

GRANT writing



Win grants - finding the right grant maker, writing inquiries & proposals, following rules & regulations, and managing the award

Introduction

Grant writing is the process of determining who can help you fund your needs and projects and how to persuade them to do so. A grant is funding, provided from either a private or public source, that is to be used for a specified purpose. A grant, unlike a loan, does not need to be repaid.

Types of Grants

Private-Sector Grants

- **Foundations and trusts:** These sources are diverse and wide ranging. Many private trusts and foundations exist to fund projects, causes, and areas of interest defined at the time they were established that reflect the aims and goals of the founders, and ultimately the trustees and administrators, of those organizations.
- **Corporate grant makers:** These sources offer grants either directly from the corporation or from a trust or foundation established to distribute grant funding on behalf of, or in the best interests of, a corporation. Corporate grants are usually specific to the interests of the corporation sponsoring the award.

Public-Sector Grants

These sources can range from federal government agencies to local government entities, including state, county, and, occasionally, local governments.

- **Federal:** Federal grants can come from a wide variety of sources, agencies, and programs. Many are subject to congressional approval or authorization and therefore vary from year to year. Many are one-time offerings aimed at achieving specific goals as defined by the political climate.
- **State:** State grants are mostly specific to agencies and departments charged with assisting or developing programs as directed by the state legislature. Many of these programs are "pass-through" federal programs that may or may not be funded by federal dollars.
- **County and local:** Generally small in the amounts awarded, these grant programs are usually designed as assistance or supplements to larger public grant programs. They may also be funded by state or federal funds.

What Type of Grant Do You Need?

- **General operating:** A grant to assist with either a one-time or ongoing budget need of your organization; not usually available for start-up operations.
- **Brick-and-mortar project:** Funding for a structure such as a building, parking lot, remodel, expansion, or other physical, tangible end product.
- **Social services and intangible programs:** Monies for programs that assist others, such as job training or providing food and shelter, education enhancement, neighborhood redevelopment, etc.
- **Other:** Programs not falling into the previous categories; usually these are targeted toward specialized needs and should be directed to a specific type of grant maker who understands the request.

Do You Need a Grant, or Can You Raise the Funds on Your Own?

Evaluate the Situation

- **Is the project time sensitive?** If so, consider alternative ways of raising funds. Grants can take months and even up to a year to be awarded. Awards are not guaranteed. Requests can and do fail.
- **Can your donor base do the job with some extra effort?** Can your organization work the donor base a little harder and raise the funds needed? After some evaluation, this may be an appealing alternative. Additionally, a specific, well managed and planned fundraising campaign may raise the funds needed in a time-crunch scenario. Alternative efforts like these not only make success more likely but also can draw the donor community together and build overall support for the project and your organization.
- **Are there aspects of the project that are controversial or questionable to some people?** Analyze your project and the grant makers you are considering approaching. If issues arise that may conflict with the prospective grant maker, consider modifying the project or find another, more receptive grant maker.

First Steps: Research

Choose a Point Person

It is important to have one person designated to gather and receive information, manage, and make decisions regarding the grant proposal. Otherwise, confusion and conflicting information will result in poor presentation, omitted information, missed deadlines, and the appearance of a poorly managed organization.

Research Your Target

- **Online sources:** The best way to learn about potential funders is by starting your search online. You can do the work yourself and likely get the information you need, or you can take advantage of the following services.

Paid

- **Foundation Directory Online:** Private trusts, foundations, and corporate grant makers; considered the best source on the web (fconline.foundationcenter.org)
- **GuideStar:** Private foundations and trusts (www2.guidestar.org)
- **GrantStation:** Private foundations and trusts (www.grantstation.com)
- **BIG Online:** Private grant makers (www.bigdatabase.com)
- **FoundationSearch:** Much like BIG Online (www.foundationsearch.com)

Free

- **Grants.gov:** Federal government funding (www.grants.gov)
- **USA.gov:** Additional federal government funding sources (www.usa.gov/Business/Nonprofit.shtml)
- **Internal Revenue Service:** Form 990 (apps.irs.gov/app/eos)
- **Foundation Center 990 Finder** (foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder)
- **Idealist:** Connects people, organizations, and resources (www.idealists.org)
- **GrantSpace:** Offers information and resources (grantspace.org)
- **Global Impact:** Connects donors and organizations (charity.org)

- Regarding state and local grants, search online for the state you want to work with; check the potential grant maker's website (public, private, or corporate), as most have their own site, which can provide valuable information; and don't forget your local library.

Network

Does anyone associated with your organization have a connection to the grant maker(s) you are approaching? Use these connections to make your case to potential grant makers known within the rules of ethics, civility, and common sense. Do not make requests or place demands on a contact that may put him/her in an uncomfortable or difficult position. Utilize the resources you may already have:

- **Your board of directors:** Your board should consist of some of the biggest movers and shakers in the community. They may know people associated with the grant maker(s) you are approaching. Do not be afraid to ask them.
- **Your staff:** Poll your staff. You might be surprised to find out who and what they know, especially if they've been working in the nonprofit sector for a while.
- **Your volunteers:** This is likely your biggest resource in this area. Coming from a wide variety of backgrounds and collectively having thousands of contacts, they could possibly provide access to the exact people you need to engage.
- **Friends of your organization:** These are people who support your organization in principal but are not actively engaged, including donors, pro bono providers, and others who may support your organization in nonmonetary ways. One-on-one requests work best with this group.

Use IRS Form 990

Form 990 is the publicly available tax return required for nonprofit organizations and private funding organizations. This form is one of the