

# **BASICS of Writing Grant Applications**

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## **Begin by Knowing the Grant Funder**

Grant writing success requires research, planning and hard work. Before beginning a proposal, thoroughly research the background of the program and grant funder. Look at how many organizations will be funded this funding round; and what is the range of funding available. You will also want to find out which organizations have received funding in the past, in what amounts, and for which programs. Often the best way to obtain this information is to visit the grant funder's website. The main purpose of your research is to determine whether your program idea is a good match with the grant funder. That is, whether your program idea stands a good chance of successful funding. Let's say through your research, you find out only 10 programs will be funded this year in the entire country. You also learn that the funder received more than 1,500 grant applications during their last funding round. If your program idea is particularly unique and a very strong match with the grant funder's mission and goals, you may want to proceed with preparation and submission of your grant application. However, if this is not the case, you may want to look for another grant opportunity where the odds of receiving funding are greater.

When making a decision whether to pursue a grant opportunity, the decision should be based upon facts and mathematical odds as much as possible. An individual's feelings and personal commitment to a particular program idea has to be set aside in order to make an objective decision about the reasonable likelihood of successfully garnering funding. Other factors that require consideration when determining whether to apply for a particular

grant opportunity include: whether your planning team can meet application requirements and submit a competitive grant application prior to the deadline; and what is the level of internal school/school district and community support for your grant application.

Proposed programming should also be important to your organization's overall mission and goals and (somehow) sustainable beyond the initial funding period.

### Always Clearly and Succinctly Describe Your Program

Before writing a draft, there are several questions that you will need to give considerable time to answering:

- 1) What will be accomplished by the program?
- 2) Who will be served by the program?
- 3) What specific activities will contribute to accomplishment of program goals?
- 4) What resources (people, materials, financial and other) will be needed to successfully implement the program?
- 5) What partners need to be included in the planning, implementation and continuous improvement of the program?
- 6) How will program results be measured?
- 7) What will be the timeline for project start up and implementation?

These questions should be considered before reading the application instructions, also called the Request for Proposals (RFP). After reading the Request for Proposals (RFP), you will need to begin preparing an outline of the grant application. Start with an outline that includes main points and supporting issues to be addressed in the grant application. The processes of forethought to the question listed above and then outlining the grant application will allow you to succinctly and clearly describe the details of your program.

Conceptual program ideas and activities must be translated into goals and objectives outcomes and specific activities that are thoroughly described in the grant application.

### Show Measurable Program Outcomes

Developing goals and objectives for your program is an initial step in translating your conceptual idea into an program operating structure. Together goals and objectives tell what impact or result you wish to accomplish.

#### *Goals*

A goal is the ultimate statement of the result of the program being proposed. A goal is an overall statement of the program.

Examples:

- To provide Flint Community Schools students with access to a broad array of technological equipment to accomplish academic content learning
- To improve Anderson Elementary School student reading scores on standardize test
- To increase teacher skill and competence in teaching character education

#### *Outcome Objectives*

An objective is more specific than a goal. Properly written objectives are measurable and time-specific. An outcome objective is stated in terms of outcomes, not processes or methods.

Examples:

- There will be a 15 percent improvement in the reading scores for our classroom this school year.

- By the end of the three-year project, high school students will report a 30 percent increase in tobacco avoidance attitudes and behaviors
- At the end of the 6-month training, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers will report a 25 percent deduction in student conduct infractions.

Once you identify your program goals and objectives it is also important to explain how and at what intervals you will measure progress for each goal and objective. Where possible, describe in specific detail the tools and methods that will be used to track progress. You will also need to provide give details of how you will use progress information to improve the program.

### **Illustrate the Uniqueness of Your School/School District**

Under the statement of needs section of the grant application, motivate the grant funder to want to help your school/school district with the proposed program. Grant writing is a competitive process! The needs of the target population, geographic area, school district and/or specific school building must be described in great detail. A well-written needs statement:

- Describes a critical condition or set of conditions
- Emphasizes the needs of students
- Gives objective data (no assumptions or undocumented assertions)
- Provides comparative statistics, when possible
- Motivates the grant funder to help
- Uses touching stories of students and families
- Communicates a sense of urgency

Don't assume the grant funder knows anything about your school district/school. Use the statement of needs to highlight current needs and past successes. Tell which factors position your school district or school favorably for successful funding.

### Creditable and Convincing

Every word, sentence and paragraph written builds your credibility as a potential grantee. Be diligent to ensure that you do not make errors in reporting facts. Carefully check figures, charts and numbers to make certain the accuracy of all information presented. It is important to understand terminology provided in the Request for Proposals (RFP). You will need to use the funders terms provided, as these are familiar to the funder. Try not to introduce new terms that have the same or similar meanings. This will help eliminate any misunderstandings and preclude you from introducing new or similar terms that may not be fully understood by the funder.

Where possible, provide references to document the source of the information you have provided. Your school's or school district's chances of successfully garnering funding are greatly improved when your grant application is detailed and technically correct. A technically correct grant application follows all guidance in terms of page-limits, margins, font size, order and completeness of the narrative application and attachments. Glaring errors of fact or errors in preparation or packaging of the grant application may disqualify your application from the competition.

### Support Program Design With Research

Grant funders prefer grant applications that present a program approach or method that gives documented evidence of its effectiveness. Cited proof of legitimacy for the proposed program methods and approaches is sure to catch a grant funder's attention.

When program activities or practices have a scientific basis and proof of effectiveness and efficiency, a stronger case for funding is presented. When references are used, it also shows the funder that you have done your homework and have given due diligence to developing a successful program design.

In the highly competitive world of grant seeking, your school/school district will be vying for the attention and funding from experienced grant funders who are not only particular, but also very discerning. Writing highly competitive grant applications that have a good chance for successful funding requires hard work. Time and effort must be invested in researching the grant funder, understanding the funders language, thoroughly planning for the program, garnering internal and community support, and spending ample time producing a grant application that is specific and detailed.