

# Writing for Grants

First of all, no one adores writing for grants. By definition, if you have to write for a grant, you don't have money for the project that you want to do. And, you have to ask someone else for money. This isn't as bad as asking your parents for a loan, but it can be tedious nonetheless. But try to think about writing for a grant as a chance to become clear about your great idea. Use the grant writing process as a way to begin your research and you will find your grant writing both useful and productive. You will win some grants and you will lose some grants. Smaller grants can be easier to win than larger grants because of the number of competitors. But try....

Phase I. Do you know exactly what you want to do? Do you know who the audience for your idea might be? In other words, what would you do with the money and who would it most benefit? This is the beginning of any grant proposal – the summary.

You need to be able to articulate in writing, exactly what you want to do and why. If you cannot do this part, you might as well give up looking for a grant to fund it. No one wants to fund a half-baked idea. Grantors want to feel good about where the money is going and what the outcome of the grant might be. So, after you figure out exactly what your idea might be, get your persuasive tools (logos, ethos and pathos) out of the barn and begin writing.

Exercise 1: Write a one paragraph summary of your idea that you need funded by some kind of grant.

Phase II. So, the worst case scenario is that you have this great project that you want to do, but it doesn't really fit into any of the grants that you have researched. What should you do?

Research, research, research... I know you don't want to hear it, but you need to sit down for a few days and really search for grants that will best fit your idea.

Also, who do you already know? Do you know anyone who works for a foundation? If so, you might start with those you know to find out if your project might be considered. If you don't know anyone and you have never done this before, here are a few thoughts:

1. With paragraph in hand, ask a few people you know about possible funding sources. People who you work with or for can be of great assistance in directing you to the write sources for grants.

2. With paragraph in hand, hit the library. Librarians are masters in finding information for you. Librarians, after all, work in libraries and are surrounded by lots and lots of information. Librarians are usually more than willing to help direct you to places that can save you loads of time.

3. Hit specific grant libraries (again, with paragraph in hand – it's the only way). Boston has its own grant library, the Foundation Center Cooperating Collection, housed in the Social Sciences Department of the Boston Public Library, where tours, help and grants are catalogued for you. Schedule time to spend a day or so in a grant resource center.

Phase III. So now you have a few grants that seem to be possible candidates. They may or may not match your idea exactly, but maybe they are close enough.

1. Now it is time to read the directions. Just like your first grade teacher told you, read the directions and then re-read the directions. Grants usually have a set of specific requirements. Grantors want grant proposals looking more or less the same so that they can easily determine who should get the money. This is easier to figure out if everyone follows the directions. And, those who don't follow the directions become at best annoying to the committee and at worst, dismissed.

So, re-read the directions. If the grantor asks that a specific cover page be filled out and submitted, do it – even if you have to dig into your closet to find an old typewriter in order to fill out the form.

2. Make lists of things you need to accumulate. Some grants require letters of recommendation, project plans, project photos and/or references. Some grants require film or video. Whatever the specifics, create a list and keep adding to it. This way, when you are about to submit the grant, you can check your list (twice) in order to make sure that everything has been included.

## Phase IV. Write the grant

1. **Generating Writing:** So you have this great idea, you have a few grants that look relevant to this idea, and you have a paragraph about your idea. Now, is the time to put pen to paper. You don't have to start from scratch – you already have your paragraph. Also, since you have had this idea germinating for a while, pull out your old notes and e-mails about this topic.

When this idea first hit you, what were its major parts? What was so compelling about this idea? Let me put it like this, try to get yourself back to the stage where the idea was first born inside you; when you were excited enough about the idea to actually go and do all the research to find grants for it. Write about the idea without editing. Just write where you are...

Think about these questions:

What is the idea?

Why is it a good idea?

How many parts are there to this idea?

Who will care about the idea?

Who will this idea help? How?

Who will this idea hurt? How?

Tell yourself why it is a good idea.

How will you be able to find out if your idea is a success?

How will you measure results?

What will be the final product produced?

Now you have a bunch of writing about your idea. This writing is from the creator inside you – the person who is like a little kid talking about this idea to anyone who will listen.

One other idea, create charts and graphs to help illustrate your ideas. In general, readers love pictures that are thoughtful and well done. If you have an image that can help bring your idea to life, consider including it and writing about it so that the reader can understand what the image conveys and why it is included.

2. **Structuring the Writing:** To bring structure to your writing means making it logical. You take your raw writing and you begin to group it into chunks that the reader can understand and follow.

In some cases, the structure will be dictated by the grant. The grant guidelines will require that certain questions be answered. Try to create structure that flows from a more general outline of the work to be performed (summary) to the specific details (methodology).

A solid overall structure looks like this:

A. Complete summary of the project:

This section should be able to stand alone. Don't refer to other parts of the proposal here. Busy readers may not have time to digest your entire proposal, but they will probably be able to get through this section with ease.

B. Background/Motivation for the project:

Here you place the project within its context. Here your reader wants to know what the motivation is for the project – read: why should I care about this project?

C. Specific project and how it fits into the history:

Now we return to the actual project. The discussion of the project should flow naturally from the background that you just provided to your reader. Here show how your project makes sense to do, given the background/problem discussed above. Here you show your reader how you will solve or contribute something to solving the problem outlined in the background section.

D. Methodology (How you will approach the project):

The foundation giving grants wants to make sure that the money that it is giving to you will be put to good use. In this section, you provide a clear outline of how your project will move from point A (an idea) to point B (a solution). Perhaps you need to study three different groups of people; perhaps you will study three different approaches to teaching parents about nutrition. Whatever study you will be conducting, it needs to be carefully thought through. Much has been written about projects that have failed, not for lack of good ideas but for lack of implementation and follow through. Perhaps the donor organization that you are writing to has experienced such project failures (your research or contacts may point these particular failures out to you).

E. Preliminary results, if any:

If you have done some research on the project already and can point to some findings, you might point to evidence and/or examples that support your findings in the proposal. Donor organizations most likely prefer to give money to projects that are likely to be successful. That said, donor organizations don't want to fund projects that have already been completed. So, there is a balance here that you need to find in terms of including results.

F. Project time line:

This should be a graphic (Gant chart usually works well) The project time line helps the reader envision the life of the project:

When will it start?

When will it finish?

What are the major tasks that need to be completed?

The reader wants to know that you will be able to complete the work in a reasonable time frame.

G. Project Budget:

One of the trickiest parts of the grant proposal is the budget. Here you need to be focused and clear about how much money you need and how it should get spent. Remember to make sure that the amount of money you need matches with what the donor organization is willing to give. You don't want to ask for \$5,000 for travel expenses and find out that the grant only gives out \$500 of non-travel related monies. The donor organization will assume that you have not read their guidelines and put your proposal in the circulating file (the trash can).

By are. You want to be as specific as possible. Don't say project materials, when you know you need a Cannon GL2 digital camera

Here are some general categories that can be further refined:

Travel

Research assistant

Accommodations

Equipment

For each budget item, you should include a cost estimate. Then, you will need to total your expenses for the budget proposal.

One last thought: it is not enough to tack on a budget at the back of the proposal. You need to include a few sentences within the budget section that discuss the items and point out the final total.

3. Editing the Writing: Editing is the key to creating a polished piece of writing. However, you won't be able to catch the problems with the grant proposal if you don't set it aside for a short while (a day or two). You have been immersed in the writing and it is difficult to see anything new about the document. You will be amazed at how much clarity you can bring to a piece of writing just by letting it sit over night as you sleep. I know, I know, you have worked until the deadline and don't have time to let it sit. Here are a few editing strategies:

1. Peer Review: When this happens you need to find another pair of eyes, eyes that you trust, to read the proposal for you. A peer can help you catch the typos, the inconsistencies, etc.

2. Back to front: Reread your grant proposal one line at a time starting from the end. When you read your work from backwards, it changes your perspective and you can see things that you would have otherwise have missed.

3. Charts and Graphs: Pay particular attention to your charts and graphs. These should read as stand-alone pieces of the proposal. What does stand-alone mean? Your reader should be able to pick up your proposal, flip through it to any chart and graph and be able to figure out by reading it what its main message to the reader should be.

In order to make stand-alone charts and graphs, focus on the titles at the top (for tables) and on the captions at the bottom (for figures e.g., pictures, graphs, etc.). The title or caption should state what the table or graph is showing to the reader. In other words, it should interpret the information for the reader. Remember that readers like to look at pictures (so much so that often they will start with your pictures without having looked at the rest of the document). This is your chance to make a few strong points using your tables and charts.

## Phase V. Format the Grant

The formatting phase can be quite time consuming. Here you have your proposal already written and you are ready to send it off. There's just one more thing to think about: how it looks.

### 1. Should you include color charts?

If done well, color conveys professionalism, draws the reader's attention, and helps focus your reader on the most important information. Assume, however, that the grant will be reproduced by the committee who will review it and be careful about including color anything. Color copies are expensive to make, and it is unlikely that the committee will take the time and pay the money to have color copies made. If your proposal hinges on a color-coded bar chart, you might want to rethink how the data are presented.

### 2. Are your headings active?

Use bold, active headings that tell the reader about the section that follows. Legal briefs that make a series of arguments to a justice use this technique. Just as the tables and graphs should make a point, bold headings should do the same. Active headings draw the reader's attention and help the reader focus on the point that the next section will make.

3. Did you leave any white space? White space allows the reader to rest her eyes and also to better focus. A piece of paper that is filled with words can seem difficult to penetrate, difficult to figure out. Busy grantors who have to get through many grants don't have time to kick back with a cup of coffee in hand and dive into your prose. They want to know what you are going to do and how you are going to do it and they want you to tell them as concisely as possible.

Allowing for white space is like allowing your reader to take a breath now and again. Here's how to incorporate white space:

- If your proposal paragraphs are single spaced, leave a blank space between paragraphs.
- Include standard 1 inch margins around the text for the reader.

- Use 12 point, not 10 point font.
- Include bullets to break lists of things out of paragraph form.
- Single space sentences that are included in a bulleted point, but include space between bulleted points

4. What about numbering? Did you number the pages, your tables and your figures?

Number the pages, tables and figures so that donor committees, working together on a proposal, can easily collaborate about your work.

5. What about appendices?

Put detailed data, if necessary to the proposal, in an appendix. You don't want to clutter your writing, yet you want to make sure that all necessary information is available to the donor committee that is reviewing your work. You can include these details in an appendix for the reader. Appendices should be labeled A, B, C, etc. And, each appendix should include a brief 1 paragraph summary of what it is discussing. Finally, if you include an appendix, you need to refer to it in the main body of the text so that the reader knows it is there and knows what it is.

Phase VI. Reread the directions. Read the directions and your lists one last time before sending the document out. Good luck!!