50 Tips for Improving Your Chances of Winning a Grant

1. Take stock of your own organization: Know what type of organization you work for and the type and size of grants it can manage.

2. Incorporate as a tax-exempt organization: If you want to get grants from most foundation or government sources, you need to become a 501(c)(3).

3. If you're not a 501(c)(3), link up now: with an organization, that is! If incorporation is a process that's too costly, too demanding, or not appropriate, find a tax-exempt organization that is willing to be your fiscal conduit.

4. Find the Foundation Center Library: This is the first resource for identifying private funding sources that are right for you.

5. Get online: All federal, state, and local agencies post funding opportunities on their websites.

6. Find the right opportunity: Don't submit a scattershot proposal to all the funders in your area. Do some research to be sure your program is what a particular funder can fund.

7. Read the guidelines: Be absolutely sure that a particular grant is right for you.

8. Do your homework: See what organizations granters have funded recently, and how much they gave.

9. Read the instructions: Answer every question and cover every topic.

10. Get organized: At slow times in your workday, prepare a file with all the documents you need when you are ready to submit.

11. Give yourself plenty of time to prepare the proposal, especially if it's for a government agency. Rome wasn't built in a day, and successful proposal aren't written in two weeks.

12. Try to bring partners into your project early, even if collaboration is not required by the funder.

13. Speak with the program officer to determine if the funding opportunity is a fit for your organization.

14. Call for technical assistance during the preparation of a government proposal (e.g. ask for clarification if application instructions seem contradictory).

15. Don't use too many acronyms. Don't use jargon, either.

16. Watch your language. Be careful to be sensitive to all individuals and organizations named in your proposal.

17. Use the funder's language. Use the language in the application package.

18. Repeat yourself when you have to. A certain repetition is inevitable in response to an application's questions and requirements for each section.

19. Give grant proposal reviewers a break. Use charts, tables, graphs, and other illustrative material whenever possible.

20. Create a checklist. Review it at least once a day, every day and once more before you submit the proposal.

21. Be sure each section of the proposal is consistent with every other section.

22. Use the application package's topics as the headings in your own proposal. This will make it easy for the reviewers.

23. When designing your own objectives, be realistic. Aim high but not too high.

24. Know how you will recognize success. Explain how you will know whether or not your objective(s) was achieved.

25. Read the instructions!

26. Get free consulting for the evaluation section of your proposal. Many academics and freelance consultants will willingly work with you on a major proposal to help frame objectives.

27. Make sure your budget is reasonable. Funders know if you're asking for too much or too little.

28. Compute your budget figures carefully. Carelessness doesn't make funders trust you with their money.

29. Think about sustainability. Tell the funder what you hope to do to keep a program going once the grant runs out.

30. Include a time line in your proposal. It will help the funder understand what you plan to do and when you plan to do it.

31. Write your abstract or executive summary two days before you submit the proposal – no sooner, and no later. By then you will have a really good understanding of what you are proposing.

32. Don't stuff the appendix. Be thoughtful about what you think they must see.

33. For a government proposal, include a letter from your elected official. For a foundation proposal, don't.

34. When in doubt, ask the funder questions before submitting the proposal.

35. Think about the final report. Remember, if you get the grant, someone has to implement it.

36. Use spell-check and colleagues for proofreading help.

37. Use your own reviewers. Ask different people to edit and comment on the proposal at different points in the process.

38. Save your most trusted, honest, courageous "reviewer" to read the final draft while there's enough time to edit.

39. Get involved with advocacy groups. Work with them to generate new funding sources to meet the needs.

40. Get on mailing lists. Make sure you hear all the funding that is available to your community.

41. Clip online newspaper and journal articles. Keep a file of materials describing what your city, state, or country are doing in the areas that pertain to your organization's work.

42. Get to know your elected officials, and let them get to know you. Invite them to see your operation.

43. Don't ask government or foundation program officers to change their guidelines for you.

44. Do discuss the unmet needs and potential new funding directions in your community or in a particular program area.

45. If you do get funded, go back to the proposal to be sure you can implement it.

46. If you don't get funded, find out why, and how you can do better in the future.

47. Wait until next year. If you can't develop and write a high-quality proposal in the allotted time, wait until next year or the next funding cycle.

48. Keep the funders informed.

49. Get on the funder's radar. Go to conferences. Speak at conferences. Network.

50. Always, read the instructions!