

Top 11 Tips for Success in Grant Seeking

11 Focus on QUALITY, not quantity. Carefully preparing a few well-written proposals to funders with whom your work is an obvious fit is time well spent. Sending a blitz of formulaic requests to every funder in a directory is a poor use of your time – most, if not all, will go into the recycling bin.

10 Do your homework -- learn what a foundation has funded before. Most have web sites that list their grants for several years back -- easy to “Google” by foundation name. Take note of grant amounts, geographic range, and types of projects or organizations supported. (In the U.S., foundations are required to list their grants in their filings to the Internal Revenue Service on Form 990. In Canada, the T3010 form contains useful information and can be accessed from the Canada Revenue Agency.)

9 Do your utmost to establish contact with a prospective funder before submitting a proposal. Be *respectfully pushy* -- it may take several phone calls, e-mails or faxes. Ideally, meet in person, but at the least, have a telephone or e-mail interaction with the funder to raise your profile and ensure that you have a chance of success. If you can't get through to the program officer, try to reach her/his assistant or secretary. Ask what your best approach would be and what an appropriate grant request would be. If all your attempts to establish contact with a funder prospect fail (becoming more common in this era of voicemail and email), learn what you can from the other grantees you researched (see item 10 above).

8 Follow application guidelines closely. Don't give the funder an opportunity to toss out your proposal because you forgot to convert your budget to U.S. dollars or you didn't include the required references or letters of support. Flouting a funder's proposal-submission rules is a form of disrespect and likely to result in a one-way ticket to the recycling bin for your proposal or letter of inquiry.

7 Don't try to bend your work to fit a funder's criteria -- they'll spot you a mile away, quoting the famous line from Shakespeare's Hamlet “the Lady doth protest too much, methinks.” If your project doesn't fit, it doesn't fit. And you do your organization a disservice to chase grants that require you to “mission-shift.” Don't waste your time and the prospective funder's.

6 Focus on outcomes, not tactics. Be clear about *what will change* as a result of your project (but don't promise the moon). Understand the difference between *outcomes* (what will change, e.g. how people will change their behaviour) and *outputs* (how many times you do something -- numerically measurable factors).

5 Be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-specific. Many proposals never reach the boardroom for consideration, because their objectives are too vague to warrant serious consideration. If you follow the SMART formula, your proposal will be sure to warrant increased attention.

4 Don't promise the moon. Be realistic about what could be achieved in the timeframe of the grant and with the amount requested. Funders are usually more realistic about this than grant-seekers, who feel they need to dazzle with

grandiose promises. If you over-promise and under-deliver, you are going to have a terrible headache at grant-reporting time... and your organization's credibility will be lowered.

3 Set internal deadlines to complete sections of the proposal well in advance of the funder's submission deadline. We all know this one, but yet somehow we've all been in the position of working on a proposal at midnight that *has* to go out the next day and *then* discovering that we need two letters of support from community partner groups – letters we don't have. Check the funder's proposal requirements well in advance and set deadlines for gathering data and completing each element required.

2 Make sure *someone else* reads your proposal and checks your budget before the package goes out. This not only ensures that typos and math errors will be caught, but it gives you a clever way to draw other people in your organization into fundraising. Ask them to be tough: will this idea fly? Have you presented enough evidence to prove your approach is credible? Will it make sense to an outsider or have you assumed the funder will understand your acronyms and organizational jargon?

1 DO THE BUDGET AND FUNDING PLAN FIRST. There is no point spending hours writing a proposal until you know what the project will cost and whether you can get the revenue to support it. Doing your budget and funding plan will get you focused on *exactly* what you need to do the project. Again, this gives you a chance to draw others in your organization into the proposal-writing process, because they will need to tell you what things cost. Once the budget is done, when you write the narrative portion of the proposal you can be clear and specific (e.g. "We will be hiring two outreach officers for three months. They will be making 60 site visits to landowners", instead of "We'll talk to landowners").

And Finally... You've done all of the above, and you still didn't get the grant. Remember that some of it *IS* just plain old luck. Don't beat yourself up. Funders often have many times more worthwhile project proposals on a docket than they can fund. Picture them wringing their hands and weeping, wishing they could fund all the wonderful proposals put before them, but not having enough dollars to do so.

Do follow up and try to find out why your proposal was rejected, as this will put you in line for more serious consideration next time, and allow you to refine your proposal to better meet the funder's needs. Happy grant hunting!

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