

CHECKLIST FOR GRANT WRITERS

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Writing grants, like any kind of writing, recalls the old saw about "10% inspiration and 90% perspiration." While there is an element of strategy, writing successful grants generally depends more on meticulously following the grantors' instructions and analyzing their true desires. Whether you are applying for funding of construction, maintenance, planning, training, or volunteer support, you will find that grant programs have the most significant aspects in common.

Here is a checklist with important questions to ask when writing applications for grants:

1. Understand the needs of the grantors

Behind every grants program is a philosophy, an intent or a law. These principles not only guide the distribution of funds; they provide a clear view of how to approach the application and where to concentrate your persuasive efforts.

- Find out about the granting organization and understand why they are giving away money.
- In return for grants, what do they want from you: publicity, leverage of funds, technical expertise?
- Who reviews the applications: a citizen board, the director, a gaggle of bureaucrats?
- Ask for examples of projects that have been funded recently, and even some that have been rejected. You'll learn a lot about the desires of the grantor.

2. Develop your proposal to fit the application

You have a great idea, you've identified a need and you've got the tools to make it work. And you have found a grantor who shares your goals. But you still have to make the specific items of your project match the funding guidelines.

- Make sure the major budget items in your project are clearly eligible for funding.
- Perhaps only part of your project is relevant to the funding opportunity. Develop other ideas to fund the rest of the project and show the grantor how resourceful you are.
- Use the constraints of the grant opportunity to rethink your project.
- Be sure you really understand what is being asked for. Don't make assumptions.
- Most importantly, look at your project through the eyes of the grant reviewers.

3. Understand what eligibility requirements and regulations you must comply with

It's a waste of time to apply for grants whose requirements are beyond your resources.

- Be sure you know what you are getting into; how much time the application itself will take.
- Can your organization commit to a contract and other legal requirements?
- The application process may take a long time. Will your project be relevant and ready to go six months or a year from now?

4. Get help and a second opinion

People don't flock to help with fundraising. If you are taking on the grant writing job, once you understand what it will take to put together a winning package, ask for the specific help you need.

- Enlist a good proofreader and critic. A semi-literate, confusing application is already halfway to the trashcan.
- Get someone who knows little or nothing about the project to ready your application.
- If budgets confuse you, get someone competent to write or review it.
- Ask the grantors for help. They can't write the application for you, but they would rather answer questions and even brainstorm with you than read a bad application later.

5. Bring your own resources to the table.

Every grantor wants to see the maximum bang for the buck even when a match is not specified. Identify funds, partners, associated projects, volunteers, and materials – anything that will help convey a sense of how far you will stretch the dollars you seek.

- Document the time and expenditures that go into the project beyond the actual funding you are requesting.
- Show that you have resources from a variety of places. The broader the support, the better.

6. Show the public support for your project

Every project can benefit from grassroots support and involvement.

- If you have a good project, everybody should be behind it. Document the support.
- Think beyond the usual suspects. Schools, senior citizens, other agencies and a variety of people who don't think of themselves as "trail users" may be eager to support your project.
- Even if you're building an urban paved trail, volunteers can still help with cleanup, tree planting and bench building.

7. Help the reviewers really see your project

Like a good news story, your application should come alive in the minds of the reviewers. Help them visualize what you hope to accomplish.

- Will you be able to show slides at a presentation? Or include a few prints with your written application?
- Know your audience and how much they know about your project and your goals.

8. Be clear and specific

Think through your own objectives and the work you are proposing. Address each point of the application as a challenge to communicate.

- If you don't have a good answer for some of the questions, be honest and say so.
- Use bullets, boldface type or a list of key elements to convey the high points of your project, and don't bury them in paragraphs of verbiage.
- Make the grant easy to read. Use a reasonably sized font and leave enough blank space.

9. Be concise

No matter how great your project is, the grant reviewers have a limited amount of time to spend poring over your materials. Don't waste their time or try their patience.

- Spend enough time to write a sparkling description of your project that states in the fewest possible words, what it's about and why it's so great.
- Don't include voluminous attachments, unless you have a very good reason clearly stated in your application.
- Make every word convey an important point to the grant reviewer. If it is not relevant, leave it out. Use pictures, diagrams, plans or maps, instead of long, confusing descriptions.
- The history and war stories of your project are vivid to you, but a grant reviewer may not care. Keep the background brief and focus on the work to be done.

10. Be complete

Can you be concise and still be complete? Yes!