

The Grant Writing Toolkit

FIVE STEPS IN DESIGNING A SUCCESSFUL GRANT STRATEGY

Your nonprofit's board members, staff members and volunteers may believe that any and all foundations – big or small – would be interested in granting your nonprofit funds for a project. Better yet, they would want to provide a grant for unrestricted operational support.

However, grant attainment is much more about relationship development and alignment. Grant seeking is a competitive pursuit and numerous factors come into play when a grantor considers a proposal from a nonprofit. A well-written grant application is just one piece of the puzzle. Strategy weighs heavily into your success. Following are five steps to determine what strategy is best for your organization.

Step One: Decision Making Before You Start Writing

The best strategy is an informed strategy. It may seem - to an outsider - that any grant money in the door is good for the organization, or that grants are easy to secure. The reality is that grants also bring with them lots of work. Grants are typically time-limited and non-renewable. Many grants anticipate that your organization will have the resources to continue your project after the grant money ends. Therefore, the best uses for grants are:

- To fund the start-up of a project
- To fund the expansion of a proven program
- To market test the development of a promising idea
- To support strategic planning or other forms of capacity building
- To underwrite an event
- To support the purchase of new technology or other capital expense
- To support a capital campaign
- To commission research

Grant seeking is highly competitive, and funds are meant to leverage progress. Rarely are grants given to sustain a project for the long term. While some foundations are moving closer to operational support, those funds are granted for very specific reasons or based on long-term partnerships. Local corporate foundations tend to participate in event sponsorship while larger corporate foundations align their giving with nonprofits that also support their corporate mission in some related way.

Questions to Answer Before Your Nonprofit Engages in Grant Seeking

- In terms of our revenue mix, where should grants fit?
- What projects, events or strategies are best suited for grant support?
- How will we sustain a grant-funded program, after the funding ends?
- Are there specific collaborating partners we should be working with?
- What internal capacity do we need to successfully execute and follow up on grant awards?



Step Two: Know and Track Your Grant-Making Universe

Maintaining a grant prospect chart requires a commitment of time and research but will pay off significantly in the long run. This chart tracks your organization's most likely grantors, their focus, your alignments, and deadlines.

If you are starting from scratch, you can compile your list of potential grantors by researching such resources as:

- [Grant Station](#)
- [Guide Star](#)
- Taking note of foundations described in annual reports of other nonprofits

Before a grantor is added to your chart visit their website. View their mission statement, any grant guidelines, funding priorities and requirements. The bottom-line is that the missions of both the grantor and grantee must match. The type of funding available, the target region of the grantor and the size of grants available must align with your own organization's needs.

Updating this chart is everyone's responsibility! We recommend you enlist the help of staff and board in keeping the chart updated. Delivering information about grantors is a great way for board members and staff to help in expanding the universe of your options. See the sample below.

Grantor	Mission/Region Alignment Notes	Grant Requirements	Size of Grants Awarded	History Next Steps	Deadlines to Watch
Local United Way	Focus on hunger: good match, our region in 9 months	Must be in business 5 yrs., northern NH, Send in Letter of Inquiry, followed by invite	\$10-15,000	No previous history, apply in 9 months when reach 5 years	Contact in March introductions, September 1, 2016 grant due
Statewide Community Foundation	Fund poverty fighting programs- like capacity building / collaborative projects good match	Must focus on one of their 3 priorities Must be invited for anything over \$50k	\$15-25,000	File online for approval grantee workshop in May	Grant excepted March and November 1
Mrs. Smith's Family Foundation	Funds programs for young parents in towns of Antrim and Dover Only a match for our Dover programs	A letter outlining history, request and predicted results, no more than 3 pages	\$3,500-\$5,000	Five years ago, received \$3,500 for Dover project	Rolling acceptance- our target: July
Federal Bank Community Foundation	Sponsors events for social services in our region worth looking into for fall event	File online application after receiving approval Community Dept.	\$2,500-5,000	3 yrs. ago sponsored our event	Quarterly grant making- our target: September



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Regional Health Foundation	Fund projects that support health in region- broad mission- need conversation	Must have partners, commitment letters, logic model	\$25,000-\$50,000	Never received funding, ready in 2016	Meet in May, convene collaborators over summer, apply November 1 2016

Step Three: Compile Compelling Stories, Data and Research

Now that you have compiled your research, filled out your grantor prospect list, provided grant education for your board and staff, determined the ways grant revenue fits into your financial strategy and selected your grantor matches – it's time to position your grant application for success.

Keep in mind that the reviewer reading your application will probably have a stack of grant applications to wade through, assess and in the end, recommend for funding – or not.

You do NOT want an application laden with overly dramatic stories or grandiose promises of “saving the world.” Nor do you want to include volumes of data and charts that may or may not tell the story you want to tell. You do not want to attach brochures and other marketing materials unless they are requested.

You do NOT want to promise more than you can deliver. Funders prefer reasonable yet challenging goals, achievable results, and realistic outcome measurement deliverables. You must know your internal capacity to deliver on each promise made in a grant.

You DO want to engage the reader. Each section of the grant application should veer away from the humdrum and capture the reader's interest. Instead of a typical organizational history, describe why your founders felt it was so important to create your organization, share pivotal milestones and share your current status.

You DO want to provide data or a graphic or a chart that is meaningful. Only include data that clearly makes the point you want to make.

You DO want to provide data that supports your credibility and credentials. National data is often used in a grant to describe a trend from a reliable source that will support your request. Use data that describes why your organization is well positioned to achieve results and/or underscores the depth of expertise your nonprofit team possesses.

You DO want to include brief (1-2 short paragraphs) stories of participants in your programs and/or testimonials from the community.

Tips for Collecting useful Data and Stories

Engage your entire organization in data and story collection in the following ways:



- Invite board members to collect and keep archives of articles and stories.
- Use a portion of every staff meeting to share brief stories of impact.
- Invite volunteers to track local/national news articles related to your mission.
- Search trade periodicals and research in the field to identify trends and data.
- Create active files of awards, testimonials, and feedback you receive and encourage board and staff to record feedback they receive.



STEP FOUR: PLOTTING YOUR STRATEGY

Leveraging the Brilliance of the Logic Model

The Logic Model, also called the Theory of Change, is a way of mapping out any strategy or project outcome which you want to achieve. Begin from the long-term outcome you want to achieve and work backwards to chart out the steps, the deadlines, the activities, and resources you will need to achieve that change.

Sample Logic Model

Start here					
Project	Activities	Resources Needed	Time frame	Short term outcome	Long term outcome
Read for Life Early Literacy Program	Story hours Home visits Trips to library Family programs Support groups	Funding \$30k Volunteers Teachers Home visitors Books Libraries ESL Training	3 year intervention ages 2-5 Start date: Sept. 2016 End date: Sept. 2019	Toddlers/ preschoolers love reading and read with parents every day	Children enter kindergarten ready to learn

Plotting your strategy also means plotting a realistic budget

Creating an appropriate budget for your project requires a thorough understanding of all of the costs of the program (space, administration, supplies, taxes, accounting, staffing, offices supplies etc.) These costs include the resources that will be needed to pay fair and equitable salaries and/or the cost of managing, recruiting, and supporting volunteers.

In the past it was common for nonprofits to greatly reduce their actual costs in order to secure the grant they were seeking. Unfortunately, this practice has wreaked havoc in the sector and has led funders and the public to expect nonprofits to deliver significant results on a shoestring budget.

Today most grant funders want to see budgets that reflect the full cost of the project backed by data that supports the salaries and other costs appropriately.

STEP FIVE: WRITING AND SUBMITTING A STRONG PROPOSAL

Three Absolute Rules to Follow when Writing a Grant

1. Read the Directions Once
2. Read the Directions Twice (highlight deadlines/unique requirements)
3. Read the Directions Again (highlight what you missed first or second time!)

If you find yourself with a group of nonprofit leaders and bring up “grant horror stories,” you will undoubtedly hear many harrowing tales of colleagues who have delivered grants late, were rejected because of too many pages or didn’t notice that letters of support were needed until it was too late.

The most powerful tactic is to **read the directions**. After you have thoroughly read the directions and noted all the detailed deadlines and specifics, the next step is to **follow the directions**.

Clean, Confident and Clear Descriptive Language

Grant reviewers understand that most grant writers are motivated by passion for their cause. However, in grant writing your goal is to transform that passion into clear and compelling language. Avoid flowery, dramatic, or grandiose narratives and letting the data and the powerful descriptions of the problem tell the story. Review the following examples:

Example #1: It is our duty as Americans is to wage a war on drugs because thousands of our high school children are destined to endure lives of misery, incarceration, and depression. With your support we will raise awareness of the crisis in our streets and engage every parent, the police force, and the entire community to end this issue forever.

Example #2: On January 5, the Smithtown police were called to an abandoned barn where they found two local students dead from heroin overdoses and another 30-40 underage youth so severely intoxicated, they had to call ambulances from neighboring towns. Our coalition recognizes that it will take our community and the involvement of diverse partners (parents, students, police, counselors, educators) working together to mount a multi-level response to this difficult issue and we feel well positioned to provide the leadership and coordination needed. With the support of this grant, we will put into motion a strategic response based on best practices from communities across the nation as describe in the National Institute of Health’s recent publication.

The first example implies that the grantor and every American should embrace this call to action. It implies that with the funds granted, it will end the issue forever. This is highly optimistic as well as unlikely to be true.

The second example provides not only data in an interesting and powerful way but begins to position the organization as a thoughtful and collaborative partner, seeking funding to take on a role it feels capable of fulfilling towards a realistic goal.



