

Introduction to Grant Writing

If your organization is a typical nonprofit, your funding will be divided among donor contributions and bequests (79%), corporate sponsorships (5%), and grants (16%). Grants include funds given by family foundations, corporate foundations, community foundation; government agencies, and others to accomplish specific objectives. For example, a family foundation may be committed to enhancing the cultural life of the community, so it provides grants to arts organizations. Grants generally are distributed periodically according to the foundation's schedule or via a specific initiative described in a Request For Proposal (RFP) issued by the foundation or agency.

To get a grant, the grant seeker must first follow the guidelines of the specific foundation. This commonly includes some sort of initial contact (e.g., Letter of Inquiry or phone call) and then, if invited, the submission of a grant proposal. Every foundation has its own unique set of guidelines, so it's important to pay attention to the detail.

Next, your proposal must demonstrate your organization's alignment (i.e., hand-in-glove fit) with the foundation's cause and purpose.

Focus on What You Can Control

You cannot control the grant review committee selection, their state of mind on review day, whose voice will be most influential, or a hundred other things. So, as a grant writer, focus on what you can control – the Three D's: Discipline, Details, and Directions. Your best asset in securing funding from any source is a focused, **disciplined** organization. Organizational integrity feeds reputation and effectiveness. It comes through loud and clear in financial reports, program experience, and focused proposals. Getting one's house in order goes a long way to securing the next grant. (see our *Cause-Driven Organization* ONEpage)

Next, become familiar with the **details** of the proposal (e.g., the organization for general expense funding or the program for project funding). The dollar is in the details, so you need to build a team of people who can supply the data, descriptions, and depth necessary to build a complete proposal. A good tool for documenting program detail is a Logic Model.

Finally, once you find a foundation(s) that looks like a good fit (see our *Grant Research* ONEpage), then read their guidelines carefully and follow **directions**. Every foundation will have a unique set of directions and those proposals that do not follow them are easily set aside. So, do what they ask – no more, no less. If you have questions, contact the foundation to get the answer.

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Nurturing a Foundation Relationship

Foundations consist of people devoted to a particular cause and purpose – just like your nonprofit. Once you find a foundation who aligns with your organization, you then may begin developing and nurturing a relationship. As with any relationship, trust will build over time and with experience so expect your first grant to be modest. Again, as with any relationship, keep communication open and honest. Be sure to meet with a program officer *prior* to writing your grant.

Developing a strong, long-term relationship with funders is a goal of every fund development program. This is true for all types of funders – donors, sponsors, and foundations. Spending time nurturing these relationships supports and promotes your cause.

*The goal is not to do business with everybody who needs what you have;
the goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe.*

Simon Sinek

Summary: The Grant Proposal Process

(Adapted from The Foundation Center)

The ideal project: fills a real, unmet need; is coordinated or collaborative with others' work; totally aligns with your cause and purpose; and is feasible given your current staff and workload.

1. Fully understand your organization & your project
Nothing else can happen until you know your project: what it is, why you're doing it, how it will impact your target audience, and its relevance to your mission. Cover the Three A's: Appropriate (real, unmet need; you're the right organization for the job), Ability (timetable; talent pool and partners; budget), & Action (program and impact)
2. Find possible funders
(private/family foundation; community foundation; corporate foundation; corporation; government agency; individual funders; in-kind support). Marry funder interest to audience need.
3. Satisfy the Gatekeeper (e.g., Letter of Inquiry)
4. Complete the application
Follow directions and use good writing practices relative to spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, etc. Use headlines and strong first sentences to make the proposal skimmable. Make sure you have at least two people proofread the proposal. (sample proposals at GrantSpace.org)
5. Application review, decision, & notification
6. Sign the agreement and return for the payment
7. Thank the funder (even if denied the grant)
8. Do the work – Notify and discuss any significant changes with the funder.
9. Report to funder

We recommend attending our *Grant Writing Basics* workshop held periodically throughout the year. See our calendar of events at www.kpl.gov/ONEplace.