

GRANT WRITING TIPS

Secret Tips for Keeping the Funder Happy

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Grant writing; two words that can make you want to run and hide! No one ever told me that I would need to know how to "write for money" to keep my job. But twenty-five years of non-profit management taught me one very important rule: Keep the funder happy. Whether it is a donation or a grant award, you have to make them smile. So what are the secrets to meeting the needs of the funder? Listed below are tips from the funders I have either partnered with or spoke to about their secrets. Here are their biggest pet peeves.

1. Speak English. Your proposal should be easy to read and crystal clear in scope, need, problem, project description, and what you are really going to do. Grant reviewers like reading a proposal that speaks to the funder's mission. Many tell me that they get grumpy when they waste their time reading proposals and in the end have no clue what the grant seeker is trying to accomplish.

2. Please Read: Funders want you to read ALL of their materials to get to know their passion and mission. It is your responsibility to read all documents, search, and understand their website profile. Get to know the culture and personality of the funder. Get to know the funder. They only date people who really know them! Speed dating is not allowed!

3. Pay Attention: The grant seeker must come to a full understanding of the funder's guidelines and application procedures. Formatting is very important. Follow the formatting rules so the reviewers may score your content rather than your mistakes. The funder should doubt your ability to manage a grant if you can't follow the rules for submission. Mother always told you to follow the directions!

4. Be Complete: Always remember to include your contact information with your application. Many grant applications are sent to the funders without contact information. That makes it very hard for them to give you the money. Besides, if you and your organization are prepared for grant competition you would not have to complete the grant at 3 AM!

5. Submit Early: Don't wait till the last minute to submit your grant proposal. Many e-grants systems send out busy signals the last few days, especially the federal system. Besides, last minute applications make a bad impression and it makes the funder work harder making them tired. Never exhaust a funder!

6. Get it Right: Make sure you get the name of the funder correct. Many applicants submit the same grant proposal to several funders usually leaving the name of the "other" funder in the application. That is just plain tacky!

7. Be logical: Create a proposal that makes sense and flows through a year sequentially. The timeline, goals, objectives, and project description must be in order of when they will occur. Three by five cards can help you "shuffle" the major steps in your grant. Each need should have a stated objective, activity, and evaluation statement. Confusion only ends up in the circular file!

8. Well Spent: Develop a budget that is complete and clear. Say what you are buying and don't forget to buy what you need. If doing training, be certain include where, how many times, with what materials for what learning outcomes. The funders are really good at finding missing links so create a complete puzzle with a clear picture!

9. Be Professional: Proposal formats are essential. When scoring a grant application the formatting provides a guideline for "leveling the playing field." If they all look the same they are easier to compare. Learn the professional formatting and you will never be turned down for the typeface. (Psst....The secret is to use the font Times New Roman size 12 for narrative, 14 for headings, single space for paragraphs on 8 ½" by 11", 24 pound white paper, no binding or stapling of any kind.) But if the funder has other formatting, always follow their directions first!

10. Just Right: Winning proposals are not too long or too short. They are just right. The funder wants just enough to make your point clear. The guidelines may limit your proposal to ten pages and the scoring says the problem statement is worth twenty points. That means your problem statement should be no longer than two pages. Make sense?? Map out your writing to match the scoring! That will really make the funder happy!

So, the next time you are faced with a new grant application, make sure you follow the top ten secrets that keep funders happy. Your grant will stand out among the competition and your funder will look forward to a happy and positive funding relationship. Best wishes with your next one!