



Grant Writing Tips for Nonprofits



by Lisa Hoffmeyer

Whether you are responding to a Request for Proposal from your local government or you are seeking an award from a foundation, submitting a well written, professional and responsive application can dramatically increase your chance of success. Here are some tips.

Read the Full Application and Instructions

Applications can sometimes be confusing so it's important that you understand exactly what information is being requested, what documents should be attached, how many copies are needed, and how the response should be organized. Make sure your project meets the goals of the grant offer.

Appearances and Timeliness Matter

First impressions are important! With few exceptions, most funding applications can be completed in Word, fillable PDF or submitted online.

Pay close attention to submission deadlines and leave yourself plenty of time to complete the application so that it is delivered prior to the deadline. It is unprofessional to ask for extensions and in many cases, a late submission will be disqualified.

Write Succinctly

An application that is clear, well written, and provides the information requested will be appreciated. Do not submit extraneous information. Most applications begin with an invitation to describe the nature of the program or project for which you are requesting funds. Use this opportunity to open with a simply stated request such as: "ABC nonprofit is requesting \$100,000 to partially fund the construction of a 10-unit affordable rental property in the XYZ neighborhood of Anytown, Florida."

Your opening statements should confirm that your project represents what the funder wants to support and is consistent with their mission. A reviewer can use this information to quickly determine that your project meets the basic requirements of the grant so they can move on to the details of the submission.

Acronyms

If you use acronyms, include the full name the first time it is used. For example: "We intend to leverage these funds with a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) provided by Anytown Housing Department." The next time you mention this funding source you can use the acronym. Grant applications may be reviewed by people with limited knowledge of the details of your business so briefly explain technical terms and concepts.

Review

Always have someone else proof read your response. A good proof reader with a fresh eye should be able to catch grammatical errors, inconsistencies, duplications and misspellings that you may have overlooked. This may be a task for one of your Board Members.

Organize and Include Pertinent Attachments

When funders request additional exhibits, such as financial statements, audit reports, organizational charts, project timelines, etc., have these properly labeled and organized so they are easy for a reviewer to locate. Copies must be legible and easy to read. Do not include anything that was not specifically requested.

Seek Help

If your organization does not have sufficient capacity to submit a professional and responsive application, consider engaging a qualified grant writer to assist. Grant writers frequently work on a contract basis paid by the hour. When a grant writer first comes on board, they begin with familiarizing themselves with your organization and work, so using the same person or firm on a regular basis is cost effective. **HNN**