

Neighborhood Resource Organization

“Empowering the Erie area one neighborhood at a time.”



www.nroerie.org

Dave Deter, Executive Director
ddeter@nroerie.org

GRANT WRITER'S HANDBOOK

A Collection of Tips and Suggestions for Successful Grant Writing

Prepared By

Dave Deter

Executive Director

Neighborhood Resource Organization

Mercyhurst University

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INTRODUCTION

Developing a funding application is a major undertaking. The following guidance should be beneficial in creating a solid funding request that assists evaluators with recognizing the value of the application.

GETTING PREPARED

Follow these preliminary steps to ensure an efficient and comprehensive application:

- Review the funding application instructions for important information on the application process and guidance on preparing specific sections of the application.
- Carefully read the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) for any special instructions, and follow the agency's guidelines to ensure your proposal will be in compliance with their requirements.
- Solicit feedback from colleagues and/or mentors on your proposed project while it is still in the concept state.

- Structure your proposal in a summary or outline format to clarify the program elements and project scope, following the application framework and structure.
- Make sure you have adequate preliminary data.
- Create a budget “wish list” by reviewing your summary and listing anything that is going to cost money, i.e. salaries and fringe benefits, supplies, travel, equipment, communication. The budget can be adjusted later in the grant-writing process.
- Conduct an organizational assessment. Determine what resources and support your organization has and what additional support you will need.

IS YOUR IDEA ORIGINAL?

- Assess the competition. Identify other projects previously or currently funded, and consider collaborating with competitors to strengthen the proposal.
- Create a niche that distinguishes your organization from others.

BEFORE YOU START WRITING THE PROPOSAL

Ordinarily, a panel of experts reviews the applications submitted. It helps to understand the criteria that reviewers generally apply while evaluating applications:

- **Significance** – Does the project address an important problem or a priority need? How will successful completion of the project change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?
- **Capacity** – Are staff and collaborators well suited to the project? Do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments? If the project is collaborative, do the partner organizations have complementary and integrated expertise; are their leadership approach, governance and organizational structure appropriate for the project?
- **Innovation** – Does the application challenge and seek to shift current paradigms by utilizing novel approaches or methodologies or interventions? Are the concepts, approaches, methodologies, or interventions novel to one field, or novel in a broad sense? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of approaches, methodologies or interventions proposed? Has an effort been made to identify best practices or successful programs being carried out elsewhere?

- **Approach** – Are the overall strategy, methodology, and outcome measures well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the project? Are benchmarks for success presented?
- **Environment** – Are the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique characteristics of target populations, or collaborative arrangements?
- **Sustainability** – Is there reasonable assurance that the project will continue after the funding runs out? If sustainability is not applicable or required by the funder, what are the long-term benefits?
- **Measureable outcomes** – Once the grant is over, exactly what will have been accomplished and how many people will have benefited? What methods will be used to measure specific outcomes to prove the benefit actually occurred?

IMPORTANT WRITING TIPS

- The grant application instructions require that materials be organized in a particular format. Reviewers are accustomed to finding information in specific sections of the application. Organize your application to effortlessly guide reviewers through it. This creates an efficient evaluation process and saves reviewers from hunting for required information.
- Think like a reviewer. A reviewer must often read 10 to 15 applications in great detail and form an opinion about each of them. Your application has a better chance at being successful if it is easy to read and follows the usual format. Make a good impression by submitting a clear, well-written, properly organized application.
- Be complete and include all pertinent information.
- Be organized and logical. The thought process of the application should be easy to follow. The parts of the application should fit together.
- Write one sentence summarizing the topic sentence of each main section. Do the same for each main point in the outline.
- Make one point in each paragraph. This is key for readability. Keep sentences to 20 words or less. Write simple, clear sentences.

- Before you start writing the application, think about the budget and how it is related to your proposed project. Remember that everything in the budget must be justified by the work you propose to do. Identify any start-up funds and other sources of revenue. This is a positive indicator of your organization's commitment to the project.
- Be realistic. Don't propose more work than can be reasonably done during the proposed project period. Make sure that the personnel have appropriate expertise and training. Make sure that the budget is reasonable and well-justified.
- Include enough background information to enable an intelligent reader to understand your proposed work.
- Use a clear and concise writing style so that a non-expert may understand the proposed research. Make your points as directly as possible. Use basic English, avoiding jargon or excessive language. Be consistent with terms, references and writing style.
- Spell out acronyms on first reference.
- Use sub-headings, short paragraphs, and other techniques to make the application as easy to navigate as possible. Be specific and informative, and avoid redundancies.
- Use bullets and numbered lists for effective organization. Indents and bold print add readability. Bolding highlights key concepts

and allows reviewers to scan the pages and retrieve information quickly. Do not use headers or footers.

- If writing is not your forte, seek help!
- Make sure Letters of Support mean something. They should state exactly what collaborators will do and how their expertise will contribute to the project.

Proofreading and Final Edits

- Allow sufficient time to put the completed application aside, and then edit it from a fresh vantage point. Try proofreading by reading the application aloud.
- Allow time for an internal review by collaborators, colleagues, mentors, and make revisions/edits from that review. If possible, have both experts in your field and those who are less familiar with your programs provide feedback. The application should be easy to understand by all.
- Have zero tolerance for typographical errors, misspellings, grammatical mistakes or sloppy formatting. A sloppy or disorganized application may lead the reviewers to conclude that your project may be conducted in the same manner.
- Prior to submission, perform a final proofread of the entire grant application.

In addition.....

- Even if your initial effort doesn't get funded, the planning and writing process allows you to resubmit your idea elsewhere. Seasoned grant-writers are skilled recyclers, re-using paragraphs from prior applications.
- An unsuccessful funding application does not mean that you are walking away empty-handed. In addition to an increased level of grant writing experience, many funders are willing to provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of your application, and make suggestions for improvements. Take advantage of this opportunity.
- Many websites exist to support grant-writers. Find them and use them. Below is a list of websites referred to while preparing this presentation:

http://grants.nih.gov/grants/writing_application.htm

www.atomiclearning.com/en/download/grant_ebook.pdf

www.guidestar.org › [Home](#) › [News](#) › [Articles](#) › [2006](#)

COMMON PITFALLS IN SEEKING FUNDING AND WRITING GRANT APPLICATIONS

- 1) **Chasing the Money** – Don't write a grant to start a new project you don't really need or want just to bring funding into your agency.
- 2) **Requesting money to offset a deficit** – No one wants to fund your poor planning or agency shortfall.
- 3) **Failing to understand it's a competitive process** – Unless funding is a sure bet (e.g., based on formula/entitlement), always assume demand is higher than supply.
- 4) **Downloading the wrong grant application** – Similar-sounding grant applications could be issued simultaneously by the same funder. Or an out-of-date application might also still be on the Web site.
- 5) **Failing to upload required attachments or uploading the wrong attachments to an electronic application.**
- 6) **Not reading the grant application thoroughly** – Highlight the most important parts (like due dates and required documents). Mark anything you don't understand or where you need to find answers.

- 7) **Not reading the grant application early enough** – Don't delay—leaving yourself too little time to make important contacts, gather important data, calculate costs accurately, find a grant writer...can be disastrous!
- 8) **Assuming the funder knows you/your agency** – Even if you are the grant-award poster child, don't assume proposal readers will mentally fill in the missing information. Don't depend on prior knowledge or past relationships.
- 9) **Disregarding the funder's questions** – If it's important to the funder, it's important to you.
- 10) **Philosophizing** – Don't argue with the funder's assumptions. If you don't agree with what they're interested in (or your ideas don't match their requirements), you should probably find another funder.
- 11) **Being redundant** – Saying it once is usually enough. Don't add unnecessary "fill" or "fluff".
- 12) **Reorganizing the proposal** – Follow the format instructions and place items where the funder has requested them—this is not the time to get creative with your presentation.

- 13) **Being incomplete (including signatures)** – This could cost you points in scoring, or it could mean being considered non-responsive and therefore disqualified.
- 14) **Assuming it's a one-person job** – In most cases, no matter who writes the proposal or fills out the application, collaboration or consultation with others will be required.
- 15) **Using a former proposal without updating it** – If you're going to use it, at least shake off all the dust. Use current dates, current numbers, and current staff.
- 16) **Using a proposal previously submitted to another funder** – This is fair game, just be sure to change the names to protect the innocent!
- 17) **Not doing the math correctly** - Use a calculator or use Excel, but make sure the numbers add up! Funders lose confidence when budgets or estimates aren't accurate.
- 18) **Poorly estimating real costs** – Although budget line item transfers may be possible after the grant award, think through ahead of time what labor, materials, and overhead costs are expected to be.
- 19) **Backing into the budget** – Be realistic about what you need. Don't create a budget that reflects the maximum allowed just because the money's there. Also, don't expect staff to make any cuts that may be needed.

- 20) **Requesting non-qualifying expenses** – Don't sneak it in and hope no one notices! (Hint: even if funded for it, auditors can catch these items after the grant award).
- 21) **Budget surprises** – Don't ask for items not described or mentioned in the narrative.
- 22) **“Going political”** – Even with friends in high places, lobbying for points could backfire or blow up in your face.
- 23) **Starting your project before getting the grant** – If the ink isn't dry on the contract, don't assume it's a done deal. Typically, costs incurred prior to the effective date of a fully-executed contract are not eligible for reimbursement.