

The Basics of Grant Writing

Successful grant-writing can be a great way to generate funding for necessary projects or campaigns. A word of wisdom about grants, though: put the grant-writing function in its proper place – cultivating your current parents and other members of the donor base is the foundation of your fund-raising effort. As a matter of fact, your success in securing grants will many times be related to the participation level of your current constituents – board members, parents, teachers and others. A school that has support from within is more likely to garner support from without.

When writing grant proposals for foundations and corporations, pay close attention to their guidelines. The success of your grant ties directly to the order and degree in which you address the facts that are most important to the grantor.

General Tips for Writing Effective Grant Proposals

- **Prepare by doing research before you begin writing.**
Determine whether the grantors' funding objectives are consistent with your purposes. Find the foundation on the Internet and visit their web site. Review the guidelines and be sure to read as much information about the organization as you possibly can. Look up their giving history on websites such as _____ and _____. Reflect planning, research and vision throughout your proposal.
- **Make certain your proposal is personalized.**
Grantors spot generic letters and proposals instantly. Some receive hundreds of proposals a day. A personalized letter will stand out in the crowd. Always include a cover letter from the principal or the pastor.
- **Follow specific instructions.**
It greatly helps your cause when you follow instructions. Always follow the exact specifications of the grantor in their applications, Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and guidelines. If the grantor

wants your first contact to be by letter, then do so. Getting to know your grantor over the phone is a good idea, but always honor their guidelines too.

- **Contact your grantor before you write your proposal.**

Contact the grantor before you write your proposal, to be sure you clearly understand their guidelines. Most foundations are very helpful and appreciate exploratory conversations. You need to befriend the people you are asking for help. Express the value of your mission subtly in a genuinely sincere manner — while confirming your understanding of the guidelines.

- **State the needs and objectives of your school clearly and concisely.**

Always include your purpose, feasibility, need, funds required, accountability, and capability.

- **Answer the questions: who, what, why, and how.**

Answer these questions: Who are you? How do you qualify? What do you want? What problem will you address and how? Who will benefit and why? What specific objectives will you accomplish and how? How will you measure your results? How does your funding request comply with the grantor's goals and objectives?

- **Always look through the eyes of the grantor.**

Reduce concepts to their simplest terms while validating value into the mind of those who read your application. Avoid making assumptions. When you take for granted how the reader would feel, find value, understand, take action, or remember what you're about to communicate to them - there is a very good chance they may not.

- **Always be prepared.**

Be prepared to submit your school's profile with your proposal on the drop of a dime. This means having a current copy of your audit, a copy of your board of directors, and your positioning statement, etc.

- **Be creative.**

Create an interesting, persuasive and unique proposal. Avoid making your proposals any longer than needed. Be clear about why you are seeking a grant, what you plan to do with the money, and why you are a good fit with the grantor's priorities. The success of your proposal ties directly to the order and degree in which you address the facts that are most important to your grantor.

- **Make your proposal easy to read.**

It is imperative that your proposal is easy to read. A full page of single-spaced lines is intimidating. Format your proposal nicely and make it stand out in a way that is inviting to the eye. For example, break up the page into small paragraphs with subheadings. Always ask other people within your school to review your proposal to make certain it is attractive and easy to read.

- **Always follow up.**

Be sure to follow up a few days after you have submitted your proposal to make sure it arrived. Use this opportunity to ask if your grantor has everything they need.

- **Use this experience as a learning process.**

Learn from this process by requesting feedback after the outcome of your proposal in order to understand your strengths and weaknesses.

The Components of a Grant Proposal

In general, grant proposals consist of ten parts known as the:

1. Cover letter
2. Executive summary
3. Needs Assessment or Problem Statement
4. Goals and Objectives
5. Methodology
6. Evaluation
7. Budget
8. Qualifications
9. Conclusion
10. Appendices

1. Cover Letter (1 page)

This is your opportunity to validate your school's mission in the mind of your grantor. Your cover letter offers compelling reasons why it makes perfect sense to consider your school for this grant. Describe your school in terms of its strengths and how it makes the world a better place instead of the "we are in such great need" approach. This letter should always come from the principal or pastor.

Be sure to include the amount you are requesting. While providing a brief outline of the needs addressed in the proposal, your cover letter should demonstrate a familiarity with the mission of your grantor's organization.

2. Executive Summary (¾ page)

The executive summary of your proposal is a "snapshot" description that clearly and concisely summarizes your request. Your executive summary must convince your grantor to consider the needs of your school as a priority. And the success of your summary ties directly to

the order and degree in which you address the details that are most important to your grantor.

Be sure to include these four areas in your executive summary:

- **Problem:**
Summarize the need of your school and why this is important.
- **Solution:**
Introduce your solution. Be sure to include the time required for bringing this solution to fruition.
- **Funding Requirements:**
Clearly and concisely, explain your proposed use of the funding and how it solves the needs of your school. It is important to show you have a plan for using your funding in a timely manner.
- **School / People:**
Succinctly, discuss the role of your school and how you will organize and implement the requested funds.

3. Needs Assessment or Problem Statement

This part should provide well-documented evidence of a specific problem, explained from your viewpoint. One of the hazards you must avoid is defining the problem as a lack of program or facility, i.e., giving one of the possible solutions to a problem as the problem itself. For example, the lack of a library in an economically depressed area is not the problem — the problem is that poor children in the area have learning needs that are not being addressed in their community. The problem described should be of reasonable dimensions, with the targeted population and geographic area clearly defined.

The case must be made that your school, because of its history, demonstrable expertise, and accomplishments is the right organization to solve the problem.

4. Goals and Objectives (1–2 pages)

Once the needs have been described, proposed solutions have to be set forth, wherever possible in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Special Note:

A goal can be considered broad and qualitative in nature. An example of a goal could state the following: to be the largest Catholic School in Houston. An example of an objective could be to increase school enrollment by 10% from August 1 2006 to May 31 2007. This objective is measurable. Please note that if your objective is not measurable it is not a good objective. (For a better understanding about the planning process, please read the paper, *“Creating a Marketing Plan”* found in the Communications section of T4S.)

Measurable objectives form the basis for judging the effectiveness of the program. It is important not to confuse objectives with methods toward those ends. For example, the objective should not be stated as "building a library in East Houston," but as "reducing the illiteracy rates in East Houston to X percent by a specific date."

Do not go overboard with stating objectives in your proposal — this is not your marketing plan. Do not list any more than three objectives. Please remember that your objectives must be realistic and have a time limit. Do not promise something you cannot deliver. In a subsequent funding report, your grantor will want to see that you accomplished your objectives.

5. Methodology

In the goals and objectives section above, your proposal outlines what you hope to achieve. You can think of the methodology part as the “who, when, why and how” of your proposal. Just as the statement of objectives builds on the problem statement, the

description of methods or procedures builds on the statement of objectives. For each objective, a specific plan of action is defined. It should delineate a sequence of justifiable activities, indicating the proposed staffing and timetable for each task. Review this section carefully to make sure what is being proposed is realistic in terms of your time and resources.

6. Evaluation

It is imperative in your proposal that you demonstrate the ability to measure success. It is equally as important to explain how you plan to report the results to your grantor. Doing so conveys expertise and an attention to detail. It also sends a message that you take a management by objective approach to business.

Be sure to include your:

- Plan for evaluating accomplishments of objectives
- Plan for making improvements based on findings
- Procedures and schedule for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data

7. Budget (grantor requirements determine length)

The degree of detail for your budget will vary depending upon the nature of the project and the requirements of your grantor. However, a complete, well thought out budget reinforces your credibility. And it increases the likelihood of funding for your proposal.

The estimated expenses in your budget should build upon the justifications given in the narrative section of your proposal. A well-prepared budget demonstrates the wise use of your requested funds.

Your budget format should be as clear as possible. It should begin with a summary but you write this after your budget has been prepared. Each section of your budget should be in outline form,

listing line items under major headings and subdivisions. You then subtotal all the major components with a grand total placed at the end. If your grantor provides forms, simply add your numbers into the appropriate spaces.

8. Qualifications

Special Note:

Please read *“Building Your Case for Support”* found in the Fundraising section of T4S. Your understanding of this concept makes it easier for you to complete this part of your proposal.

Consider the qualifications part of your grant proposal as a snapshot of your school or case for support. You should include some general information such as your vision, mission, history, description of current programs, and description of your school community. Briefly, explain what your school does that is special and provide evidence to prove this point

To make this section stand out, think of pertinent information that will demonstrate to your grantor that your school has the administrative, financial, programmatic, and staffing capacity to carry out your proposal. Highlight your school’s expertise, especially as it relates to the project in need of funding.

9. Conclusion

It is time to wrap up your proposal. Summarize the main points of your narrative: your needs, goals, outcomes, benefits, and timeline. Repeat concisely why you need funding for this project and how it supports the mission of your school. Write with passion, purpose and clarity.

10. Appendices (grantor requirements determine length)

Additional documents are usually required at your grantor’s discretion.

Typical documents can include:

- IRS letter
- List of the Board of Directors
- Audited financial statement
- Current operating budget
- Project budget
- Biographies for key personnel
- Testimonials
- Schematics for building projects

In summary, a well-written grant proposal can easily make the difference between a win and a loss. Always write your proposals from an “outside-in” perspective, which looks through the eyes of your grantor and speaks directly to their heart. Convey long lasting value in the mind of your grantor with short, hard-hitting sentences. State the needs of your school and objectives clearly and concisely. Write well. Do not waste words. Use active rather than passive verbs. Use proper grammar and correct spelling. Be clear, factual, supportable, and professional. A well-written proposal is a key factor in your grantor’s decision-making process.