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Five Tips for Successful Grant Writing

From Anne Wayman, Your Guide to Freelance Writers.

Grant Writing Basics

By Guest Writer, Michele Mathieu

"Grant writing" is common shorthand for writing a grant or contract application or proposal. Actually, the grant or contract is what is awarded to the grant recipient as a result of your writing efforts.

With the exception of scholarships, grants are seldom available for individuals. Education and human services are most often privately funded, followed by health, arts/culture, and public affairs/social benefit projects. Environmental, religious, scientific/technical, and international projects capture smaller shares of grant dollars (see [Foundation Giving Trends](#).)

Here are Five Tips for Successful Grant Writing:

- **Tip 1:** Select your target carefully. Look at projects previously funded by the organization. Does the donor give to projects your area of interest, in your geographic location? What is the size of the average award—will it cover your estimated budget? To select an appropriate target, see the links to grant maker databases at the end of this article.
- **Tip 2:** Cultivate relationships at the donor organization. One phone call can be the start of a long-term acquaintanceship with someone in a position to give you money. In other situations, a phone call can save you the effort of writing a proposal for a project the donor would never fund.
- **Tip 3:** Follow instructions, proofread your work, and meet the deadline. Many donors publish required proposal formats, some feature online application forms, and some prefer a one- to three-page concept paper prior to inviting a full proposal. Even fundable proposals may be downgraded for typographical or grammatical errors, or for an incorrect number of hard copies or incorrect file format. Missing a deadline means you missed the chance to get funded for that grant cycle; few donors will grant exceptions.
- **Tip 4:** Blow your own horn, use the donor's language, and subtly highlight personal connections. If you can write a press release, you can write a grant. Write at least three drafts, and emphasize every pertinent fact that makes your case. Use the vernacular of your donor; it shows respect and understanding of the donor's priorities. Unless the application is strictly electronic, include a cover letter, even if it is not required.

On one successful proposal, I knew the names of two of the reviewers, who had published on the proposal topic. At appropriate points in the paper, I cited one publication each. It's just good politics to use every ethical advantage.

- **Tip 5:** Be persistent. If your proposal is rejected, ask for comments on how you can improve your application for the next grant cycle. Recycle the parts of your proposal that may appeal to other donors. When you win, make sure the recipient follows through and does what your proposal promised. As the old song says, "This could be the start of something big!"

Suggested resources

- [Learning Lab – A Proposal Writing Short Course](#)
- [Donors Forum: Grantseekers Toolbox](#)