

Show Me the Money: Tips and Resources for Successful Grant Writing

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Many educators have found that outside funding, in the form of grants, allows them to provide their students with educational experiences and materials their own districts can't afford. Learn how they get those grants -- and how you can get one too! Included: Practical tips to help first-time grant writers get the grants they need.

THE THREE P'S

Most successful grant writers give the same advice: begin your search for a grant with a project, a plan -- and permission. "If you're planning to apply for a major grant," Smith noted, "be sure you have the support of your principal or superintendent. Many grants for more than a few thousand dollars require a senior officer's signature to agree to implement the grant within the school system." In addition, school districts are limited in the number of state and federal grants for which they can apply. If you're applying for a government grant, you'll need permission -- whatever the amount.

Before you even start the funding process, however, you need a project. "The most important thing is to have a project in mind and then search for a grant to fund the project," Smith said. "Many people do the opposite; they hear about a grant and then try to find a project to fit it. The writing is much harder when you don't have a clear plan in mind and know exactly what you want to do before beginning applying for a grant."

As soon as you have a project in mind and permission to implement it, formulate your plan. Don't wait until you're faced with a grant application form before solidifying the details of your project! Begin right away with a written account of the project's:

- **background.** Document the need for your project with demographics, test results, and anecdotal evidence.
- **mission statement.** Identify the project's potential outcome.
- **goals and objectives.** Make sure they are specific and measurable.
- **timeline.**
- **planned assessment tool(s).** Again, be specific.
- **required materials, supplies, and personnel.**
- **total cost.**

Having this information in hand will make it much easier to locate appropriate funding sources -- and to complete the grant application when the time comes. And be sure to start the process early. Experienced grant-writers say that, depending on costs and the amount of funding, it can take months, in some instances a year or more, before you receive any funds.

After you have a detailed picture of all aspects of your project, it's time to find the necessary funding. Start by searching online and library resources. You might begin your search with some of the resources in the Grant Resources and Grant Sources sections at the end of this article. You should also investigate local government agencies, educational and civic organizations, and businesses as possible sources of funding. According to Smith, "the best funding sources are education-related businesses, U.S. Department of Education programs, state department of education programs, and philanthropic organizations. Many magazines also highlight education grants."

Most importantly, however, look for funding sources whose philosophy and focus are consistent with your project's goals and objectives. The [Grant Match Rubric](#) will help you determine how close a match various funders might be.

Contact those funders who are the best matches based on your research. (Don't limit yourself to a single funding source.) Obtain their funding guidelines and, if possible, a list of previously funded projects. Determine whether the average amount of funding is consistent with your needs.

Speak personally with a contact person involved with the funding who can answer your questions and provide advice and guidance. Be sure to ask how projects are reviewed, how decisions are made, and how and when funding is dispersed. Develop a relationship with your contact person and keep the lines of communication open throughout the application process.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Next comes the hard part -- completing the grant application! A grant application generally consists of three parts: the application form or forms, the narrative, and the budget. Grant writers and grant givers alike caution applicants to give equal weight to all three sections, and they provide the following advice for completing each part successfully.

Fill out **application forms** meticulously and completely. Read the questions carefully -- read them again -- and then proofread your answers. Type answers, if possible; otherwise print them neatly and legibly.

The **narrative** section of the application usually includes:

- a statement of need, including the project's purpose, goals, and measurable objectives. This section can also include background on how and why the project was conceived and should include a compelling reason why the proposal should be funded.
- the planned approach, including an explanation of how the project's goals and objectives will be met, what activities will be used, what personnel will be needed, and how that personnel will be utilized.
- a discussion of the assessment procedure, including how the project will be evaluated and specific measurement strategies.
- a timeline that includes the start and end dates of the project and a schedule of activities.
- the applicant's credentials, including information that demonstrates his or her background and ability to carry out the project successfully.
- a clincher. You won't find this on the funder's guidelines, but it's the critical aspect of your narrative. Provide information in a way that clearly demonstrates to the reviewers why the project is needed and why it is an important funding opportunity for their business or organization. Let the funder know that the project is important to you and that you're excited about its possibilities.

Remember to make your narrative clear, concise, and interesting to read. Write professionally, but avoid too much educational jargon. Define any educational buzz words that you do use. (Remember, the reviewers might not be educators!) Be specific about your project's goals and objectives -- and focus on results! Most importantly, follow the rules set down by the funder. Don't assume that more is better or that your way is better. Most funders know what they want and ask for it.

The **budget** provides funders with cost projections for the project. Your budget should be specific, reasonable, realistic, accurate, and flexible -- in case the funder wants to negotiate the funding amount. Be sure to include other revenue sources, if any are available. Above all, make sure the budget is consistent with the narrative. Don't include budget items that aren't mentioned in the proposal or omit costs for projected activities.

Some funding sources may also require a variety of **supporting documents** as part of the application. Those could include endorsements, resumes, additional project information, visual aids, and so on. Don't assume that your funder wants -- or even allows -- those documents, however. Ask if you aren't sure.

EXPERT TIPS

- Have a clear plan for your project. Know what you want to accomplish and the steps you will take to do it.
- If you can find grants that others have submitted, read them and get a feel for the writing. (Don't copy the grant.)
- Find out in advance what kinds of projects the granter will and will not fund.
- Try to have a hook -- something different that will make your grant stand out from the many submissions.
- Include statistics. Prove your points. Don't just say students can't read. Give facts to back up your claims.
- Make sure your goals are measurable and realistic. You can't realistically say 100 percent of students will read above grade level at the completion of the project.
- Do not make your grant tech-heavy. Everyone wants equipment. Make the equipment a byproduct of the project: it just so happens that a few tablet computers are needed to improve students' ability to meet the desired goal. Don't ignore the amount that will be spent on technology, but it should not be the main emphasis of the narrative. Student or staff achievement should be the focus of your proposal.
- Be sure to include the necessary staff development to make the project a success. Too many people skimp on that area.
- Make sure the timeline of the grant matches the grantor's funding cycle. If that's unknown, it's better to use phase 1 and phase 2 or month 1, 2, 3, etc. than specific dates.
- Don't pad the budget. Most reviewers know the costs of the equipment and other needs. If you inflate costs, you probably will not be funded.
- Know who the evaluators will be -- business leaders, educators, government officials, and so on.
- If possible, become a grant reviewer. (Most states accept volunteers.) That will allow you to see the kinds of projects that are funded, how the review process works, what types of projects people are writing, and how good or poor the writing is.
- Don't give up because you're rejected. It takes time and dedication to get projects funded.
- If you are rejected, submit the same project to different groups, companies, and organizations. Just be sure to make improvements and change the format, if necessary, to meet the new criteria.
- Remember, once you are awarded the grant, someone has to implement it and make sure everything you said would be done *is* done in a timely manner, and that the money is spent properly. That takes a lot of time.

ADDITIONAL GRANT-WRITING RESOURCES

The following sites offer tips and advice for the grant-writing process.

- [SchoolGrants](#) This site provides grant-writing tips and sample proposals.
- [Getting Grants](#) LibrarySpot offers resources on locating grants and writing grant proposals.
- [Grant Writing Sources and Tips](#) About.com offers advice on writing grants.
- [Non-Profit Guides](#) These grant-writing tools for non-profits take prospective grant writers through the entire process, from pre-proposal to the grant application.
- [Grant Writing Tips](#) The Web English Teacher offers links to a variety of resources on writing grants.

Source: http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev039.shtml