

GRANT WRITING GUIDELINES

Introduction

The following guidelines include tips and insights that will help you begin the grant writing process. They answer some basic questions and outline the fundamental elements of researching and writing a grant proposal.

What is a Grant?

A grant is an award made to an individual or an institution to support the specific costs of project implementation or continuation. Grantors make awards to grantees for many reasons, but the need of the grantee is usually the main consideration. The components involved in preparing a grant proposal are:

- Planning
- Researching and identifying potential funding sources
- Understand grant guidelines
- Organizing a budget
- Writing the proposal
- Formatting
- Writing a Letter of Intent

Planning a Grant Proposal

Grant proposals grow out of well planned, clearly organized, and goal oriented projects. Your proposal is, in essence, a description of your project. A proposal based on good planning and thorough research has the greatest chance of acceptance.

Grantors look for creative and innovative ideas that benefit students, teachers and the community. Before you write, start with an idea and be clear about your goals. Plan to address the following criteria:

Need

Identify the need or problem your organization has recognized and is prepared to address.

Solution

Present a clear description of how the project will provide a solution to the problem.

Objectives

Describe specific objectives and the activities that will be implemented to achieve them. Include a timeline. The following questions can help provide focus for your project and create the foundation of a strong proposal.

- What is the problem you are addressing? (Look beyond need; look to the reasons for need.)
- Who else may be addressing this problem? How are they failing or succeeding?
- How will this problem be solved? How will the grantor's participation help realize the solution?
- How will you know the project is succeeding? What will be measured to monitor progress? How will you report this to the grantor?
- What resources do you have? Do you have volunteers, donations, buildings, hardware?
- What qualifies us to solve this problem?
- What obstacles can you anticipate and how will you address them? Keep in mind that even a perfectly planned and beautifully written proposal may be rejected – do not be discouraged if your grant proposal is not successful. There are many reasons why proposals are accepted and rejected that in no way reflect on the quality of your proposed project.

Researching and Identifying Potential Grantors

Finding the right grant for your project takes time. When considering available grants, read through each Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Application (RFA) with the following in mind.

- **Look for grants that match your program's objectives.** Changing your objectives to fit a grant compromises your constituency's needs and can weaken your project.
- **Scrutinize eligibility requirements.** Lists of eligible entities and their qualifications accompany most grants – make sure your program or organization fits those requirements.
- **Note deadlines.** Does the deadline give you enough time to collect data, gain committee approval and write your proposal?
- **Understand the grantor's priorities.** The purpose of the grant and the grantor's priorities will be clearly described in grant request – read these carefully.
- **Know your prospective grantor.** Knowing the objectives and ideals of your grantor, especially if they are private or corporate, will help you appeal to their cause.
- **Remember, grants are not just funding sources** – they are requests for partnerships. Present your project as one that meets your partner's ideals and appeals to their priorities.

Submitting a Letter of Intent

Your first contact with a grantor should be to request information about their missions and goals through annual reports or other published material. Your next contact is a Letter of Intent. A Letter of Intent is a condensed version of the proposal that allows the reviewer to quickly assess whether or not there is a good match

between the grantor's mission and goals and the proposed project. It should be no more than three pages and should consist of the following:

- Summary statement
- Statement of need
- Project description
- Outcomes
- Organizational background
- Credentials
- Budget
- Closing

Make your Letter of Intent as strong and direct as possible. Aside from the project description, which should be the bulk of the letter, each component should be no longer than two paragraphs.

Organizing a Budget

Your budget is one of the first things grantors will look at when they open your proposal. Do your homework on costs and explain your budget, even if the application does not require it.

- Itemize the funds needed for the project.
- Itemize plans for future funding.

Writing the proposal

Writing is a process that requires effort and time. When you are writing, be prepared to make several drafts, each taking you closer to your final proposal. As you are writing, here are a few things to keep in mind:

Follow the Request for Proposal (RFP) Guidelines

Pay very close attention to the RFP's guidelines – straying from them means failure. Using the same section headers and numbering systems outlined in the guidelines will help grantors navigate your proposal.

Maintain a Problem-Solution Theme

A problem-solution theme should run through your entire proposal. You are describing a solution to a problem. Make this clear in your summary and introduction. Your project narrative will detail the activities, objectives and budgets that bind the two together.

Use Clear Language

Complicated language leads to confusion. Grantors do not have time to be confused they may have a stack of hundreds of other proposals to read. Clearly explain your project in plain English. Use simple words, short sentences and clearly defined terms. Write as though your reader is unfamiliar with jargon and has no idea what your project involves.

Proofread

Give yourself time to proofread. Errors in grammar, punctuation or spelling will make your well-planned project appear sloppy. When possible, ask someone else to read your proposal for errors.

Final Writing Tips:

- Use simple, concise language. Be direct.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms, or strictly educational terms.
- Use action verbs.
- Be consistent.
- Don't plagiarize.
- Don't omit criteria.
- Demonstrate good organization and management.
- State credibility of district and/or school; provide credentials of key personnel; provide evidence of resources.
- Include endorsements and testimonials.
- Prove how you intend to solve the problem with measurable data such as statistics and case studies.
- Budget format should be clear and detailed.
- Tell the means. Tell the end result.
- Have an editor proofread.
- Demonstrate tenacity. Follow up and stay in touch.

Format

Formatting requirements are included in most RFPs. These often specify required fonts, spacing and page limitations. The guidelines will also explain the number of copies required, how proposals may be bound and how the pages are to be formatted. Don't lose a grant because you didn't include enough copies for every reader or wrote in a font that is difficult to read. Although formatting requirements will differ, certain components will remain consistent. Grant writers will typically need to organize proposals in seven sections:

1. Summary
2. Introduction
3. Statement of Need
4. Objectives
5. Methods
6. Evaluation
7. Budget

Summary

The summary is a slimmed down version of the entire proposal. It provides a quick overview of the project and its significance. It should be about 250–500 words, and use about one sentence each to address the problem, objectives and methods.

Introduction

Describe your organization in this section, focusing on qualifications, history, and experience.

Statement of Need

Describe the problem that your constituency faces, cite statistical and demographic detail related to the problem and clearly state the need your project will address.

Objectives

Explain the goals of your project and the expected impact it will have on your constituency. Be certain that your objectives are measurable, or indicate how progress towards these objectives will be monitored.

Methods

Clearly describe how you are going to accomplish the objectives of the program. This is the core of your project. How will the project be implemented? What are the specific details?

Evaluation

What quantifiable methods will measure the success of your program? How will this information be reported to the grantor? How frequently will progress be checked?

Budget

Clearly itemize and detail the costs of your project. Break your budget into subcategories so that your reader can understand it in a single glance.

Conclusion

The process of applying for a grant may seem painstaking at first. It can also be a rewarding one as you have the opportunity to both define and refine your proposed project to better meet the needs of your constituencies. Remember: If at first you don't succeed, there are literally hundreds of potential funding sources out there, and one is bound to be perfect for your project!