Grant Writing 101

Steps to Preparing Successful Grant Applications for Federal, State, and Foundation or Corporate Giving Programs
Table of Contents

Step 1: Define the project ...................................................................................................... 3
Step 2: Identify the right funding source(s) ......................................................................... 4
Step 3: Gain specific funding information and interpret the guidelines ........................... 5
Step 4: Prepare the application ............................................................................................. 6
Step 5: Submit the application .............................................................................................. 7
Step 6: After submission ideas .............................................................................................. 8
Step 1: Define the project

The first step in preparing any grant application is to define the project for which you will be requesting funding.

Ask yourself:
• What need or problem are you trying to address?
• What is the background of the problem (how did it come about)?
• What is the project that will solve the problem?
• What is the project timetable?
• How much will it cost?
• How will you determine if the project is successful?
• How will it be funded in the future?

Write down the answers to these questions. They will assist you as you search for appropriate funding sources. You can also use the information later as you discuss your ideas with potential funders and prepare your application narrative.

Step 2: Identify the right funding source(s)

The next step in the funding process is to identify an appropriate funding source for your project. There are three funding categories that you can consider.

Federal Funding
If you need hundreds of thousands of dollars for a one-to-three year program, consider looking for funding at the federal level. Federal funding appropriate to educators will most likely come from the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Justice, or the Department of Labor. Application announcements for all federal programs are made available through Requests for Proposals (RFP’s) and published in the Federal Register at www.gpo.gov/fdsys. Funding announcements can also be found at www.grants.gov. Applications for specific programs are usually accepted on an annual basis and it may take six months or longer before you are notified of funding awards. If awarded funding, reporting and record keeping requirements will come with the money. Often the department sponsoring the program will offer training sessions on how to put the applications together. Know that federal applications can be somewhat complicated and time consuming to prepare.

State Funding
If you need large amounts of funding ($100,000 or more), state funding programs are also a good place to look. These applications can be just as much paperwork as federal grants, but the odds of winning an award are better because fewer grant applications are competing for the monies. Applications are typically accepted once a year with notification taking six months or longer. State agencies that have funding available will vary by state. Most states do not have a central location where you can find funding programs available through various departments. Therefore, the best place to start to look for state funders is your particular state government’s general web site.

Foundation or Corporate Funding
If your needs are under $100,000, you may want to look for foundation or corporate funding opportunities. These applications require less writing time and are typically much simpler to prepare. Often the applications can be completed and submitted online. Many have multiple due dates or accept applications on a continuous basis. Notification of grant awards is often made within four to eight weeks. The Foundation Center’s On-line Funding Database and hard copy Funding Directory are good places to look for foundation and corporate funding. To access the web site information you must be a paid subscriber. Most public libraries pay for this service and have it available for you to use. Most also have copies of the Funding Directory. For additional information on the Foundation Center and the resources they offer, see wwwfoundationcenter.org.
Step 3: Gain specific funding information and interpret the guidelines

The key element, or the soul of your application, will lie in matching your proposed project and its needs to the funder’s desires and requirements. Every funder has very specific interests and goals. These are usually spelled out in the form of a mission statement or organizational purpose statement. The funder wants certain particulars, and if your project does not address those particulars, no matter how unique, wonderful, or worthy it is, it will not be funded. To receive funding you must find a compatible grant maker or funding source interested in solving the same kind of problems that you are. This is a key to your success. Not paying particular attention to this step is one of the most common reasons that applications are denied funding.

When looking for an appropriate funding source keep these items in mind:

- If you find a source that seems to be a good match for your program, obtain funding literature and application guidelines directly from the grant maker. This information is often on the funder’s web site. If not, contact them and ask that they email or mail the materials to you.
- Make sure that your organization and your proposed project meet all of the funder’s eligibility criteria.
- Make sure that the funding source is a good fit for your program. In other words, make sure the funder is interested in solving the same kinds of problems that you are.
- Look for lists of past recipients who have received funding. This will give you a good idea of the types of organizations the funder likes to support and the amount of funding each received. This information is often on the web site or in annual reports.
- Once you have found a potential funder, if possible, telephone the program officer to discuss your idea and determine the funder’s level of interest in your project. Make sure that you are thoroughly familiar with your project and you are able to discuss it with clarity, conviction, and strength. Also be prepared to respond to any questions or concerns of the program officer and take notes so that you can later incorporate any relevant suggestions into your application.

You may want to apply to more than one funding source to piece together your budget and to increase your chances of receiving funding. However, each application will need to be specifically tailored to the individual funding source. Do not mail out generic applications and expect to receive funding.

Step 4: Prepare the application

A successful grant application is one that is thoughtfully planned, well prepared, concisely packaged, and persuasive. Federal, state, and foundation/corporate programs will all require the same basic information, although it may be requested in different formats. Nonetheless, there are generally six components that need to be presented.

**Executive Summary**
The Executive Summary presents a snapshot of your application. It should include:
- Problem statement
- Proposed solution
- Funding requirements
- Applicant and its expertise to carry out the project

**Problem or Need Statement**
The problem statement should be a clear, concise, well-supported statement of the problem to be overcome using the grant funding. The information provided should be both factual and directly related to the problem addressed by the proposal. Use statistics to support the existence of the problem or issue.
**Project Description**
The project description should describe the overall project you wish to implement and should include three sections:

**Goals and Objectives:** The goal of your project is the “big picture” end result that you hope to accomplish. Objectives are specific, measurable outcomes that together allow you to accomplish your goal.

**Project Design:** The project design outlines the tasks that will be accomplished with the available resources. Describe in detail the activities that will take place in order to achieve desired results.

**Project Evaluation:** Applicants should develop evaluation criteria to measure progress toward the project goal. It is important to define carefully and exactly how success will be determined.

**Funding Requirements**
This is the budget section of your application. It should include project costs as well as information on how the project will be funded in the future.

**Applicant and its Expertise**
This section should include an explanation of why your organization is trust worthy and capable of carrying out the project. Provide a history of your past successes, staff experience and expertise, and why your organization should receive the funds.

**Attachments**
Particular attachments that need to be included in your application will be specified in the instructions. Review these items carefully and make sure to include everything that is requested.

**Step 5: Submit the application**

But first...

- Make sure that you have carefully followed all application guidelines.
- Review your application to see if it will “stand out in a crowd.” Does it pull at the funder’s heartstrings while demonstrating that you will be able to implement an effective program? Is it clear, concise, and well organized?
- Double check grammar, spelling, and typos.
- Ask someone else not familiar with the project to your application.
- Include a one-page cover letter if not specifically prohibited by the funder. The cover letter should briefly introduce your organization and describe your project, including the funding request.
- Check to see how many copies of the application are requested.
- Make sure the application is delivered prior to the due date.
- Make a note on your calendar of when the funder anticipates making a decision. Follow up if you do not hear back by the specified date.
**Step 6: After submission ideas**

If funded:
- Send a thank-you note.
- Find out administrative requirements.
- Follow up with the funder as the project is implemented to let them know of your successes and the difference their funding has made in the lives of your students.

If not funded:
- Write the funder a thank-you note to let them know that you appreciate their considering your application.
- Ask the funder for reviewer comments (if available). The comments can offer invaluable tips for improving future grant applications.
- Check with organizations that did receive funding to see if you can view a copy of their winning application. This information will help you to learn more about the grant source and may make your next application a winner.
- Revise and then resubmit your application to the same funder if allowable and to new funding sources as well.
- Keep trying! Those who persevere will receive the funding.