HOW TO WRITE A GRANT PROPOSAL FOR FUNDING

Grant proposal writing is a process – a rewarding one if the time and effort needed to generate a clear, concise approach to the project is achieved.

A well thought-out proposal plan takes time and deep thought about what the project is and what needs to be done to accomplish it. Once the plan has been formulated and it is determined that funding is needed beyond what funds are on-hand in bank accounts, or what can be solicited and collected locally, a 'grant' can be sought from a foundation which funds ideas/projects equal to yours.

Application to a granting foundation takes time to research and investigate for a 'good' fit for your project needs. Each foundation has a list of categories for investment; and it is an investment for the foundation as well as the organization seeking the funding.

Granting foundations have several approaches outlined in their guidelines: These guidelines MUST be followed precisely and thoroughly as provided by the granting foundation. There should be no deviation as that might close the door on the request.

Some foundations require a letter of inquiry prior to authorizing the generation of a formal application for the grant.

Where Do I Begin? Ah, the Possibilities!

1. An information letter from the group explaining the project and the need for funding – Project Purpose and Mission.
    a. Include local support
    b. Add current timeline information
    c. Beneficiaries from the successful accomplishment of the project
2. Visitation to the foundation website for application guidelines and procedures.
    a. Verify if the group meets the guidelines which will help define the Grant proposal approach.

Grant Proposal – Plan and Descriptive explanation of the requesting group **('Layout of the Proposal')**

1. Requesting organization paperwork and government establishment have been accomplished
    a. Articles of Incorporation through the State in which the requesting organization exists
    b. Non-profit status achievement from the IRS
    c. Identification of the group within the State (all of the state, certain counties
2. Clearly defined purpose/vision for the project which justifies and leads group to request funding and/or support
3. Preparing for the proposal document brings in subject areas discussed in previous written offering in this website.

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    a. **Storyboard of the project** – include all ideas and approaches to successful completion of the project 'whether' the funding request is a success or not from solicited granting foundation(s.)

        i. There are plenty of foundations available and receptive to solicitation

        ii. The project must be a 'solid' project with reasonable and achievable purpose and approach. * There is no magic to this – just common sense and thoroughly defined and thought out approach to success. *

    b. Timeline definition which is reasonable and achievable.

The following items should be considerations for information inclusion in proposal document. Before starting the writing:

1. Plan clearly defined and achievable
   a. Tasks/Goals/Objectives – specified in detail
   b. Meaningful
   c. Actionable – it is realizable that plan works to a successful conclusion.
2. Being able to explain 'how' the plan will be successful and a great contribution to the defined and identified community.
3. Identify a compatible grant foundation or source which supports groups with plan as defined
4. Determine if the mission/purpose of identified granting foundation(s) parallel with a plan being presented – no deviation or confusion in alignments of missions.
5. Review foundations application guidelines for proposal acceptance.

Before considering writing a grant proposal here are two mindful <u>questions to be answered in a grant proposal</u>: <u>It is important to have these answers ready for the foundation 'at first blush':</u>

1. Does the Proposal? Consider a plan that is not only an important venture, but also a plan that fully and thoroughly advances the valuable cause (mission, objectives, goals)
2. Are the Team? The support of the group of individuals involved are committed and capable to realize the plan.

*** If these two statements are 100% met, then the grant proposal process can begin.*

Remember – the proposal has an AUDIENCE. Determine 'who' the people are who are reading the proposal and who will have many ideas and questions about what they read. SO pay close attention to the foundation guidelines and what definitive information is being sought.

This process takes TIME and areas of consideration must <u>not</u> be overlooked.

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<u>Who is reading the proposal? In other words, 'who is your audience?'</u> Is the audience a preliminary committee that will review the document and decide whether to reject it with regrets or forward it on with their thoughts and critiques to the decision committee? Or, is the decision committee the audience?

Not knowing who reviews the document makes it imperative to answer questions listed below thoroughly and honestly: REMEMBER – Words mean things: vocabulary used, your background and resume, how your goals are explained and/or outlined in the request.

1. The applicant has goals and a mission – What are the goals and mission of the foundation?

2. What are the foundation's values?

3. Does your plan and its values align with the foundations?

4. Do your answers to the questions open a description of your interests?

5. How in-depth do you write to reveal what the project means to you. (These revelations direct the reader to sincerity and commitment to the project.)

6. What persuades the reader?
   a. Budget numbers – explained in depth using a spreadsheet if possible.
   b. Testimonials: Letters of support, drawings from children affected by the project, quotations about your organization, etc.
   c. Number of volunteers/supporters from the community involved.
   d. What is the experience of others on the team (resume credentials of talents, knowledge)
   e. Committee – Who are they and are they collaborators of other projects? Do the committee members represent a coalition of foundations who 'team' to support a project to provide more funding than requested from a singular foundation?
   f. Historical precedent for this plan or project and others within the community. Does your group have a 'track record' of success within the community for previous projects?

7. The foundation has specified expectations for use of their funding. Their expectations include how well your group adheres to the foundation "requirements".
   a. This grant application stands "alone" against any other funded by the foundation. Write within the bounds of your plan/project and the foundation requirements.
   b. There can be noise from those not in the know about your project – unsolicited advice about how to approach the grant can be dangerous to your success if accepted without investigation or scrutiny. Watch out for 'nay-sayers' whether on the team or not. These comments exude lack of confidence in the project and the negativism can spread quickly. Always keep the team on the same page and have discussions if there are differences of opinion or approach to the project.

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8. Establishing credibility for your group and plan.
   a. This item is achievable with ease 'if' you are confident in your presentation of yourself and your:
      i. Capability to tackle the project
      ii. Knowledge of the project and what needs to be done to achieve it
      iii. You are a 'dreamer' of sorts where your vision includes future results and growth of the project. <u>IE</u>, the proposal includes a vision of where the project leads – 'forward thinker'
         1. Display a well thought out plan through description of value to community and the importance to the growth and development of the community
         2. Provide examples of test results if applicable
         3. Examples of previous work and accomplishments to show 'you are the right person' IE, sell yourself to the reader and decision committee

9. Set up a 'flow-chart' for reference to display that your organization (of the proposal sections) makes sense. You don't want to have a 'herky-jerky' flow where sections are split and require to the reader to move between pages to understand and connect the flow. ** **The guidelines and instructions from the grant foundation is the key to how they want the proposal organized and presented**. ** Before starting to organize review the following items for specifics.
      i. Guidelines
      ii. Section headings:
         1. Organization Information
         2. Project Description (if there are sections to be filled out, be sure to answer each as thoroughly as you can)
         3. Contact information
         4. Financial Information
            a. Project Costs
            b. Sources of Funding
            c. Funds Needed
            d. Amount of this particular Grant Request
            e. Attachments required –
               i. 501(c)(3) IRS Determination Letter
               ii. Current annual operating budget
               iii. Most recent year-end financial statement and balance sheet
               iv. Board of Directors list
               v. Letters of Support/Commitment
               vi. Recent newsletter/news articles about the Organization
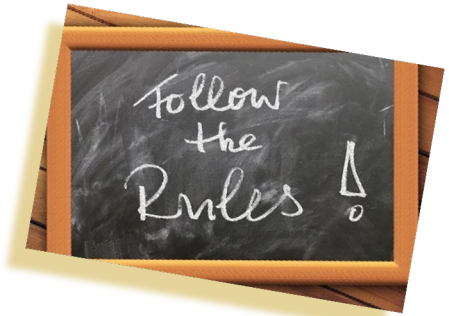
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10. Grant proposals for projects are not a novel with extraneous information provided.
    a. The proposal should be 'direct' and to the 'point' and the verbiage should exemplify and reflect that.
    b. ** Clear and concise sentences and descriptions.
    c. Don't use flowery or colloquial language
    d. ** Observe maximum character limits specified in the question answer space/block – be conscious of this in making your response. [This requirement keeps the reading reasonable and helps the proposal writer meet "clear and concise sentences.]

<u>Layout of the Proposal</u>
Some of the items listed are duplicative; but, that is for emphasis of importance!

a. <u>**Summary of What the Proposal Covers**</u>
   a. Purpose
   b. Outcomes
   c. Success evaluation
   d. Project importance description
   e. Biography of presenter – "Who Are You?"

b. <u>**Statement of Project and Need**</u>
   a. Clarify need = value of the project
   b. "Why was this project developed initially"
   c. Include research for demographics and structure of community to achieve support

c. <u>**Project Description Paragraph**</u>
   a. Goals of the project investigation and research achieved to develop the project
   b. Ultimate goals for success
   c. Outcomes – specific, measurable, realistic, achievable, and timely
   d. How will outcomes be achieved?
   e. How will the project end be measured as defined and/or perceived?

d. <u>**Budget – Income for Project Completion**</u>
   a. Building the budget based on the type of funding sought for the project; funding already received; funding already promised
       i. In-kind (land donation, development costs forgiven (City), volunteers - # of hours promised tied to $ value for those hours; say $15 per hour)
       ii. Donations – equipment (technical, office, cleaning, etc.), materials (lumber, tools, supplies, etc.)
       iii. Monetary Donations
   b. Fund raisers planned/executed
   c. Grant History for the project: Do you have enough funding to proceed?
       i. Grant Amount Requested
       ii. Grant funding already received
       iii. Grant funding being sought from other foundations

e. **Budget – Expenses for Project Completion**
    a. Initial Costs – Design, Planning, Fundraising
    b. Fixed – Paid Labor, Supplies & Materials, Equipment Rental, Site Clean-up, etc.
    c. Variable – Administrative, Advertising, Consulting/Technical Services,
    d. Periodic – Tax Prep, Tax Payment, Licensing, Permits/Compliance

f. **An Introduction Letter**

This is sometimes required, but I would suggest <u>is</u> necessary to set the stage for what the 'audience' is about to receive/read.

    a. Be brief, but defined in an introduction to your organization and key individuals.
    b. Outline the project with enthusiasm and illustrate excitement for the project.
    c. Invite the reader into the project by emphasizing that their agreement and concurrence will 'change the community' and 'make a difference in many lives.'
    d. Inclusion of non-profit status submittal of IRS paperwork confirming status if appropriate
    e. Supporting documents: endorsement letters, drawings associated with the project, personal documents (resumes) of key participants in the project.
    f. Suggestion of advertising foundation support: Are there perks for the foundations as well? Such as, naming pieces of the project for historical reference.

This is not the only granting foundation your group will solicit for funding for this project of future projects; SO …

1. <u>General thoughts and hints</u> to a successful proposal document and submittal.
    a. Make the basic document "generic" in nature. "Boiler Plate" document – then add specific project information about the project requiring funding. <u>Fine tune</u> it to specific foundations for consideration.
    b. Tailor your "generic" proposal document (one that covers all the general information about the project and supporting areas) to the "specific" project to meet the funding foundation's needs for information.
    c. Not all granting foundations are universal in their interests – pay close attention to subject areas of interest specified in their website overviews especially the itemized projects they have granted funds to in the past; often listed by previous years. Also, interests and areas of funding change from year to year, so be aware.

<u>Common Grant Funding Priority Areas:</u> (a short list for sure)

    1. Arts and Culture
    2. Economic Development
    3. Children and Youth
    4. Community Health
    5. Convening and Gathering Places
    6. Environment and Natural Resources
    7. Poverty Alleviation

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Key: Read specifically and absorb what the foundation's interests are as this will direct a grant writer into deciding if the foundation is a viable one for application.

    d. Grants come in all sizes. Don't be afraid to seek small ones as well as large ones.

    e. Proposals come in all sizes as well. Large projects require more in-depth information than smaller project. That is why it is important to understand the foundation being asked for support.

2. Writing proposals is not difficult once ideas are formulated and researched. Common sense and patience are key.

    a. Does the project make sense? Sense enough to explain logically and convincingly to the audience (reader).

    b. Use your project team – utilize their knowledge and skills along with their expertise.

    c. Break up specialty sections to maintain the flow of writing and gathering of information. Efficiency of team utilization.

    d. Don't accept 'rejection' as an indicator that your project isn't worthy or needed. Foundations get many requests and are limited on funds they have. Keep the faith and keep sending out requests for funding. "DON'T GIVE UP!!"

    e. A many foundations are now using the 'e-file' format for grant proposal applications. Review the on-line system for each to see what they are looking for and take copious notes. Although this can be tedious (going back and forth to the website) it could make or break a successful application.

Grant Ideas: What Works? Like a recipe: all ingredients must exist and be present for a successful outcome.

1. Have a clear idea of what successful receipt of funding will do to improve/affect the community as intended.

2. Compelling project idea – approach is vital to successful receipt of funds and implementation

3. Is the project a 'fit'/something the granting foundation supports or can support?

4. Is there an 'Inter agency' collaboration or are there multiple foundations that work together to successfully fund the grant request?

5. Is the project a 'one-off' or are there phases for future development and expansion. Sustainability if vital as foundations don't want to limit their influence. Many suggest they will fund into future phases.

6. Create a timeline that is editable to show progress, but to also track what is falling behind. A timeline is like a roadmap to the project and successful completion.

    a. A timeline cannot be completely designed until all elements of the project have been identified and described. This is where team players come in and report their assignments: budget, design, communications, etc.

    b. Defined tasks, objectives, and milestones can be associated with Phase Definitions: maybe the initial application is only seeking funding for Phase I, II, and so on, which must be definitely described and supported by facts.

7. Funding requests in proposal is in addition to what your project budget reflects from other income sources identified. If these exist, list them to show community support and give the granting foundation flexibility in the proposal review. **(Return to Grant Proposal Section)**