

## Grant Writing Tips

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The following information provides general insights on how to write effective and competitive grant proposals, including common pitfalls, hints for success, and working with a grant writer. This information, along with information about the [CIWMB grant scoring criteria](#) is provided to assist you in writing effective and successful grant applications.

### Things to Think About

- Different factors play a part in funders' decisions, no matter how well-written your proposal is.
- There are basic elements, but no "model" proposal for patterning.
- Organizing and communicating are more important than form.
- Planning is key—a grant proposal is the written version of your planning process.

### Some Criteria for Going After a Grant

- Project is consistent with your organization's mission and business objectives.
- You have a better-than-average chance for funding (e.g., we have an "A-plus" track record, funder expresses interest in us, we are well positioned).
- Program is undersubscribed (i.e., competitive opportunity).
- Cost/benefit is favorable (i.e., amount of grant award justifies cost of pursuing it).

### Common Pitfalls in Seeking Funding and Writing Grant Applications

1. **Chasing the money.** Don't write a grant to start a new project you don't really need or want just to bring funding (\$\$) into your agency.
2. **Requesting money to offset a deficit.** No one wants to fund your poor planning or agency shortfall.
3. **Going to Macy's to buy groceries.** Do your research first—make sure you're going to the right funder for the right project. Match-up is important.
4. **Failing to understand it's a competitive process.** Unless funding is a sure bet (e.g., based on formula/entitlement), always assume demand is higher than supply.
5. **Downloading the wrong grant application.** Similar-sounding grant applications could be issued simultaneously by the same funder. Or an out-of-date application might also still be on the Web site.
6. **Not reading the grant application thoroughly.** Highlight the most important parts (like due dates and required documents). Mark anything you don't understand or where you need to find answers.
7. **Not reading the grant application early enough.** Don't delay—leaving yourself too little time to make important contacts, gather important data, calculate costs accurately, find a grant writer...can be disastrous!
8. **Assuming the funder knows you/your agency.** Even if you are the grant-award poster child, don't assume proposal readers will mentally fill in the missing information. Don't depend on prior knowledge or past relationships.
9. **Disregarding the funder's questions.** If it's important to the funder, it's important to you.
10. **Philosophizing.** Don't argue with the funder's assumptions. If you don't agree with what they're interested in (or your ideas don't match their requirements), you should probably find another funder.
11. **Being redundant.** Saying it once is usually enough. Don't add unnecessary "fill" or "fluff."
12. **Reorganizing the proposal.** Follow the format instructions and place items where the funder has requested them—this is not the time to get creative with your presentation.
13. **Being incomplete (including signatures).** This could cost you points in scoring, or it could mean being considered

nonresponsive and therefore disqualified.

14. **Assuming it's a one-person job.** In most cases, no matter who writes the proposal or fills out the application, collaboration or consultation with others will be required.
15. **Losing the Q & A window.** Start reviewing the grant application requirements and writing early enough to not let the time pass for asking questions and getting answers—and, don't be afraid to ask!
16. **Using a former proposal without updating it.** If you're going to use it, at least shake off all the dust. Use current dates, current numbers, current staff.
17. **Using a proposal previously submitted to another funder.** This is fair game, just be sure to change the names to protect the innocent!
18. **Not doing the math correctly.** Use a calculator or use Excel but make sure the numbers add up! Funders lose confidence when budgets or estimates aren't accurate.
19. **Poorly estimating real costs.** Although budget line item transfers may be possible after the grant award, think through ahead of time what labor, materials, and overhead costs are expected to be.
20. **Backing into the budget.** Be realistic about what you need. Don't create a budget that reflects the maximum allowed just because the money's there. Also, don't expect staff to make any cuts that may be needed.
21. **Requesting nonqualifying expenses.** Don't sneak it in and hope no one notices! (Hint: even if funded for it, auditors can catch these items after the grant award.)
22. **Budget surprises.** Don't ask for items not described or mentioned in the narrative.
23. **"Going political."** Even with friends in high places, lobbying for points could backfire or blow up in your face.
24. **Starting your project before getting the grant.** If the ink isn't dry on the contract, don't assume it's a done deal.

## Hints for Success

- **Write clearly and concisely**— Succinctness is more important than volume.
- **Be thorough** —What have you forgotten?
- **Be specific** —Are the deliverables clear? Can the funder easily understand what they are buying?
- **Follow the format** —Be a "responsive" applicant.
- **Use/create local data when possible** —Define "data" as information.
- **Address anticipated challenges**— Don't try to minimize them; describe how you will overcome them.
- **Identify others necessary to your success** —Who are the stakeholders? How will you involve them?.
- **Use reader-friendly format** —Grid display vs. narrative may say it best.
- **Use good grammar. Use spell-check!**
- **Bring something to the table** —Funders view themselves as partners.
- **Write the executive summary after writing the proposal** —It's easier to put together.
- **Make sure letters of support/letters of authorization mean something** —They should state exactly what collaborators will do and how their expertise will contribute to the project.
- **Put yourself in the reader's place** —Would you know what the proposal was saying if you didn't write it? Would you want to fund this proposal?.

## Working with a Grant Writer

- When to use:
  - You don't have in-house expertise.
  - No one has dedicated time.
  - Particular person has unique insight to what they require.
- Issues to consider when selecting and using:
  - Number and type of proposals.
  - Reputation.
  - Experience with/as a funder.
  - Ask for a sample proposal they've written.
  - Ask about success rate.
  - Ask if they're also writing for other applicants (you may or may not care).
  - Don't make price the selection criterion.
  - Always check the writer's work—read the application before submitting it!