

# Approaches to Grant Writing

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Writing a grant proposal is challenging and sometimes intimidating. Some individuals may actually prefer giving public speeches to putting a grant proposal together. The challenge is to convince complete strangers that the project you represent will put their money to good use. The intimidation often comes from a fear of the unknown, like success or rejection. The objective of this article is to discuss grant proposal basics. Following is how to approach grant writing.

There are generally two approaches to grant writing. The first approach is when there is solicitation from grant makers. They generate the ideas for the program or project and supply the funding source. Solicitations come in the form of program announcements, requests, or calls for proposals. The unsolicited proposal is the second approach. In other words, you target the appropriate funding source with an idea that is your creation. Researching unsolicited funding sources requires significant effort and is time-consuming yet may be worthwhile doing. No matter the approach, always write proposals to very specific funding sources. There are generally five common guidelines to follow when preparing a grant application:

- Seek program support because there is a significant need or problem requiring a solution, not because "money is there."
- Most grant makers have strict guidelines they want applicants to adhere. Follow the exact guidelines grant makers specify. Far too many otherwise good proposals go unread because applicants exceed page limitations set by the grant maker.
- Prepare the proposal budget carefully. Remember to include overhead expenses. However, expenses relating to writing the grant are often not permissible, so do not include grant writing in the budget. Be sure to specify any other resources (in-kind, donation or real property).
- Adhere to assurances, especially if a federal or state government agency is the grantor. Depending on the project mission, standard assurances may or may not include research activities, civil rights, management, environment and protection, and construction. Everyone involved in the grant application process needs to read and understand any assurances and their implications.

Take the opportunity to ask the grantor for advice. Start by briefly explaining your cause and that you believe the cause meets their criteria for support. Three critical bits of information to gather are (1) what the grant cycle is, (2) what the proposal acceptance deadline is, and (3) what the proposal submission criteria is, i.e., postal or electronic and the number of copies to submit. Ask the grantor for a copy of a successful proposal. Finally, find out who recent grant recipients are. The intention is to compare your needs with the needs of other like-organizations. This will also help you to tailor your application to grant makers' requirements.

Think of writing grant proposals as an investment rather than a sacrifice. No immediate compensation other than knowing you did the best job you could do may happen. On the other hand, think of the excitement when a grant maker notifies you of a successful proposal.

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