Book The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need

Top Grant Writers and Grant Givers Share Their Secrets

Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox
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Recommendation

Veteran grant writers and nonprofit funding development specialists Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox again combine their vast experience in this updated third edition of their best-selling handbook for preparing successful grant proposals to foundations and government agencies. Whether you are a veteran grant writer or whether you are new to grantsmanship, you are sure to learn fresh strategies and effective techniques for presenting solid, well-designed proposals. Full of information, explanations, practical advice and examples, the book provides an appendix featuring 50 useful tips, a proposal checklist, a glossary, sample grant forms, a state-by-state directory of community foundations and a list of important websites. The book also presents a revealing "Funders' Roundtable" of grant makers discussing the effects of the 2008 economic recession. *BooksInShort* recommends that serious grant writers – and those who aspire to be – keep a copy within reach at all times.

Take-Aways

- The economic recession that began in 2008 has taken a "terrible toll" on grant funding.
- The basic elements of grant proposals remain unaltered, but the grant environment has undergone a change.
- Money is scarce, so grant seekers must write better, stronger proposals.
- Determine exactly how a grant furthers your firm's mission, goals and objectives.
- Build a reference library of documents that characterize all aspects of your organization.
- Create an outline of narrative essays to use as you develop grant applications.
- Obtain grant application guidelines from grant makers whose mission, goals and objectives match your own.
- Follow instructions precisely, because failure to comply can mean disqualification.
- Build collaborative partnerships for grant and program success.
- If you lose a grant, learn from your mistakes. If you win a grant, keep your promises.

Summary

An Altered Grant Funding Landscape

For many years, the grant funding process was fairly predictable. But in 2008, the recession in the US and worldwide complicated matters for grant makers and grant seekers. In these difficult economic times, funding is limited, and funders are reallocating grant monies. The climate in which the game is played has evolved, but the rules remain the same: A well-crafted proposal that accurately, comprehensively addresses a funder's questions is the centerpiece of your grant-seeking strategy.

"The most successful programs and organizations are not grant driven, they are mission driven."

The "Funders' Roundtable," a "large and diverse group of grant makers from government funding agencies and foundations," reveals the new realities of philanthropy and government funding. Substantive changes are afoot in grantors' financial positions, the amount of money they can afford to distribute, and the level of information and detail they insist upon in application packages. Fiscal uncertainty surrounding the business affairs of all members of the nonprofit community – donors, funders and applicants – complicates everything. More applicants are vying for increasingly scarcer resources. Success requires doing your homework before proceeding.

Part 1: Before You Apply

Define the nature of your organization. Are you a grassroots group that serves local community needs, a nonprofit or government agency aiming to provide social services, or an advocacy group promoting an issue-oriented agenda? In the US, organizations incorporated as nonprofits must gain 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status to receive most grant funds directly. Nonprofits without tax-exempt status must apply in partnership with a tax-exempt organization – a "fiscal conduit" – willing to officially receive and be accountable for the money. Scholars seeking to undertake research projects or artists and writers embarking on creative ventures often can use their affiliations with universities, medical facilities or cultural institutions to establish a fiscal conduit. Groups of artists can form their own nonprofits or link with established cultural institutions.

> "Preparing a grant proposal is a process; it is not just a simple matter of responding to a series of detailed questions and attaching a batch of forms and adding columns of dollar amounts."

A grant is a sum of money given to applicant organizations and individuals who meet specific requirements outlined in funding organizations' requests for proposals (RFPs). Be certain that the goals and objectives of your grant proposal mesh with the stated purpose of the grant. Funders prefer applications from those who fit naturally with their organizational mission and RFP objectives, rather than applications from groups who "massage" their proposed projects to fit eligibility guidelines. Funding organizations include those operated by private individuals; private corporations; federal, state and local governments; and six different types of foundations (family foundations, independent private foundations, federated funds, corporate foundations and financial institutions).

> "A grant is an award of money that allows you to do very specific things that usually meet very specific guidelines that are spelled out in painstaking detail and to which you must respond very clearly in your grant proposal."

Finding grant opportunities requires diligent research. Tap into the Foundation Center's valuable online search and tutorial resources, and its network of reference collections in libraries throughout the US. Other resources include the Grantsmanship Center, the US government's Federal Register, the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA), the federal government's Grants.gov website, and the sites of most federal and state agencies. Check the GuideStar website to access tax-exempt organizations' Form 990 tax returns which show you a grantor's funding history. Become tech-savvy. Not only will your search for grant opportunities be easier and quicker, but more and more grant makers accept only online applications.

> "There's a lot more to grantsmanship than just the proposal."

Examine a potential grant's application package to determine if you are eligible. If you do not meet the eligibility requirements, do not apply. If you do, learn what narratives and documentation the funder requires. No two grant makers and no two application packages are alike. Contact the funder to ask questions or to obtain more information. Many applications require you to submit narratives that describe your organization, define the problem you want to solve and explain how you'll use the grant to achieve your goals. Most applications specify the number of words and pages for each narrative, the font style and size, the margins, the deadline for submission, the sequence for attaching your supporting materials, and other details. Follow these directions to the letter because failure to do so will ensure rejection of your application.

> "There are no right answers on a grant application, but there are plenty of wrong ones."

To prepare to apply for relevant grants, first collect important background information about your organization, its structure, its past accomplishments and its future plans. Set up a filing system for important documents and computer folders for electronic files. Include mission statements, incorporation documents, tax returns and audit statements, lists of board members and key personnel, their bios, an organizational chart, the number of full- and part-time staff and volunteers, recent organizational and departmental budgets, annual reports, and personnel policies and procedures. You may need additional materials specifically related to your mission, such as floor plans of your facility. Write narratives describing your organization's history, current programs and service audience. Gather up your needs assessments, impact statements, evaluation reports and any memoranda of understanding (MOUs) describing your agency's partnerships with support organizations.

Part 2: Preparing Your Grant Application

Take care and pay close attention when you research, document, write and assemble your application package. The review committee will check whether you followed instructions, answered every question, and provided documentation in the manner and sequence requested. Each of these topics addresses a key element of a successful proposal:

- **Understand the basics** – Savvy grant seekers understand certain implicit agreements between themselves and grant makers, as well as "underlying assumptions about the entire grant process." For example, funders will rarely ask you to state outright how your project serves the mission of the grant maker, but you must always show that it does. Become well versed in the fundamental nature of philanthropy.
- **Hone your writing skills** – Follow these rules of good writing: Work from an outline. Avoid ambiguity and slang. Don't exaggerate. Check your grammar. Use a dictionary and thesaurus. Don't include your personal opinions. Don't use too many adjectives. Avoid writing in the first person. Limit the use of abbreviations and acronyms. Include enough information to explain your meaning.
- **"Tackle the blank page"** – Create a comprehensive outline as a central document that you can refer to later when preparing other grant applications. In the first half of your outline, cover your organization's mission, history and location; community and city demographics; current programs, service clients and participants; service partners; facilities and resources; personnel, including volunteers; board of directors; budget and additional data such as awards, media

coverage and anecdotal support.

- **Identify community needs** – Successful grant applications offer viable solutions to pressing community needs. Grant makers look for compelling reasons to get involved with your organization. Develop your outline by identifying and documenting the perceived problem, stating specific objectives, giving project details, clarifying the role of partner organizations, defining how you will evaluate ongoing and final results, forecasting how you will pay for costs, and justifying your organization's capacity to reach its goals. Explain why your proposal is important, and back up your statements with solid evidence.
- **Define and document goals and objectives** – Many proposal writers confuse the terms "mission," "goals" and "objectives." An organization's mission captures its raison d'être, for example, "to improve the lives of children." Specific goals might be to improve local schools or raise literacy levels. Objectives are the actual, definable outcomes you want to achieve through your programs. Objectives must be "concrete, specific, measurable, realistic, attainable and time-bound." Determine just how well your mission, goals and objectives mesh with those of the grant maker. The more clearly you can demonstrate a thorough match, the better your chances of success.
- **"Develop and present a winning program"** – A grant writer serves as liaison between the program director and staff on the one hand, and the "scope and limitations" of the RFP on the other. The "program description" is the heart of your grant proposal. After you demonstrate how your project matches the grant maker's stated priorities, show how your solution addresses the perceived need, and explain how the program in your application fits into and enhances your organization. Include a timeline for developing and implementing the project, job descriptions and marketing strategies to garner community support. Outline how you will recruit an advisory board, staff members and program participants, or describe the participants already on board.
- **Build partnerships and coalitions** – Other agencies' collaborative involvement during the grant development stage will give you additional expertise and will bring diversity to the process of creating better, more sustainable solutions. Collaboration also shows that you'll have support when you implement your project, so it will appear more likely to succeed. Include MOUs or formal "letters of commitment" in your application to show that you have solid community support.
- **Evaluate your program's success** – Explain how you will gauge the success of the proposed project, even if the grant maker doesn't require monitoring. At a minimum, outline how you plan to measure your program's "before and after" situation and specify the metrics you will use in your assessment. Failure to emphasize evaluation could cost you the good opinion of your funding source.
- **Create a realistic and viable budget** – Elements of a proposed budget include employee wages and fringe benefits; all other direct costs such as travel, supplies and consultants; indirect costs associated with administrative overhead; and the value of in-kind goods and services, such as volunteer time. When assembling your line-item budget summary, be consistent with all the other aspects of your proposal. Neither under estimate nor inflate your monetary needs.
- **Sustain the value of the grant** – Increasingly, grant makers want to support projects that can continue after the grant period ends. You can demonstrate sustainability if other funders are willing to provide additional money during or after the grant period, if your organization has strong fundraising efforts in place, if you can charge program participants fees to defray costs, or if you fund activities that have enduring value – for example, train-the-trainer programs and community resource guides.
- **Prove you can keep your promises** – Grant makers want to know about your organization's ability to manage donated money effectively, to carry out the proposed program and to produce the required reports. To enhance your credibility, you can discuss your history of good performance, your reputation in your community, your relationships with past collaborators, your personnel's experience, details of your financial control methods as well as the "adequacy of resources" at your disposal.
- **Add "front and back" supplementary materials** – Your cover page generally should include legal information identifying your organization, its chief executive officer as well as the contact person for the proposed program. Many funders require a concise summary as an overview of your proposal. In addition to the multipart narrative, provide additional material as the grant requires. Any proposal longer than five or six pages needs a table of contents. Include appendices or attachments in the order stated in the guidelines.

Part 3: Site Visits and the Big Decision

More and more foundations – but few government agencies – will want to meet your leaders and partners, tour your facilities, and see your programs in action. Site visits don't guarantee getting a grant, but they bring you a step closer and offer excellent opportunities to improve your odds. Win or lose, receiving the funder's decision is a momentous event. If your application is not approved, learn as much as you can as to why. That will help you reassess your strategies for seeking other funding. If you are approved, celebrate, and then take the steps outlined in your acceptance letter. Keep your promises to bring your dream into reality and to earn future funding.

About the Authors

Ellen Karsh developed and wrote foundation and government grant proposals for New York City. **Arlen Sue Fox** has extensive experience in grant writing, program planning, evaluation and consulting.