Top Ten Grant Writing Guidelines

1. Make sure the proposal meets the funding priorities

Just because a grantmaker has a lot of money to give doesn't mean your project qualifies for it. Funders don't ignore their objectives and policies just because you have a good project. If your project doesn't match a grantmaker's interests, keep looking for a funder whose do. Do your research and find grantmakers who fund organizations and projects like yours in your geographic area. Ditto when dealing with individuals.

2. Read and *follow* the directions

"Give 'em what they want." If they want 29 copies, give it to them. If they want the narrative double-spaced in Arial 10-point font with 1.7" margins on a single page, give it to them. If they want every copy in a separate plain manila folder labeled with your name, date, and project name, bound with a pink paper clip, give it to them. No matter how ridiculous a request seems, it must be followed.

3. Be clear and *concise*

Just because you are allowed, for example, up to eight pages for your narrative doesn't mean you need to use all eight pages. Successful grant writing conveys the need and the project plan clearly, concisely, and without verbosity or extraneous information. If you include too much information in the narrative, you risk confusing the reviewer. Clear writing demands the narrative projects a single voice, one writer. Don't use multiple authors.

4. Avoid emotional or vague phrases and words; don't use clichés

Phrases like "increase their self-esteem", "exciting new program", and "hopefully" are worse than useless. They're fluff, filler, or worse still, a substitute for having anything real to say. Avoid clichés (e.g., "needless to say", "obviously,…") Words like "innovative", "revolutionary", and "dynamic" are not advised unless you can demonstrate how by giving an example or quoting an expert in your field who uses the word to describe your organization or program.

5. Don't assume the reviewer's background

Don't assume the reader/reviewer has the same program or educational background as you or is familiar with your organization and community. If you are writing a federal grant or making a proposal to a national foundation, the reviewers will likely not know you. Avoid jargon, acronyms, and technical language for the same reason – don't assume reviewers are experts in your field.

6. The budget supports the project description

The project budget should accurately reflect the costs of the project's activities. Don't include expenses in the project budget that aren't mentioned or explained in the narrative. The budget

needs to add up and support the narrative. Don't "pad" the budget, exaggerate costs, or guess at the costs. Make sure the budget is balanced (income equals expenses).

7. Show measurable outcomes or objectives

Objectives must be measurable and you must show how you will measure success, quantitatively and qualitatively. A corollary rule: Don't confuse outputs with outcomes (or objectives). An example of an output is teaching a class of 20 kids. An example of an outcome is that the 20 children actually learn something and can demonstrate it after the class is over. Too many grant proposals focus on the outputs, the activities and "busy work" that keeps your staff employed. Grantmakers, and individual donors also, want to fund successful outcomes.

8. Make a reasonable request – neither too much nor too little

The requested amount must be appropriate, relative to expected outcomes, numbers served, populations impacted, size of total project budget, and the size of the organization budget. The requested amount must also be reasonable relative to the foundation size, its total annual giving, and its giving history.

9. Make a final check of the application before submission

Ideally, a second individual, or even a committee for larger or high-stakes proposals, should read through the entire proposal and budget before it is submitted, ideally with the guidelines at hand for reference. Make sure to:

- re-read the proposal for its compatibility with the guidelines
- proofread the entire proposal for spelling and/or grammatical errors
- put the proposal in the requested format and order
- re-check the budget for arithmetic errors
- address the proposal to the correct person and address
- include the required number of copies
- include all required attachments
- re-check the deadline (e.g., if instructions say "received by", don't put it in the mail the day it's due – hand deliver it)
- send it how they want it (e.g., if it says no faxes or emails, don't do it)

10. Start early

Set an internal deadline of a few days, or even a week, before the real deadline. This gives you time for additional review and to polish the proposal and make copies and package the proposal.