Grant Writing Guide: Top 10 Tips

1. Dissect the questions and respond to every part.

MOST important tip = respond to every single part of a question with laser like focus.

It is safest to assume that reviewers will know a little about your industry or cause and the narrative you share should read with concise responses to every part of a question.

2. Brevity is hard but best.

a. Spell out acronyms only the first time you use them.

b. Only abbreviate well known words "ea. = each, ft.=foot".

c. If the funder has a word limit versus a charter limit, use the slash "CrowWing/Cass/Morrison/Todd/Wadena counties" = 2 words versus 6.

d. Use "&" for tight space limitations.

e. Get rid of all unnecessary duplication after conjunctions (and, but, or),

f. Remove any unnecessary adjectives but balance this with keeping the narrative compelling.

3. Share data.

· Give context to the data and share how the stats impacts your need or how it articulates your opportunity.

· Do not leave it up to the reviewer to make the data connections to your project and never data dump. What may seem like common sense to you, might not be to the reviewer.

· MN Department of Employment and Economic Development regional data analysts and the U of MN Extension Educators and Interns are good partners to assist with data collection.

4. Address need & capacity.

• Utilize surveys (qualitative), and data (quantitative) to address "need".

• Think of the value proposition to the funder…why do they care about this issue?

• Make sure the data reflects what they care about. Keeping the tone passionate & credible.

• State your ability to fiscally administer grants citing strong fiscal administration in other areas such as contracts, levy funding, donations and other.

• Get a partner to serve as a fiscal host for large grants if applicant is new to grant fiscal administration.

• Organizations with small budgets and limited staff typically start with small grant amounts and build a reputable fiscal administration history.

5. Matching requirements. Definitions of "cash" and "in-kind":

Cash – When ANY money exchanges hands for goods or services. If an employee is at a meeting and is getting paid by their employer to be there, CASH moved hands to cover that expertise and is therefore a "cash time match". If an item or product is given the value of the item is a "cash item match".

In-Kind – When NO money exchanges hands for goods or services. In-kind value is place on a person's time is when no one is paying that person to participate or offer services.

Many foundation programs do not require a cash match as this approach can leave behind those with capacity and need but who are without financial match resources. Government granting programs take a different approach, but frequently foundations assist with the required match to Government applications. Federal funds cannot be considered a match to other federal funds. Utilize the budget templates that funders provide.

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6. Create evaluation plans.

Evaluation plans can be part of your workplan if desired, or separate if you need to give it more attention. See Sprout sample. We use the WealthWorks and Community Capitals to measure impacts of a value chain and all 8 forms of wealth. Ask Region Five Development Commission more about this approach to evaluation or see WealthWorks Evaluation video on this page: https://www.regionfive.org/gfap

7. Develop workplan and timeline table.

Define the roles of each partner as part of this section. Gather biographies and resumes.

8. Review successful proposals & ask for partner/team review prior to submittal.

If possible, get a copy of a similar grant proposals for government funded programs. Don't plagiarize even if your project is similar, but it is helpful to see the approach others took with the amount of data and format of workplan etc. Ask a reviewer to make sure the tone is consistent and correct.

9. Use $$ wisely & exactly as you committed to in the grant award agreement.

Reach out to funding partner if you need to revise the approved use of funds. Typically, grantors allow up 10% - 15% variation of spending WITHIN the approved line item allocations. Meaning on a $100k grant, up to $15k could be moved from personnel to consultant fees if both of those line items were approved in the budget. Many funders won't allow new line item budget allocations once the budget is approved.

ALWAYS contact the funder for advice and budget for staff time to comply with reporting. Budget enough administration support to cover outreach and recoup some of your grant writing time.

ALWAYS do exactly what you committed to in the deliverables of the award. You wrote the grant and agreed to the reporting requirements and deliverables so there are never any surprises in the grant world. Trust is earned by doing exactly what was committed and by reporting on time. Funding partners talk to each other and you want to be a high performing grantee. Submit reports on time and in full.

10. Build authentic relationships with funders.

• People fund projects or programs and progress moves at the speed of trust.
• Ask for advice and more than money from funders...seek their advice even when you're in the middle of making the sausage, they know your work is difficult.
• If funded, check in regularly to share success and struggles. The best resources from funding partners goes well beyond their investments...it's their knowledge.
• Promote the grant awards via press releases and bring in funding partners for ribbon cuttings or awards when appropriate.