

7 Steps to Get the Grant

Beyond Well-Written Grant Proposals

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“We need a grant writer!” Sound familiar? If you just had a talented writer who could sit in a room with a laptop and crank out a few pages, and if you just sent it out to a bunch of places, the money would start rolling in, right? Not exactly. How much attention did you pay to the last piece of unsolicited (junk) mail **you** received?

Here are some tips to successfully get grant funding.

1. Clarify Your Programs

If I asked you for money, your first question would be, “What for?” Before you even start looking for funding sources, your first step is to clarify what you are doing, why you are doing it, the resources that you have, what activities are involved, and what resources are required to do what you are proposing. It is far more strategic, and you will be more successful, when you create the program and then look for funding, rather than chasing grant opportunities and creating programs on the fly to fit a funder’s guidelines.

Think about what you are offering in exchange for funding support. What are you selling? What are you asking the funder to buy?

While social impact initiatives have visionary goals to address complex issues, statements like “we advocate for” or “we work toward” can leave a lot to the imagination about how the funds will be used. Using a logic model can help clarify your resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes visually in a grid. It can also tie the larger vision of the organization to the services you

are providing as well as the results, or outcomes, that show progress toward achieving your mission.

2. Write a Clear, Compelling Narrative

Whether you use a logic model or a strategic planning process to clarify your programs and services, the next step is to write a narrative about your organization or project. Start with the need you are addressing. Then, describe how the organization came to the point of addressing the need. This could include your vision, mission, and goals. Next, describe what you propose to achieve with the grant funding (See Step 1).

Brevity is key! Be succinct in describing what you will actually do and how the money will be spent. This is a balancing act because you also want to tell your story.

If writing isn't your strength, ask someone to interview you using questions from a funders' application and have them write your answers. You might ask others to read it – it should make sense to both people who know your organization or field and those who have no idea about it.

3. Create the Budget

Once you've established your programs and services and what you are proposing to do, and you've written the narrative, figure out how much it will cost. A grant request is a request for money, right? The funder wants to know how you will spend the grant. It seems obvious, but so many people spend a lot of time on the narrative and leave the budget for last. Many funders look at the budget first!

4. Research Likely Funding Sources

Now that you have a clear idea of the programs and services you are proposing and how much they will cost, you can narrow down the field of funding sources to the ones that are funding what you are providing – those that are looking to “buy” what you are “selling.” Funding for non-profits and charitable causes generally comes from grants from foundations, corporations, and government agencies, gifts from individual donors through crowd sourcing, social media, mailing campaigns, and fundraising events, and earned income by charging fees for services.

For grant funding, the best place to start is with local foundations, corporations, and government agencies. Outside of your community, Google searches, the Foundation Center, the Chronicle of Philanthropy, Guidestar, and Grants.gov are all good sources for researching prospective funders.

5. Research Each Prospect

As a result of your search, let's say you have 10 funders that make grants in your field and in your community. Take a close look at the website for each prospect and review their guidelines. They might make grants for youth and families but not for after school programs like yours. They might not fund religious organizations, grants might be available to individuals, or they might require a financial match. Now, your list of likely prospects might be down to five, but those will be five solid prospects, which is better than spending time pursuing a source and finding out later your program didn't even meet the eligibility requirements.

Quality over quantity counts. Better to put your time and energy approaching one highly likely source of grant funding than 10 that won't read your proposal.

6. Follow Their Directions

Simple, right? But so often ignored. Don't think you can be an exception. If you don't follow the directions, your application can be disqualified.

The procedures for government grants are pretty clear with the Notice of Funds Available (NOFA) in terms of the application to use and the deadline, and a foundation or corporation's website will tell you how to approach them – by submitting a Letter of Inquiry through the website, downloading the application, calling and talking to a program officer, etc. Even if you met the president of a foundation on an elevator, she would still direct you to the directions on the website.

Look for instructions on formatting, page limits, and deadlines – and follow them.

Funders can also get specific about the margin size and fonts to use for grant proposals. With sometimes hundreds of proposals to read, larger margins and bigger fonts are easier on the eyes.

7. Follow Up and Ask for Feedback

Congratulations! You've received the grant! This is just the start of your relationship with this funder, and you are responsible for nurturing that relationship. Find out how often the funder wants to hear updates about how the program is going and in what format (a phone call once a month, regular newsletters from your organization, an annual grant report, etc.) and put it in your calendar to follow up. Your stewardship of this grant goes a long way to receiving the next one from this and other funders.

If you were not funded, don't give up! Contact the funder and ask for feedback. Ask if it would make sense to approach them again in the future and what would need to be different. If your program doesn't fit within their funding guidelines, ask if they know other funding sources that might be a better match. And if the door is completely closed, don't fret, it goes with the territory. Use the narrative and budget you developed and move on to the next prospect.

Keep in mind that Paper Crane Funding Solutions is a resource for you throughout the process.

Shine On!

Paper Crane Funding Solutions is your guide to getting the funding you need so you can spend more time achieving your mission and less time fundraising for it. We provide a combination of consulting, coaching, planning, and direct services. At every step of fund development, we help you create the prosperity you need to make your vision soar!