WHO IT IS FOR
Finance staff, proposal writers, and program leads

WHEN TO USE IT
When the narrative and budget have full drafts, and again before submission

WHO LEADS IT
Ideally someone who did not build the budget

How to use this checklist

1. Put the narrative, logic model or logframe, budget, and budget justification (also called budget notes or budget narrative) side by side.
2. Mark each item Yes, Partly, No, or N/A (not applicable). Write the fix and the owner for every Partly or No.
3. Resolve every No before submission. Agree as a team which Partly items are acceptable.
4. Always follow the funder's own cost rules first. The examples in brackets come from three widely used rule sets: US federal awards (2 CFR 200), European Union external action grants, and UK FCDO accountable grants.

A. Staffing matches the promised services

Check	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Fix and owner
Every activity in the narrative has a named role and enough staff time (level of effort) in the budget.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
No one is budgeted above 100 percent of their time across all funded projects.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Salaries follow your pay policy and match rates used on other awards.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Volunteer or donated time is counted only where the funder allows it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

B. Data and MEL (monitoring, evaluation, and learning) costs are included

Check	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Fix and owner
MEL staff time, data collection, tools, and data quality checks are costed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Every baseline, survey, or assessment promised in the narrative has a budget line.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Any required evaluation or audit is budgeted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Learning sessions and reporting costs, such as translation and design, are included.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

C. Partner roles are confirmed and costed

Check	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Fix and owner
Each partner named in the narrative has an agreed role and a confirmed budget.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Letters of commitment or memoranda of understanding are signed or scheduled.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Each partner arrangement is correctly classed as a subgrant or a contract, as the funder defines them (US example: 2 CFR 200.331).	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Partner budgets use the same activity numbers and timeline as yours, and partner overheads follow the funder's rules.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

D. Indirect costs

Check	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Fix and owner
The indirect rate is one the funder accepts: a negotiated rate, the funder's fixed rate or cap, or a de minimis rate (examples: up to 15 percent of modified total direct costs under US 2 CFR 200.414(f); a fixed percentage set in the contract for EU external action grants; FCDO's non-project attributable costs, or NPAC, method).	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The rate is applied to the base the funder specifies, such as total direct costs or modified total direct costs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
No cost is charged both as a direct cost and inside the indirect rate. All three rule sets above require this.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

E. Match and cost share

Check	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Fix and owner
The required match is calculated on the right base and shown clearly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Match sources are confirmed in writing and not counted toward another award (US example: 2 CFR 200.306).	☐	☐	☐	☐	
In-kind contributions are valued with a documented, reasonable method.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

F. Every cost is eligible under the funder's rules

Check	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Fix and owner
Each cost is necessary for the work, reasonable, incurred within the award period, and verifiable in your accounts. These principles are common to US, EU, and FCDO rules.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Items many funders exclude are removed unless the call allows them, such as contingency lines, fundraising, or the cost of preparing the proposal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The currency, exchange rate, and its date and source are stated, and inflation assumptions are explained.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

G. Narrative and budget tell the same story

Check	Yes	Partly	No	N/A	Fix and owner
Participant numbers, sites, sessions, months, and staff numbers are identical in every document.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Every budget line traces to an activity, and every activity has a budget line.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
The budget justification shows how each estimate was built, such as unit cost times quantity.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Totals match across all forms and attachments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	
All costs fall within the award period, and the timeline matches the work plan.	☐	☐	☐	☐	

WORKED MINI EXAMPLE

Brightwater Reading Trust checks its reading clubs budget

All names, places, and figures in this example are invented for illustration.

Brightwater's finance lead, who did not write the narrative, ran the checklist three days before the deadline. Most items were Yes. Five were not.

Section	What the review found	Fix	Owner
A	The narrative promises 12 clubs, but the budget covers coordinator time for 10.	Increase coordinator time to cover 12 clubs, or reduce the narrative to 10 clubs. The team chose 12 and trimmed book costs to fit.	Finance lead
B	The narrative promises reading assessments at the start and end of each term, but no budget line covers assessor time or printed tools.	Add a line for assessor time and assessment materials, costed per child per term.	MEL officer
C	One partner school is described as hosting four clubs, but its letter of commitment mentions only two.	Ask the principal for an updated letter that confirms four clubs and room access.	Program lead
F	The budget includes a 5 percent contingency line, which this funder's guidelines do not allow.	Remove the line and explain in the budget notes how cost changes will be managed.	Finance lead
G	The narrative describes a 24-month program, but the budget covers 18 months.	Extend the budget to 24 months and update the totals on the cover form.	Finance lead

None of these gaps was hard to fix once someone looked for it. Each one, left in place, would have given a reviewer a reason to doubt the plan.

Want a second pair of eyes before you submit?

Edit Right Advisors is a grant writing and advisory firm. We help nonprofits and NGOs win funding and grow their impact. We can screen an opportunity with you, shape the program logic, build your MEL (monitoring, evaluation, and learning) plan, or review a full draft so that every part holds together.

FREE 30-MINUTE CONSULTATION

Book a free 30-minute consultation: calendly.com/editrightadvisors

The full series: five templates, each with a companion guide

RO1	Bid or No Bid Funding Opportunity Checklist (guide: G01)
RO2	Pre-Proposal Planning Worksheet (guide: G02)
RO3	Logic Model and Theory of Change Template (guide: G03)
RO4	Proposal-Stage MEL Starter Template (guide: G04)
RO5	Proposal Budget Alignment Checklist (guide: G05)

Sources and credits

Follow your funder's rules first. The three rule sets used as examples, all accessed October 27, 2026:

United States: 2 CFR Part 200 (eCFR), sections 200.306 Cost sharing (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.306), 200.331 Subrecipient and contractor determinations (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.331), 200.403 Factors affecting allowability of costs (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.403), and 200.414 Indirect costs (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/section-200.414).

European Union: General conditions applicable to European Union-financed grant contracts for external actions (PRAG Annex II), Article 14, Eligible costs: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/e3h2_gencond_en_0.pdf. Check the PRAG edition named in your call.

United Kingdom: FCDO, Programme expenditure: eligible cost guidance for accountable grant arrangements (August 2021): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-accountable-grant-arrangement-budget-template-and-guidance.

The checklist and example are original Edit Right Advisors material.

© 2026 Edit Right Advisors. Free to use and share with attribution; not for resale (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Suggested credit when you share or adapt this resource: Edit Right Advisors (2026). Proposal Budget Alignment Checklist. editright.io. Licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/