

Oklahoma Museums Association
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Ten points to increase your grant writing success

by Cecil Carter, Coordinator, Center for Rural Competitiveness, Murray State College

1. Be certain your organization is fundable

Fundability comes from the "right" organizational structure as well as the organization's activities. The right organizational structure typically means being a 501(c)3 organization. This refers to the Internal Revenue Service codes. 501 is the section of the code defining tax exemptions, "c" means corporations, and 3 is the type organization. So a 501(c)3 organization is viewed as an organization doing community or charitable work.

Fundability has to do with other things like:

- list of accomplishments for last year
- list of three objectives for next year
- proposal talking about the "people side" of the project
- an absolute need – remember you need to show "Drama, Trauma, Doom and Gloom"
- report showing you are at full capacity now
- list of partners
- fundable project

2. Designing a fundable project

The key to having a fundable project is one that matches the potential grant makers criteria for funding. Grant makers do not fund organizations; they fund causes or projects that match their need to give. Here is where your organization's mission plays a vital role. This means the area in which you operate, like your museum or education or medical or infrastructure. The mission is why you are in business. Geographic boundaries can be a criteria some grant makers have. For example if a grant maker prefers to make grants in the Tulsa area, it is a total waste of your time to apply for the grant if your organization only serves Oklahoma City.

3. Research most likely grant makers

Research means finding a grant maker that wants to fund, and can fund a project like yours. You are matching what you need with what they fund. Basically this means time on the internet, searching out each grant maker's funding criteria.

4. Develop a relationship with grant makers

People are simply more comfortable dealing with other "friends." Folks like to deal with people that they know. Never write a grant without calling the grant maker first.

5. Develop partners for the project

There are no Lone Rangers! Some organization out there is willing to partner with your

organization. They share your mission or your stakeholders. The word these days is collaboration not competition. Funders expect to see partners in your project.

6. Leverage the grant maker's funding

This simply means show you have financial partners willing to invest money in the proposed project. Grant makers do not like to fund 100% of a project. When several grant makers see other colleagues investing in your project, they are more likely to invest in your project also.

7. Write a compelling letter of inquiry

Many funders today want a letter of inquiry prior to your developing a grant proposal. Quite honestly, they are trying to screen you before you spend hours on developing the proposal. Remember, they also have to read all these proposals. Some grant makers want a letter of inquiry before they even send you an invitation to develop a grant proposal or let you have an application.

8. Develop a carefully crafted grant proposal

This means: write in plain English. Spell check does not catch logic errors. When the grant maker asks for exhibits in a certain order or with certain font size or certain margins...DO IT. Carefully crafted will also mean developing the Drama, Trauma, Gloom and Doom aspect of the proposal. Successful grant writers usually make a case showing that "the sky will fall unless their organization receives this proposed funding."

9. Follow up with the grant maker

This is basic good manners. If you communicate with the potential grant maker it is an opportunity to build the relationship. Call and thank them; write them a thank you for the phone call. Handwriting a thank you letter will get you more than an email.

10. After you get the grant, pave the way for the next grant

Do what the proposal says you intend to do with the funding. Keep your word. Integrity gets a lot of grants. The grant making community is very small. Word gets around if you do not perform. Either do what you promised to do with the funding or get out of the business. I say this because if you do not do what you promised, you will not get another grant, and neither will your organization.

Good Luck!