



Mobilization resources for civil society organizations in a digital context

Session 3: Connecting to make an impact Keys to success with proposals

2025



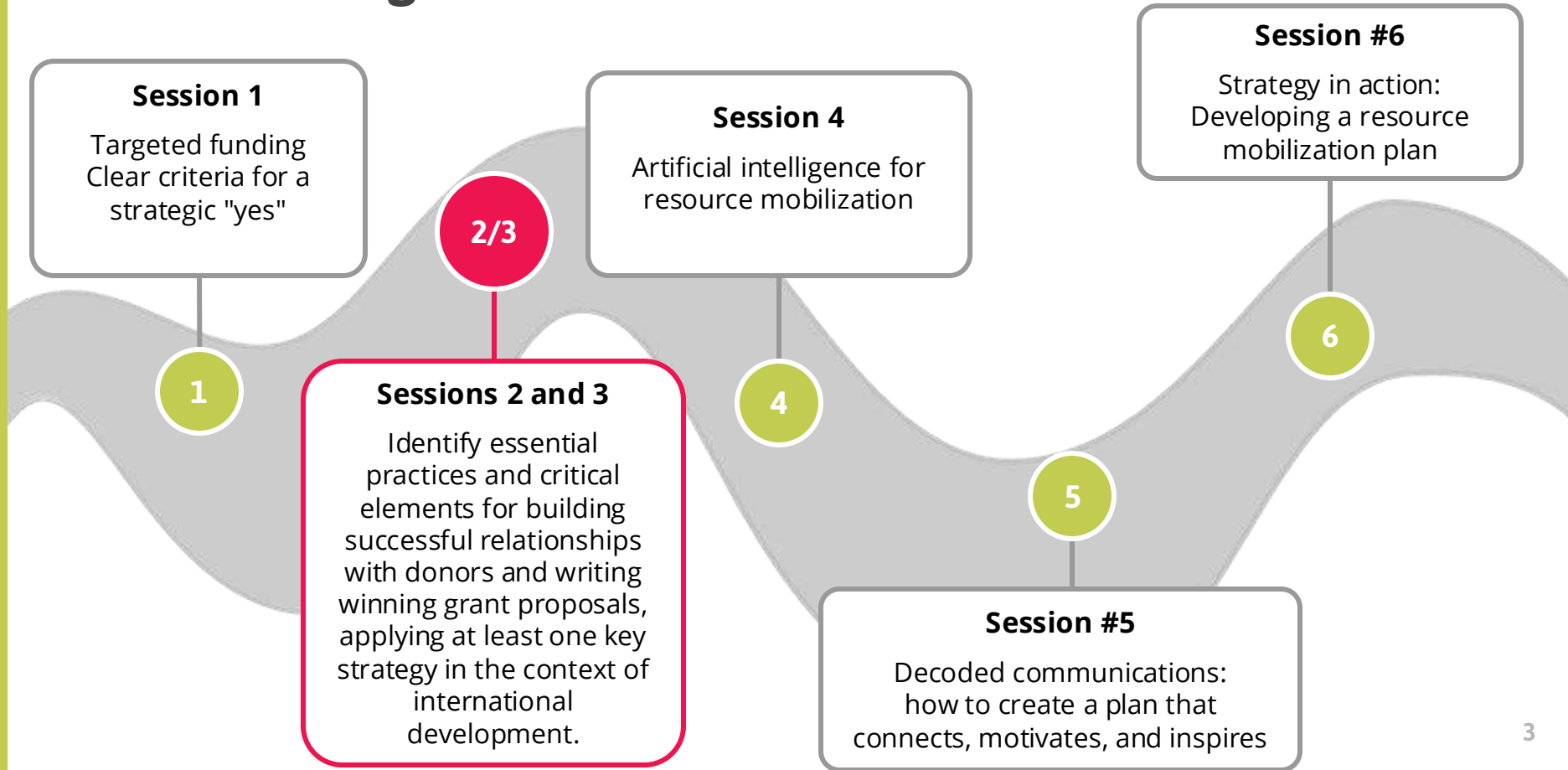
**Let's now move from the initial
contact in session #2 to the
written pitch in session #3**



Approaching donors and winning proposals

These combined sessions reinforce each other

Slide showing the sessions and where we are headed



Session 3: Objectives

Objectives of these sessions

- ✓ Develop a strategic approach plan for a potential donor organization, justifying the choice of donor and the structure of the request ("The Ask") in order to maximize alignment and chances of success.
- ✓ **Build the central argument of a grant proposal, convincingly linking the problem, the solution, the SMART objectives, and the sustainability strategy.**
- ✓ **Evaluate the consistency and potential for success of a donor approach plan, judging how donor relationship strategies and proposal structure reinforce each other to support a decision.**

The key resource and inspiration for the day

YOU'RE ALREADY MAKING
A DIFFERENCE. MAKE EVEN
MORE WITH WINNING GRANTS.

JAMES RUELL NONPROFITS



Building the bridge to winning proposals



Building the bridge to winning proposals



What successes (or failures) have you encountered in your approaches to donors?

What successes (or failures) have you encountered with proposals sent to donors?



Proposal architecture: first impressions

- Cover letter:
 - Brief (1 to 2 pages), personalized for the donor.
 - Introduces the NGO and the proposal, the link to the funding organization's priorities (e.g., geographic, sectoral), the desired impact, and the passion behind the project.
- Executive summary:
 - CRITICAL! (4-6 concise paragraphs), to be written at the end.
 - Convince: project vital for development, NGO capable of acting in complex contexts, relevant plan.
 - Include: project name, contact, NGO, problem (development context), objectives, summary, expected results, costs.

The gateway: cover letter and executive summary



The challenge of the executive summary

What will we do?

Write the first 3 to 5 sentences of an executive summary designed to immediately capture the interest of the funder.

Work in small groups:

- In groups, write your introductory sentences. You must communicate convincingly:
 - The URGENT problem.
 - Your innovative solution.
 - The expected key impact.

Pooling ideas:

We will share the examples in order to analyze, as a group, what makes them more effective and why.

Grab attention in 30 seconds



The heart: problem, solution, and measurable impact

Presentation of the problem (development context):

- Convincing description of the problem (ideally one page).
- Recent data (local, national, global), clarity, urgency, but possible solution.
- Story: community (protagonist), problem (antagonist), NGO (guide).

Definition of the need and the transformative response



The heart: problem, solution, and measurable impact

Description of the project/program (innovative solution):

- Your solution: what, how, why, who, when, where (in which country/region).
- Alignment with the donor's mission and mandate (and SDGs, if applicable).

Define the need and the transformative response



The heart: problem, solution, and measurable impact

Goals and objectives (SMART impact):

- Define success! SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound).
- Goals (broad, aligned with development) -> objectives (concrete, measurable in the community).

Define the need and its transformative response



From problem to SMART goal

Explanation:

This practical activity shows how to transform a general problem into a specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound goal.

Example:

- **Problem:** High post-harvest losses among smallholder farmers.
- **SMART objective:** Train 50 farmers in Los Pinos to reduce their crop losses by 30% over the next 12 months.

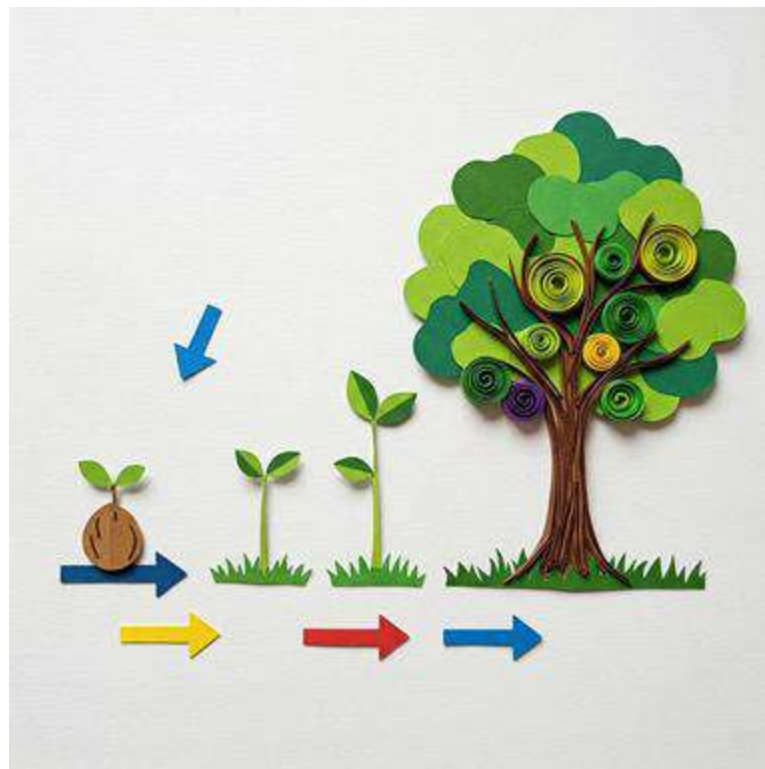
Individual or pair work:

- Think of a common problem in your region and write down 1-2 SMART goals to address it, making sure they meet all 5 criteria.

Sharing:

A few volunteers will share their goals to receive feedback from the group on each of the 5 SMART criteria.

Measuring change



Implementation and feasibility: methods and evaluation

- **Methods and strategy (the "HOW" in the field):**
 - Detailed plan of action: logical steps, timeline, roles (local/international staff, volunteers), key activities.
 - Anticipate risks (security, logistics, politics) and have mitigation strategies in place.
- **Evaluation plan (measuring success and learning):**
 - How to measure progress and define success? Concrete indicators.
 - Outputs (e.g., workshops organized) vs. outcomes/impact (e.g., improved incomes, reduced infant mortality).
 - Methods (quantitative/qualitative), who (M&E team), when, how?



Long-term viability: sustainability and budget

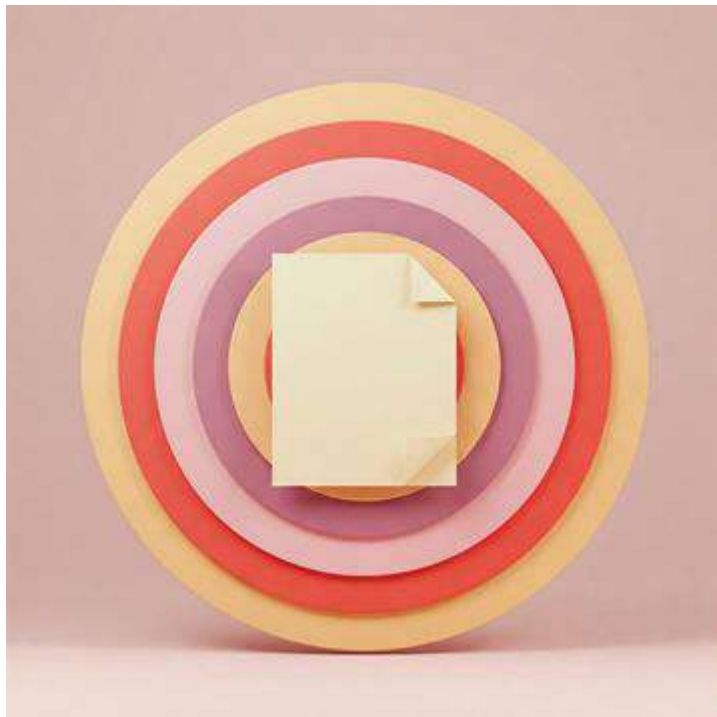
- **Sustainability (lasting impact):**
 - How will the impact/project continue after the grant ends? (e.g., local capacity building, social enterprise models).
 - Strategies: expansion, revenue diversification, transfer to local actors.
- **Budget (realistic and justified):**
 - Detailed, every dollar counts. Align with the funder's scale and ranges.
 - Indicate other sources, personnel costs (local vs. expatriate recruitment), operational expenses in the field.
- **Brief mention:** other supporting elements (letters of support from local partner organizations, testimonials, CVs of key staff).

Securing the future: sustainability
and responsible budgeting.



Strategic positioning and its staff

- **Strategic positioning:**
 - ALIGNMENT IS IMPORTANT! Find out about the organization funding the project (geographical and thematic priorities).
 - Speak their language, highlight your common interests.
 - Memorable message: what is the ONE thing that should be remembered about your development project?
 - Address risks proactively (administrative risks, action without prejudice, etc.).
- **Your central proposal template:**
 - Create a solid base document.
 - ADAPT, DON'T COPY AND PASTE, for each funder.



Key conclusions and concrete recommendations

- With donors: trust -> preparation -> clear request -> follow-up and demonstration of impact.
- In proposals: first impressions → clear problem/solution (development context) → measurable impact (smart) → viability and sustainability.

Winning strategy:
alignment and effectiveness



Key conclusions and concrete recommendations

Key recommendations for action:

- Personalize relentlessly.
- Show, don't just tell (field data, beneficiary testimonials).
- Plan for sustainability and an early exit strategy.
- Seek external advice (colleagues with experience in the region or sector, and someone with no prior knowledge).

**Winning strategy:
alignment and efficiency.**



Thank you!



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 **Session moderator:** Camilo Forero

 **Module creator:** Camilo Forero