

Improve Your Chances to Get Funded



Getting grants funded is all about the numbers. He who has the highest score wins! You can improve your score and “rack up points” by following some simple guidelines.

First and foremost, use the tools that come with your word processor--spelling and grammar checker! A sloppy proposal indicates possible sloppy work and you don't want the grant reviewers and decision makers to draw conclusions from something as simple as a misspelled word.

Abstract

This is the part of the grant proposal which will be read over and over as reviewers consider funding decisions. They may not re-read the entire proposal, but they will rely on the abstract to remind them of your plan and who you are. The Abstract, sometimes called the summary, typically has space limitations. Be careful with this and don't try to squeeze in too much information. Don't make the font size so small that it is difficult to read. Don't stretch the margins beyond the limitations set forth in the guidelines. The most important point to keep in mind is that the abstract must be readable and offer a well stated description which mirrors the main part of the proposal. You don't need to restate every fact in the proposal because reviewers have a chance to read that later. To reinforce the point once again, the abstract is read more frequently than any other part of the grant and is what reminds both the grant reviewers and the funding program officers who you are and what your project entails. Make sure that the abstract accurately summarizes the overall project.

Avoid using first person pronouns. Instead of saying "I (or we) will measure reading improvement by ..." try rewording the sentence structure to read "The project director (s) will measure reading improvement by..." (This applies for both the abstract and the main body of the grant proposal.)

If space allows, restate in the abstract, in shortened format perhaps - the specific aims or objectives of the project even though you will be stating them in the body of the proposal.

Budget and Budget Justification

Numerous problems can occur with grant budgets. As you determine the costs for the grant project, keep notes on how you calculated salaries, materials, and other expenses. A justification is always required and you need to carefully describe how you estimated necessary costs. Usually the budget justification does not count against the page limits so don't try to save space in this section.

Personnel: If a person is listed under the personnel section of the budget, explain how this individual's time commitment is absolutely essential.

Contractual or Consultants: To help justify your spending grant funds for a special consultant, get a letter from the individual agreeing to work on the project. This will be added as an attachment typically. Be sure to fully justify why you need to hire a consultant and how you determined the number of days/hours they would be needed.

Equipment: Be careful when requesting equipment. If the grant is to improve reading through better preparation of teachers, don't spend the entire budget on computers. Any equipment purchases must be essential for the mission of the project. Most of the time office furniture is not allowed, so buy that from local funds for any new staff. If you want a computer, which is a reasonable request, don't ask for an overpriced item. Keep the request in line with current prices for a mid-priced item. Show the funder that you are going to be a good steward of the grant money.

Travel: Typically, when requesting money for out of state travel only one or two staff members will be able to attend. If you intend for several individuals to travel to a conference, show in the budget that you are requesting partial funding from the grant funding and part from institutional funds. Or if you do want to take several teachers and administrators to a meeting, fully justify why you need this many to attend (i.e., they can cover several sessions; they represent multiple grade levels and campuses, etc.)

Cost Sharing/Matching: The grant application may not require matching funding. If you are planning to spend local dollars to cover part of a project, for example, buying classroom sets of books to support a reading program, it is important to mention this in the budget justification area. There may or may not be a budget line item for cost sharing/matching, but still include a sentence on any local support both in the main narrative and if appropriate, in the budget justification.

Narrative

1) There is a page limitation on most grant proposals. Do not try to push the page limit by using appendices to extend your proposal beyond what is acceptable for attachments based on the guideline or using hard-to-read small font.

2) Clearly state the goals, objectives, and hypotheses at the earliest possible point in the proposal. It doesn't hurt to highlight them (i.e., bold-face, italics, etc.).

Even with your best efforts, not all grants get funded upon first submission. Always request the reviewer's comments be sent to you whether or not you are funded so you can revise the proposal, strengthen the descriptions and re-submit the next time the competition is announced.

These tips on typical problem areas will help you increase your score and your likelihood of success!!!

Deborah Porter Ph.D

President, Access Grants, Inc.

www.accessgrants.com