

Grant Writing - - Just the Basics

Grant writing can be fun! Honest. It is one of the most beneficial tasks to undertake for your school or organization. It can help you plan, focus, grow, change and clarify missions, goals and objectives. Even when your grant is denied, you can learn and benefit from the process. The following are just tips based on experiences of grant writers, fundraisers, grant reviewers, and grant application project directors. I hope you find it useful.

Before any grant application is written, there are some things you can do that will make the process easier and, hopefully, more successful.

If the grant application an on-line application and requires a log-on name/password, follow the instructions EARLY. DO NOT wait until the last minute to log on to read any guidelines, applications.

1. Carefully READ guidelines and applications well in advance of the due date. Ask the following questions:
 - Are we eligible to apply?
 - What do they fund? — planning, projects, artistic services, consultants, residencies, bricks and mortar, program assessment, operations?
 - What is the criteria for funding?
 - What is the maximum amount you can request?
 - What is the absolute due date for the application?
 - Can you request an advance proposal review?
 - What do they “like” to fund, philosophically, politically and/or according to the source of their funding?
2. If some of the above information is not available:
 - Request an annual report. Annual report indicate whom they funded, for what and how much.
 - Call or visit the staff person at the granting agency. Before you call or visit, read everything carefully so you do not waste time asking questions already answered.
 1. Describe your organization. Describe what you want to accomplish. Ask if their agency would fund the kinds of activities you described.

Ask if there are projects they would rather fund. Clarify your objectives that would be more compelling to their decision makers.

2. Requests samples of funded and not-funded proposals. Some funders will do this, some will not. If they give you one, DO NOT copy it, but use it as a guide to help you plan and write.
 3. Ask their advice about writing the proposal and presenting the information they want to see.
 4. Ask who determines what is funded. Is it an internal process with staff involvement or panelists, foundation board members, etc. Is the decision made by panelists? If so, ask about their backgrounds, and what might be their frame of reference (artists, educators, physicians, higher education)? A foundation may have family or board members who have personal agendas (funding for the homeless children, etc.) that they have a particular desire to fund.
 5. Ask if minutes or panel comments are available to you if the funding is denied.
 6. Ask what the grant reviewers/panelists will receive.....just the narrative and budget sheets? Copies of supplemental information?
 8. Take their advice and suggestions seriously, and apply them to your applications. They are the experts in understanding how their agency makes their decisions and they know individual panelists.
3. Prepare and organize your materials that you will use to write a proposal. Read the guidelines and application carefully and pay close attention to any other information they request.
1. Gather together any information about your organization that will enable you to write an informed, complete proposal. Some of the information they may ask might be included in the following:
 - Your annual report, newsletters, long-range plan, school plan, any document that lists demographic information, mission statements, goals and objectives.
 - Letter from the IRS indicating your non-profit status.
 - A list of your board members or faculty and their qualifications.
 - Resumes for your project staff.

- Descriptions of your constituency, students, audiences.
 - A list of those you think might be willing to write letters of support for you should your application permit this.
2. Determine what kinds of information are *required* along with the application. The kinds of additional documentation will vary from application to application, so be sure to pay attention to any requirements for supplemental information. *Don't send anything they don't request.* New on-line processes require uploading documents. Some of the documents they may request include:
- IRS non-profit status letter.
 - An organizational plan (long-range plan, 3-5 year school plan, organization's mission statement, goals and objectives)
 - Resumes for project staff, artists, consultants, faculty, etc.
 - A demographic and community description of your intended audience.
 - Status reports or evaluations of your current program.
 - Examples of materials that further describe your organization (video tapes, annual reports, documentation of past projects, your guide to services, newsletters, exhibition/performance programs, etc.).
 - Letters of support from your board, school superintendent, agency director, etc. Don't overload on letters of support. And, don't send any if they didn't ask for them.
 - Always check the appropriateness of your supplemental documentation. Follow the guidelines of the application and if you have any question, do not hesitate to call the staff person at the funding agency and ask them.
3. Read the application and review criteria again. Based on their review criteria, ask the following questions:
- Does the review criteria parallel their application questions, or do you need to weave the information required in the review criteria into your responses to the questions? Often, applicants will totally ignore the review criteria and simply answer the narrative

questions.

- Do any of the review criteria apply to the budget?
- Do any of the review criteria apply to supplemental documentation?

4. Determine how you will present the physical information.

- If you must submit an on-line application, does it require an initial registration for a login to a portal? If so, is there a lag time before you can work on the application on-line. **DON'T** wait until one or two days before an application is due to explore an on-line process.
- If you don't submit it on-line, do they want a digital file?
- Do they require both digital and hard-copy (wet) submission and originally written signatures?
- If you download an application from on-line, can you work on it, save and return to the task? Find this out **BEFORE** you spend too much time entering data.
- Can you answer narrative questions separately or must you also enter those into a prescribed space?
- *If asked to up-load documents, make sure you follow instructions. Some applications require that you upload the required form to your desktop, fill in the info, save and then upload the form onto the application. In some cases, if you don't do this step, the form uploads empty of data.*
- If you are required to submit letters of support, **DON'T** draft them yourself and submit. Have the individual draft them on letterhead, and **SIGN** them, then scan and upload. Or have them email the letter to you. Email also functions as an official signature. Nothing is worse than letters crafted by the grant writer that shares the same language, font, format and has no signature. It is deceitful.

5. Once you have decided on how you will complete the application, note the following:

- If you are generating the entire or parts of the application on computer....
 - Don't inadvertently delete any application components.

- Follow their instructions to the letter about font style, type size, margins, headings, page numbering, one-sided/two sided, etc.
 - Don't use fancy fonts, script or all caps.
 - Don't cram the whole space with text. Pay attention to white space, indentions, using bold or italics to emphasize, underlining, clear headings.
6. Do not, under any circumstances, submit a handwritten application. Chances are that the agency will simply reject the application. If they don't, panelists will not give it the attention they will other applications. Most now are submitted online, anyway.
7. Just some major hints from experience:
- Organize your information and write a draft. Add any information from other documents that you may have already written.
 - Again, keep looking at the review criteria as you answer each question.
 - Does the question have multiple questions? If so, don't forget to answer each segment. (Unfortunately, most applicants **ONLY** answer the first question they see.)
 - Answer the questions truthfully. Don't make promises your organization can't keep or make your organization look more successful than it is. Panelists have an uncanny ability to detect inflated narratives and budgets. At the same time, ***don't whine!*** Funders want to fund winners, not those who are desperate. They want to fund those most capable of successfully implementing their grant projects. It is better for you to present a thoughtful, clear proposal that demonstrates your organization's ability to plan and implement a project for which you seek funding. It is better if you're candid about organizational strengths but do communicate strategies for dealing with weaknesses.
 - **DO NOT LIE. PLEASE.** Do not fabricate statistics, demographic data, etc. In this day and age, it is too easy to verify just about anything by searching the internet. Do not disguise with euphemisms, a different title. Assume panelists are panelists because they are qualified.
8. Write simply and clearly and make your proposal visually attractive.
- Use correct grammar.

- Spell accurately.
- Do not use excessive jargon.
- Do not assume the reader is going to understand acronyms. Spell them out at least the first time you use them.
- Remember, this is not a short story or poetry, stay away from dramatic metaphors and do not become overly literary. Make each word count and eliminate excessive words especially if you are limited to a specific number of pages or characters. Use short words and fewer words that mean the same thing instead of more or long words. Here are some examples:
 - Accomplish - do
 - Attempt - try
 - Designate - name
 - An additional - another
 - As soon as - when
 - Take into consideration - consider
 - For the purpose of - to or for
 - In the event that - if

You get the idea.....

- Find ways to let your organizational personality and energy come through. If your proposal is appropriately creative, that is good, but don't make it cute. It is ok to use humor, but again, pay attention to appropriateness.
- Word your proposal so that it comes from your organization and not just the writer. Panelists shy away from proposals that appear to be the idea and work of only one person or a professional grantwriter.
- *Edit, edit, edit.* Have someone familiar with your organization edit for content and clarity. Have a different someone edit for grammar, spelling, punctuation and consistency. Have someone unfamiliar with your organization and program act as a potential panelist and read your application "cold." They will often have questions about things that are too familiar to you for you to notice.
- ***Give you and your editors plenty of time*** for reflection, making corrections and editing one last time.
- Make it easy for the panelists to read:

Use white space.

Don't decrease the leading (the space between the lines)

Use **bold face**, *italics*, underline, indentions, bullets, etc. to emphasize key words, phrases, headings, etc.

Make it easy for panelists to refer back to specific information, i.e., your supporting documents. For example, (see attachment 1).

Review its overall appearance. Is it clean, clear, easy to read and Organized?

Does it follow all of the instructions for format, margins, etc.?

9. BUDGET! Don't underestimate the power of an accurate budget:

- Do not inflate your budget.
- Pay attention to match, in kind, cash, new cash requirements. If you do not understand the budget categories, terminology, where to place things, etc., call the staff person.
- Be realistic about income and expenses.
- Pay attention to what they fund and do not fund. Do not ask for teacher salaries if they do not fund teachers' salaries. If you are unsure, ask.
- Prepare your budget knowing you, if funded, may be asked audited.
- *Double check your math!* Newer on-line applications have built in business rules.
- Add clarification if necessary. For example, do not list \$10,000 for a consultant without naming the consultant, describing what they will do and adding their resume, if necessary. Do not ask for equipment without naming the piece of equipment. Call the staff person and ask if it is appropriate to add a budget narrative.
- Calculate matches correctly. If all of your staff is spending all of their time on this project, then it is appropriate to calculate 100% of their time and the equivalent value. However, if they are only spending

25% of their time, do not use a 100% match.

- Remember, no matter how wonderful the narrative, a poorly written budget that does not accurately reflect your project proposal may doom your chances.
- It is always to your best interest to submit a budget that reflects the support of as many entities as possible, i.e. partners, your organization and supporters, etc. *Never* ask for the entire budget from your granting source.

10, Putting it all together and submitting it:

- Review once again all the materials you need to submit.
- The original, plus how many hard copies, or only digital or only submit on-line?
- If you are submitting paper applications, in what sequence should the application components be organized.
- If submitting a paper application, is there a return card that needs to be signed?
- Do you have all of the necessary, original or electronic signatures of your director, principal, fiscal officer, superintendent, etc.?
- If submitting it online or emailing attachments, make sure you are complying with their time-frame. Allow for time-differences. Some on-line applications require the application, narrative and budget be submitted online but you mail supplemental materials under separate cover. Often these are due on the same day as the electronically filed application. FOLLOW their directions.
- If snail mailing, *MAIL, it on time and according to their instructions!* Check to see if the due date means actually in their hands on that date or if it simply needs a postmark for that date. ALWAYS ask for a receipt to prove the date you mailed it.
- Understand that everyone has a busy schedule, a family crisis and a dog that eats applications. Do not submit it late. The staffer will just yawn at your excuse. We have heard them all!
- Package it carefully. Prudent people take it themselves to the Post-Office and ask to have the package canceled in their presence. Always

ask for a receipt from the Post Office. The other easy alternative is to use someone like Federal Express who already has a receipt process. Electronically transmit, if that is permitted and now, sometimes required. E-mail is occasionally permitted if the hard copy with original signatures follows. Most agencies no longer accept faxes.

- Postage machines in offices do not count because the date stamp can be manipulated. Do not use them.
- If allowed and you hand deliver a paper copy, do it in person, during business hours and ask for a receipt or confirmation of delivery.
- Do not leave your application under the door mat, tucked in the door jam, on the porch, or as one person did, tied in a Smith's bag in the tree to protect it from the rain.
- Do not complain about the due date or their requirements. If you do not have the time to complete the application well by the due date, then you probably need to wait till the next round of applications. Remember that they sometimes receive hundreds of applications.
- After you have submitted your application, do not hassle the staff about whether you received the funding. Your guidelines should tell you of a notification date. Ask up front for that information. Be patient and wait.
- If your application is funded, fill out all the necessary forms they need to start processing your funds. Complete reports as required and take time to thank the agency. If your application denied, ask for panel comments and talk to the staff. Your next application will be much stronger if you take the time to find out why one was not accepted. Remember, if you denied, don't take it out on the staff - - in 99% of the cases, they do not make any of the funding decisions.
- If you are reapplying for funds, check to see if you have any outstanding paper work, reports, etc. Granting agencies do not like to fund those who have not completed all the requirements for an earlier grant.

Reasons most grants are not funded:

- Writer did NOT read ALL of the instructions. (Sometimes administrators will simply hand the application to the writer without all of the requisite instructions, guidelines, etc. of the funder.)
- When the writer did it all by him/herself the application communicates the ideas of

one individual instead of the entire organization or segment of the organization for which the funding is intended. USING "I" INSTEAD OF WE.

- Data is missing AND narrative questions are missing, incomplete, vague, whine, or makes unrealistic promises.
- The budget appears inflated and there is not enough financial commitment from other sources.
- Poor writing, lack of attention to accuracy, spelling, font guidelines, etc. Sloppiness indicates the recipient may be as sloppy with the funding.
- The application is late. For most online applications, submission is denied once the due date/time has passed. In many cases, the online system simply shuts down

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