An Introduction to
GRANTS AND FREELANCE GRANT WRITING

by
Waddy
Thompson

From the author of the
Wise Guides Series

An Introduction to Grants

and Freelance Grant Writing

FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE WISE GUIDES SERIES

Waddy Thompson

Table of Contents

Introduction

This introductory guide, drawn mostly from articles I have written for various publications and websites, provides an overview of the three critical skills involved in crafting a winning grant proposal: (1) writing well, (2) backing up the proposal with a clear, believable budget, and (3) researching funding possibilities. I've also included articles on what it takes to start a career in grant writing.

After gaining general knowledge about the three critical grant-writing areas, you will be better able to decide which ones you need to study more and which of the dozens of books on grant writing will be best for you. I would, of course, like to point you to my other three books on these topics:

- *The Wise Guide to Winning Grants*: a comprehensive A-to-Z guide covering all aspects of grant writing, with additional information on how to start and run a grant-writing business. (265 pages)

- *The* Quick *Wise Guide to Writing Grant Proposals*: a concentrated look at techniques for organizing and writing a persuasive proposal. (45 pages)

- *The* Quick *Wise Guide to Fundraising Readiness*: an overview of fundraising to help you decide where to look for funds and what backup documentation you will need to apply for funding. (50 pages)

All three books are available in paperback and e-book formats from all major retailers.

Shameless commercial over, I hope you will find this free guide useful, and I'd appreciate hearing from you if you have questions or comments about anything in this book. You can email me at <u>waddy@grantadviser.com</u>. And if you'd like to review this book online, that would be much appreciated.

The Four Most Important Things

Grant Writers Must Get Right

Lists of the ten most common grant-writing mistakes like the one in the next chapter appear often, but just avoiding the mistakes isn't good enough to make yours a winning proposal. And whereas it is easy to come up with more than ten things *not* to do, on the positive side, there are just four major things that you must remember to get right.

1. **Tie the program to the funder's interests.** Some fundraisers, desperate for program funding, think they can bend their program to fit a funder's stated interests. For example, a funder wants to support financial literacy for middle school children, and your program is meant to improve math scores. Since financial literacy involves numbers, that's a fit, right? No. You can be certain that there will be dozens of organizations that specifically provide financial literacy programs and who will, therefore, be considered ahead of your proposal. Don't waste your time or that of the funder by trying to stretch your program to fit their interests. You won't be successful.

    Your program exactly meets their interests? Great. When stating how your program fits their interests, don't parrot back the language from their guidelines. That proves only that you know how to read. Instead, paraphrase their guidelines to show that you understand what they want to support. For example, if you were applying to a foundation interested in middle school financial literacy, you might open with something like, "Our nonprofit works with middle school children to increase their skill and comfort in handling money, including what it means to use credit and barter."

2. **Ask for the right amount of money.** Your request to the funder should fall within the range of grants the funder typically makes. Look carefully at the list of grants that each funder awarded in the last three years. You'll discover that most funders make most of their grants within a relatively narrow range. Don't be misled by outliers, such as a multi-million-dollar grant to a university's capital campaign or small grants that might have been part of a museum membership for a trustee.

    Also, consider grants that have been made to nonprofits similar to yours. If you're a new charity with a $50,000 budget, you probably will not get funded at the same level as a major research hospital, even if you're both working to provide health services.

    The amount you request should also be in line with your total budget and what you will spend on the project for which you are seeking funding. Few funders will want you to ask them to cover your total budget, whether operating or project. They will want you to have a "diverse portfolio" of funding sources. Why? To provide you with stability and therefore be certain that their money will be well used. Should one funding source fall through, there will be others on which you can depend. Determining the right amount to ask for requires you to place your request in proportion to all grants the funder makes, so research the grants made to nonprofits similar to yours.

3. **Present a logical, structured argument for support.** There are a number of ways you can structure your proposal narrative so that each important aspect of your program and qualifications are included, flowing naturally from one to the other. The simplest of these structures is to begin with a statement of the problem you seek to address, describe your nonprofit's qualification to address that question, and end with the specifics about what you will do with the funding requested.

    If the funder provides a list of questions that it wants answered in the proposal, seriously consider making those questions your organizing principle. I once served on a peer panel that was charged with reviewing forty proposals for a funder. A dozen very specific questions had been provided for the applicants to answer. The narratives we received

took about as many organizational approaches as there were proposals. In evaluating them, we had to go back and forth between the applications and the instructions to make sure all the answers were there and then compare each application to the others. Around application number twenty-two, we breathed a collective sigh of relief when we saw that the applicant had not only used the funder's questions to structure the proposal, but they had even used the questions as section headings! The applicant received a very nice-sized grant.

4. **Write in a clear, concise style.** The number of nonprofits seeking funding has grown enormously in the last two decades, and funders are hard-pressed to review all of the applications they receive. It has therefore never been more important that you write and format a proposal in a clear and concise manner. As noted in the point above, an application that is easy to comprehend stands a better chance of being funded.

I always strive for a conversational tone, as if I was talking to a respected colleague. That means avoiding run-on sentences, making your paragraphs short to medium in length, and avoiding jargon that is specific to your nonprofit. Always read your proposal aloud, preferably to someone outside your organization, before submitting it. If you keep running out of breath before the end of sentences, they are too long. Your listener looks puzzled or sleepy? You're not being clear. Always seek to elucidate; don't obfuscate! (And don't overly rely on semicolons or use a proposal to show off your vocabulary.)

This article originally appeared in the GuideStar blog.

Ten Most Common Grant-Writing Mistakes

1. Not following instructions. This has got to be the biggest mistake, even though it's the easiest one to avoid. Foundations, corporations, and government agencies receive thousands of grant proposals, and one way they sort the amateurs from the professionals is to see who followed directions. If the funder requires a three-year budget, create one. If they want you to use paper clips instead of staples, use them.

2. Failing to research the funders' interests thoroughly. Each funder has an interest in making grants for a particular purpose—sometimes a very specific purpose. Many grant proposals never have a chance for success because of superficial research. It's not enough to know that the foundation makes grants for education. Do they support K–12? Adult education? Do they specialize in funding organizations working with high-poverty schools? The answers to all these questions can be yours by simply reading all of the foundation's guidelines.

3. Focusing the proposal on the needs of your organization. Keep in mind that a funder's goals are achieved not when you make payroll, but when you deliver the service your nonprofit provides to the people who need it. So don't ask for $10,000 to prevent your food bank from having a deficit; ask for $10,000 to feed 7,000 people. Even if you're asking for operating support, be sure to include how your nonprofit will do more for more people by receiving the grant you're requesting.

4. Careless editing. Pity the poor program officer who has to read 600 grant proposals on the same topic. How do you think she'll feel when she has to reread your sentences because of typos and grammatical errors? Keep her on your side. Spell check, and then go a step further with a grammar-checking program such as Grammarly. And, if possible, have a friend proofread it.

5. Preaching to the choir. Never assume the funder knows anything about your organization, especially when it comes to describing your capacity to carry out the project for which you are seeking funding. And while you're at it, avoid catchphrases and jargon. Clear, simple language wins the day.

6. Not asking for the money. You wouldn't believe how many people forget to include the amount of the grant they are seeking in the proposal. The people at the foundation aren't mind readers! Be explicit, usually in the first sentence or two, about how much money you would like them to give you.

7. Asking for the wrong amount. This mistake is closely related to number 2 in the previous chapter. In your research, you should determine what size grants the funder has made to organizations similar to yours. When you look at the lists of grants funders have made in the past, you'll see that most funders have a number they seem fond of. Asking for substantially less or more than their typical grant will end in failure.

8. Submitting sloppy budgets. You may be familiar with three or four budgets for programs like the one for which you're seeking funding, but the program officer at the funder has seen hundreds, if not thousands, of similar budgets. She will immediately know if your budget is reasonable for your project. If you've left out a major item, she'll know. If you've padded the salaries, she'll know. The budget that accompanies a grant proposal should be prepared with the same care as the narrative description and match it point for point.

9. Submitting a proposal late. This is absolutely the most amateurish mistake, and so easily avoidable, yet it happens all the time.

10. Not asking for a grant. There never is a perfect time to ask for a grant: The economy is down. You're too busy to finish the proposal by the deadline. You worry the funder has never heard of you. Excuses are easy to come by, but you'll never get a grant if you don't try. So what are you waiting for? Start researching and writing now!

Writing a Proposal They Will *Want* to Read

BE DIRECT—DON'T OBFUSCATE

Learning to write in a style that will engage a funder is perhaps the most difficult skill to acquire, but one that need not elude you if you're intent on making a successful career in grant writing. When crafting a grant proposal, you just need to follow a few basic principles for success.

Keep It Simple

The first and foremost thing to keep in mind is the KIS principle: "Keep It Simple." To be a successful grant writer, you may need to unlearn much of what you were taught in college about academic writing. I've seen grant writers who approach a proposal like a term paper, complete with footnotes, bibliographic citations, page-long paragraphs, and overuse of colons and semicolons to hold together sentences that, in their length and complexity, appear to have come from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake.*

The sheer volume of proposals that most foundations receive means that your proposal will initially be read quickly. Simple sentence structures, short paragraphs beginning with strong topic sentences, and important facts broken out in bullet points will best reveal the proposal's main points and help advance it to a more in-depth reading.

Avoid Jargon

You should always make an effort to avoid jargon. That includes your nonprofit's jargon, jargon common to your field, and jargon used by funders. Jargon is really just a form of slang, with no place in a reasoned argument to fund your organization. And think about it: one reason people use jargon is to show that they are part of the "in crowd," which means that anyone who doesn't understand the terms-du-jour is part of the "out crowd." Do you want to risk making a foundation trustee think they are part of the "out crowd"?

"But surely," you might well ask, "what about the jargon used by the funders themselves?" Granted, some funders write their guidelines in the kind of prose that requires a thesaurus (or insider's knowledge) to interpret. If you parrot that language back to them, you've only proven that you've read the guidelines—not that you've understood them.

Consultant Tony Proscio made the elimination of jargon something of a quest, pointing out how using buzzwords weakens your message. It's well worth reading [his booklet](#) to increase your awareness of the misuses of language that may be obscuring the case for your excellent projects and organization.

Write for Your Audience

Whenever you are writing, just as when you are speaking, remember your audience. And by "audience," I don't just mean the program officer who will first read your proposal or the peer panel that may review it—I mean everyone who will read it. Program officers' and peer panelists' knowledge of your proposal's subject may well be similar to, or greater than, your own, but foundation trustees will also see at least part of your proposal, and they are the ones who will make the final decision on funding. Also, my guess is that if you use plain language in your proposal, the program officer's summary is likely to be clearer than if you indulge in a paroxysm of jargon meant to impress them with your erudition, thus obfuscating the meaning of your primary thesis. (See what I mean?)

I'm not suggesting that you dumb down the proposal or define every technical term within it. What I do recommend is that you write your proposals on a level that shows respect for your audience and highlights your ability to communicate your nonprofit's case to a lay audience. The experts will be impressed, not put off, by your ability to explain complex issues in

simple terms. The lawyer portrayed by Denzel Washington in the movie *Philadelphia* was fond of saying something like, "Explain it to me like I'm a six-year-old." You don't have to go that far, but it's a good phrase to remember.

Strive for a Conversational Tone

This is one of the hardest things I have tried to teach the writers I have worked with, but it is by far the most important thing to remember. Why? A conversational tone automatically eliminates long, winding sentences and excessive jargon. You don't speak that way, so there's no reason to write that way. Just as importantly, a conversational tone helps establish the all-important personal contact with the reader. Grants are made by individuals, not faceless institutions, and connecting person-to-person is critical in making a persuasive case for funding.

To develop a conversational tone, have a nonexpert read your proposal and point out anything he or she had to read twice or that broke the flow. Even better—read the entire proposal aloud. Can't finish a sentence in one breath? Then that sentence is too long. Find your tongue tripping over a phrase? Rewrite it. The acid test is to read your proposal aloud to a friend outside the profession. I'll bet that your friend's facial expressions alone will tell you where you've lapsed into jargon or academic, or simply bad, writing.

If you can keep it simple and personable, you will separate your proposal from the dozens or hundreds of others and increase your chances for success. I can't close this chapter without recommending to you one of the very best works on writing well: William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White's *The Elements of Style*. Although originally published decades ago, there is no better source for clear writing and none more enjoyable to read.

Additional Reading

Heath, Chip and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2007)

This article was previously published in the *NonProfit Times*.

The Power of Positive Writing

POSITIVE WRITING STARTS WITH POSITIVE THINKING

Does your writing style project a positive tone? You would naturally write only positive things about your organization and project in a proposal, but there are subtleties of style that can enhance your proposal to create an image that displays a can-do, positive tone. This will help make the funder want to say "yes." Sometimes, the simplest word choices and phrasings can make a major difference in how your proposal comes across. Here are a few ways to strengthen your proposals.

Will vs. Would

It's amazing the difference using "will" rather than "would" can make in a proposal. "Will" asserts your confidence that the project will move forward, even implying it will do so with or without the funder's participation. "Would" puts your verb into the conditional tense, indicating that you may or may not do the project, depending on the funder's decision. When you use "will," you indicate that (1) you are confident that the foundation will make the grant you are requesting and (2) you are in control of the situation. Consider the following simple examples:

> The Community Food Bank would provide daily meals to an additional 200 homeless people in our community with funding from the Smith Family Foundation.

> The Healthy Family Food Bank will provide daily meals to an additional 200 homeless people in our community with funding from the Smith Family Foundation.

Just changing "would" to "will," you can see that the people at the Healthy Family Food Bank are ready to get the job done. Using "will" throughout the proposal creates a cumulative impression of optimism and confidence—two important qualities you will want to project.

Good or Better Than?

It is unlikely that your nonprofit's services are unique in your area. Invariably, some other organizations provide some of the same services, although they probably do so on a different scale or in different ways. You will want to position your nonprofit as deserving of a foundation's support by stating its unique qualities, and you will want to do this without putting other nonprofits in a bad light.

Building your organization up at the expense of another sets a negative tone that will detract from your message. (It also doesn't hurt to remember that a staff member from a similar charity may well be a peer panelist reviewing your grant application at some future date.) Consider the following three statements of the same facts, yet the third one creates a totally different (and negative) impression of the nonprofit asking for the grant:

> Hometown Health Service's mobile unit will provide diagnostic diabetes testing and treatment for 100 people daily who now do not have access to regular, free health services.

> Hometown Health Service's mobile unit will provide diagnostic diabetes testing and treatment for 100 people daily who lack transportation to the county's existing low-cost or free clinics.

> Tri-County Health Center's mobile unit will provide diagnostic diabetes testing and treatment for 100 people daily who are not served by Hilltown Medical Center and other facilities that only treat people who are able to come to their facilities and who can afford at least a minimum fee.

Hometown Health Service found two ways to emphasize their unique service (they go where no other service providers will go), but they did so in ways that did not denigrate other services, while Tri-County Health Center did so in ways that did.

Superlatives and Qualifiers

"Avoid sweeping statements" was a rule drilled into us when we wrote term papers in school. But grant proposals are not term papers, and frequently a grand, bold statement is just what you need to demonstrate your confidence in your nonprofit's ability to carry out a project. Consider the difference between these two examples:

> Central Opera Company is arguably among the premier performing arts organizations in the region and serves one of the more diverse audiences in the region.

> Lyric Opera of the Tri-Cities is the most lauded performing arts organization in our area and the only one providing opera to a large and diverse audience.

Central Opera Company comes across as a good, but modest, company doing modest work, but Lyric Opera impresses the reader as a major player in the area's cultural arena, especially in reaching a wide demographic. The assertiveness of the statement creates a positive tone that makes me want to know more.

Of course, both opera companies would follow their opening sentences with additional information to substantiate their claims. The bolder the initial statement, the more important it is to back up the claims with details. Lyric Opera sets the stage for that by referring to itself as "highly lauded," paving the way for quotes and testimonials.

Testimonials

Endorsement and praise of your nonprofit from the press, civic leaders, or your constituents and clients provide the ultimate in creating a positive tone. Weaving testimonials of this type into a proposal adds depth to what you can say about your own work and provides color and context that will set your proposal apart from others.

When quoting individuals in a proposal, it's not necessary to follow the conventions used in scholarly writing to indicate minor changes. After all, people will usually appreciate you making them sound more articulate than they are—as long as you don't change the meaning of their words. Indicating each place in a quote where you've made minor changes will only make for awkward reading, and may even make the person quoted look bad. Consider the effect of reading the following examples:

> Original client statement:

> "The Health Service gave my Bonnie, who had broken her toe, and me compassionate and expert care late last Thursday night. And they gave it right when it was needed."

> Technically correct attribution:

> "The [people at Community] Health Service[s] . . . [provided my family with] compassionate and expert care . . . right when it was needed."

> Readable attribution:

> "The people at Community Health Services provided my family with compassionate and expert care right when it was needed."

The last example certainly does not distort, in any way, what the client said, but it presents it in a manner that is more readable and does not raise needless curiosity about the words omitted (indicated by the ellipses).

If you don't have a direct quote about your organization, you can support your case with quotes that speak to the need your nonprofit addresses. Check to see if the foundations to which you're applying (or other foundations) have published or funded studies on your issue. Quoting from these studies will show an appreciation for the work done by the foundations.

Also, check to see what has been written in the press about your issue. Statements by public officials can be especially compelling. For example:

> "As Mayor Jones said in his recent speech to the City Council, 'Healthcare, to be effective, must reach those most in need where they live and work.' This is why Hometown Health Service's mobile unit is so important for the community."

By including praise from clients and articulations from public officials and published studies of what is lacking in community services or facilities, you will present your project as the real-world solution to a pressing need. When you combine this with assertive, positive prose, you'll have a winning proposal ready to go.

Program Evaluation

STRONG EVALUATIONS MAKE GRANT REPORTING A SNAP

The importance of program evaluation has probably been one of the most major changes in the nonprofit world during my thirty-five years in the business. In olden days, after completing the project, you wrote a nice report letter to funders telling them how well everything went and thanking them for making it possible, and you were done. No so today.

With the enormous increase in the number of nonprofits during the last two decades and the consequent increase in competition for funds, funders of all kinds now insist that charities measure the effectiveness of their programs and include in their grant requests how they will do that. Foundations want their investments in your charity to be money well spent. Additionally, corporate and government funders must justify their grant programs to their stockholders or elected representatives. So, when writing the grant proposal, don't try to brush off the question about program evaluation. That can quickly sink your chances.

Generally, I admonish writers to avoid jargon, but evaluation is one place where you must know and use the right lingo. Here are a few of the most important terms you will need:

Formative Methods: This is fancy talk for observing how a program is progressing while it is taking place, focusing on the process. Perhaps you have stood in the back of a class noting students' reactions to the teacher's presentation. You always thought you were just taking notes, but you were actually employing formative evaluation methods!

Summative Methods: When the project ends, and you conduct a survey, formal or informal, of participants or of those who ran the program, you are using summative methods to measure the outcomes.

Next come goals, objectives, benchmarks, and strategies. Goals and objectives are often spoken about as if they are the same thing, but they're quite different.

Goals represent the ultimate achievement of your program or organization; they might well be so grand as to be unreachable or take place long after the grant period.

Objectives are the measurable steps you need to take to get to your goal. You usually need to accomplish several objectives to reach the goal.

> Goals are broad; objectives are narrow.
>
> Goals are general intentions; objectives are precise.
>
> Goals are intangible; objectives are tangible.
>
> Goals are abstract; objectives are concrete.
>
> Goals can't be validated as is; objectives can be validated.

Benchmarks are steps you must complete along the way to accomplish each objective.

Strategies are the activities you will undertake to reach each benchmark.

Here are two examples:

> **The United Nations:** The ultimate goal of the United Nations might be thought of as world peace. Its objectives embrace universal education and healthcare, and the elimination of nuclear armaments. The benchmarks to be achieved include resolving specific disputes around the world and improving agriculture in different countries. Some of the strategies include holding peace talks, delivering food to impoverished people, and establishing better healthcare facilities.

Children's Literacy Program: The goal of a children's literacy program might be to have every child in a school reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Depending on the grade level at which the children in that school now read, this might be a multi-year program, extending well beyond the time period of the grant you are seeking. (Grant time periods are typically a year but can be longer.)

An objective for a one-year grant for this program might be that kindergarten and first-grade students will read at grade level, or above, by the end of the first year. Benchmarks that must be achieved to reach that objective would be for all K–3 students to be enrolled in the program and for students to meet with the specialist teachers for an hour, three times each week. A strategy would be to hire specialist teachers to conduct the program.

You can see from these two examples (one global and one very local) that goals and objectives are kind of common sense, but if you get the terms muddled, you will come off looking inept and be much less likely to receive a grant.

Numbers, or "metrics," are an essential part of good, measurable benchmarks and objectives. Be careful when setting these very specific markers of success. You want them to be achievable, but be careful not to lowball the numbers and thereby make your program look small and ineffective.

GOAL	
Objective 1	*Objective 2*
Benchmark 1	Benchmark 1
Benchmark 2	Benchmark 2
Benchmark 3	Benchmark 3

If you have mastered the terms above, you won't find what I call the "Dreaded Logic" model quite so dreadful. A logic model consists of aligning your goals, objectives, benchmarks, and strategies into a chart, demonstrating the causality and correlation of each to the others. There are, naturally, another set of terms used with logic models. Here is how they roughly relate to the words we've already learned.

Inputs (resources you will put into the program) = Strategies

We will employ thirty reading-specialist teachers to work at the school.

Outputs (activities you will undertake and who will take part) = Benchmarks

All K–3 students will be enrolled in the program.

Students will meet with the specialist teachers for an hour, three times each week.

Outcomes/Impacts (results, consequences of the above) = Objectives and Goals

Kindergarten and first-grade students will read at grade level or above by the end of the first year.

All students will read at grade level or above.

Short-term outcomes are like objectives, the specific things that have changed. Medium- and long-term outcomes are more like goals or the results of making the short-term changes.

Here's a section from a logic model I had to prepare, with the funder's headings and my responses:

LOGIC MODEL		
Activities or Strategies	*Short-term Outcomes*	*Long-term Outcomes*
Provide eight large ensembles for as many as 300 choldren, ages 6 to 19, at four distinct ability levels	300 or more children gained musical experiences in an ensemble of their peers outside of what was offered in their schools	Students will pursue a variety of professions, with some becoming professional musicians and/or teachers

You can see how each column's response leads to the one to the right. There were around ten activities for this grant, some of which led to the same longer-term outcomes.

Your evaluation methods, as well as your specific goals and objectives, form an integral and important part of any grant proposal. Taking care in preparing the evaluation section of your proposal accomplishes two things:

- It makes your proposal stronger.
- It makes your report on your project much easier to do. With established objectives, benchmarks, and strategies, your report will have substance and clarity.

One final note: staff members can certainly perform the evaluation, but there is even greater strength in an evaluation performed by an outside person. Many consultants do this work. They can be quite expensive, but their costs can usually be included as part of your grant budget, and you will be able to use their reports to bolster your future grant applications.

Additional Reading

The Foundation Center provides an extensive bibliography of websites about evaluation methods:
http://grantspace.org/tools/knowledge-base/Nonprofit-Management/Accountability/program-evaluation.

The University of Wisconsin offers excellent examples of logic models, both blank and filled-in templates, along with a bibliography:
http://fyi.uwex.edu/programdevelopment/logic-models/bibliography/.

The Who, What, When, Where, and How

of Grant Budgets

YOUR BUDGET WILL INSTANTLY TELL THE FUNDER
WHETHER OR NOT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING

You probably remember the mnemonic in the title of this chapter from grade-school English class on how to write a news article. In teaching budget preparation, I have long stressed that a budget must be able to stand on its own and answer questions about your grant proposal (not raise questions). It occurred to me that, in this way, a grant budget is like a good news article, and by using the familiar formula the grant writer will remember to include all of the important components in the budget. These words are also a good way to group expenses and income for a clear presentation. Of course "why" is missing from the list of points to cover. I've not discovered how to explain that in numbers—yet.

Who

Who will carry out your project? Staff, consultants, and volunteers all have a place in this part of your budget. In thinking about the staff, don't forget support and supervisory staff. They may spend only a fraction of their time on a project, but some portion of their salaries usually should be included. And think about what you'd have to pay people to do the work of your volunteers. If you include volunteers in your staffing, list them on a separate line, and put a corresponding line for the same amount in the income section of the budget as "donated services."

What

List all your direct expenses—supplies, postage, mailing, shipping, special-space rentals, service fees, equipment, transportation, and other direct costs.—that you must have to do the project. Don't leave out the value of supplies you have on hand; you'll have to replace them after the project has consumed them, so these should be counted too.

You will probably need a line for indirect expenses. These are expenses that you can't justify as part of the project but that you must incur to operate your organization. Examples are rent, utilities, insurance, and accounting and banking fees. Of course if your budget is for your entire operations, everything is a direct expense. (I provide an in-depth explanation of indirect expenses, and how to allocate them, in my book *The Wise Guide to Winning Grants*. My free online Budget Builder Spreadsheet turns a complicated indirect expense calculation into a fill-in-the-blanks spreadsheet.)

When

When will your project take place? What period is the grant meant to cover? Sometimes those dates won't be the same. Let the funder know when you need the money by clearly labeling the column of expenses or by including the dates in the title on the page. And if the project dates and grant dates aren't the same, you may need to list the specific costs you want the funder to cover in a separate column. That way, they can see the total costs, as well as what part their grant will play in the overall project.

Where

The location of the project can be expressed in several ways. If yours is an operating budget, you'll include all your occupancy costs—such as rent and utilities—and costs of any additional spaces you'll have to rent. Your project's grant

budget will include a percentage of your occupancy costs as indirect expenses, indicating that at least part of the program will take place in your offices. Specific rental costs will show when you are operating outside your office space. And if that extra space is donated, include a fair market value for the space in your expenses, showing a corresponding space donation line in the income section.

How

Your income sources statement will tell the funder just how you expect to carry out the project. Will there be service fees charged to clients? Will audiences pay admission? In addition to the funder for whom you're preparing this budget, what other funders do you expect to support your project? Which have already made a commitment and which are pending? Will you have any in-kind income, that is, will anyone, such as your volunteers, donate goods or services to the project? List everything here. The more sources supporting your project, the better it will look to the funder.

Footnotes and Budget Narratives

Sometimes everything just can't be clear from numbers alone, so feel free to add footnotes or to write a short narrative putting some of the important expenses into context. Your largest expenses will most often need explanation, especially if their roles in the project are not clear. For example, if you have large travel costs, and your project takes place locally, you might want to explain that the travel costs will allow you to bring in an expert from across the country to take part in the project.

Your budget will instantly tell the funder whether or not you know what you're doing.

Here's a sample budget created using the above guide. Take a look and see how much you can tell about the project just from the budget!

Sample Budget Format	
Expenses	
Personnel	September-February
Project coordinator @ 30%	$11,800
Communications officer @ 5%	$2,000
Fringe @ 18%	$2,484
Subtotal salaried personnel	$16,284
Artist fees	$24,000
Total personnel	$40,284
Direct expenses	
Space rentals/utilities	
(in-kind by libraries)	$15,000
Equipment rental/supplies	$2,250
Postage	$1,000
Travel/transportation	$750
Advertising/promotion/marketing	$5,200
Printing of model PR kit	$2,000
Total direct expenses	$26,200
Indirect expenses @ 12%	$8,016
Total Expenses	**$74,500**
Income	
Requested from Big Corporation,	
Inc.	$20,000
Department of Cultural Affairs	$24,500
(committed pending a 1:1 match)	
Library systems in-kind	$15,000
A. Family foundation (pending)	$10,000
H. Family foundation (pending)	$5,000
Total Income	**$74,500**
Surplus/(Deficit)	**$0**

Use my Budget Builder Spreadsheet to create your first project budget. You can find it at https://www.grantadviser.com/budgetbuilder.

Additional Reading

Financial Management Resources: http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Resources-for-Financial-Management/Pages/default.aspx The Wallace Foundation offers a wealth of articles on financial planning, monitoring, operations, and governance.

This article also appears in the Information Exchange of the Association of Fundraising Professionals website.

The Principles of Good Grant Research

THOROUGH RESEARCH IS ESSENTIAL TO A SUCCESSFUL PROPOSAL

Knowledge is power, especially when you are seeking funding. Follow these three research principles to make yours a winning grant proposal.

1. Consult multiple sources of information. Thorough research requires consulting and crosschecking multiple sources. Online databases such as the <u>Foundation Directory Online</u> (FDO) will likely be your first step in seeking grants. The FDO allows you to search for funders based on a wide range of parameters, including the funders' subject areas, geographic interests, and grant amounts they have made in the past. But as good as FDO is, you should crosscheck its information with that on the funders' websites to make sure you have the most complete and current information. You can also find information on a foundation's grants by checking its 990 forms filed with the IRS (available on <u>GuideStar.org</u>), although these are typically at least a year old.

2. Compare what funders state that they support with the grants they have recently made. In addition to the funder's interests detailed on its website and in research databases, you should look closely at the grants it has most recently made. These will give you an indication of the grant amounts the funder is currently making and what organizations it is supporting. This information will help determine if organizations of your size, subject area, and location are being funded by the group and, if so, will also allow you to request an appropriate amount.

Lists of recent grants can also help you determine shifts in the funder's interests. For example, a foundation's mission statement might describe its interest in adult literacy education. An examination of its recent grants, however, might reveal that it currently makes grants for adult literacy programs only to YMCAs, or that it has begun making limited grants to children's literacy programs. In the first case, if you're not a YMCA, that's a red flag that your grant might not be successful. In the latter case, this could be a new opportunity if you work with children's literacy education.

If there are distinct differences between what a foundation says it supports and its recent grants, a phone call or email to the foundation's program officer for clarification is in order.

3. Research the individuals connected with each foundation. This is the most overlooked area of grant research. Never forget that foundation grants are made by people—foundation trustees and, sometimes at large foundations, staff. Knowledge about those with decision-making power can help you fine-tune your grant proposal, make it more personally appealing, and increase its chances for success. For example:

If you are raising funds for a botanic garden, you might be encouraged by the $100,000 grants a foundation makes to another botanic garden, even though botanic gardens aren't part of the foundation's stated interests. Researching the foundation's trustees reveals that one of them also serves on the board of that botanic garden, thus explaining those grants. Without the personal trustee connection, your botanic garden probably won't be successful applying for a grant to this foundation.

Research on a foundation trustee might turn up the fact that she graduated from Princeton the same year and with the same major as one of your board members. If this board member knows that trustee, you have now established a valuable personal connection. The board member can approach the trustee, asking that he or she recommend to the foundation's board that it make a grant to your nonprofit.

If you discover that the foundation has a program officer or trustee with a Ph.D. in the field for which you seek funding, you can feel freer in the proposal to use technical language particular to that field.

Time spent researching funders is never wasted. It will prevent you from sending out grant requests that are doomed from the beginning, find valuable contacts, and help you customize your requests to best match the funders' current interests, thus increasing your chances of success.

How to Make a Cold Call to a Foundation

Making a phone call to a stranger is never easy, and if you're calling to ask the stranger to do something for you, it's even harder. Still, from time to time, you will need information from a foundation about its grant application and funding policies that you can't find on its website. Making personal contact with someone before submitting an application can also be highly beneficial, but it is increasingly difficult to do—there simply are too many nonprofits today seeking funding from the same sources. If you need to contact a foundation directly, here's how to prepare for the call.

1. **Follow instructions.** If a foundation's guidelines request no calls, do not call them. Ditto for emailing. The foundation is in charge; only contact them within the parameters they specify.

2. **Do your research first.** This is essential! Carefully and thoroughly read the foundation's website. Also, learn all you can about the organization from an online directory, such as the Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online. Asking someone at the foundation for information that is readily available online will make a terrible first impression.

3. **Be Prepared.** Make a list of the points you want to cover in the call so you can get the most out of a short phone call. Foundation representatives will appreciate your efficient use of their time. At a minimum, be prepared to succinctly tell the contacts who you and your charity are, what you need, and why you are calling them.

4. **Call the right person.** As part of your research, determine the best person at the prospective foundation to call. If you are approaching a large foundation, look for a program officer responsible for grants to your type of nonprofit, someone in your field, or someone in charge of grant proposal review in general. At a very large nonprofit, there might be several such people. Don't necessarily contact the most senior officers, however, as they might be harder to reach than someone who works for them.

   If a small family-run foundation is your prospect, the contact will likely be a trustee. If the foundation gave the trustee's phone number on its website or in an online directory, it's OK to call the contact, but be more sensitive to the time of day you call. (I once called a trustee contact at noon, and it was obvious from background noise that she was busy preparing lunch for her children. Still, the call went well because she was their designated contact.)

   In general, don't call at the end of the business day, when people are tired and less amenable to taking a cold call.

5. **Be business-like and polite.** Don't call contacts by their first names unless you know them. Be sure to thank them at the end of a call, even if their answers to your questions don't bode well for your chances of a grant.

Don't be surprised if you have trouble getting through to someone. The number of people seeking grants far exceeds the number of staff members foundations have to answer questions. If you don't receive a response to your first message, try again after several days, but don't make yourself a pest. Feel free to ask for a meeting, but know that it is rare for a foundation to agree to a meeting before receiving an application from you, if then.

If you decide to email rather than phone someone at a foundation, don't expect a speedy reply. If you haven't heard back in a week, forward a copy of your email to the same person you contacted. Still no reply? Phone the contact, if permitted. In any email, be as specific as possible in the subject line as to why you are writing, and keep the email as brief as possible.

Preparation and good manners will increase your chances of a successful first contact with any funder.

Now Casting: Multiple Roles

Available for Grant Writers!

THE ABILITY TO PLAY MANY ROLES
WILL SERVE A GRANT WRITER WELL

An actor who can play Hamlet, Willy Loman, and Felix Unger, or Lady Macbeth, Amanda Wingfield, and Lady Bracknell, all equally well, is highly valued by any theater company. Likewise, grant writers who can flawlessly execute many diverse roles bring real value to their nonprofits. Those roles bring you into contact with the dedicated people who run programs, the nonprofit's board of directors, foundation staff and trustees, volunteers, and those served by your nonprofit.

"Grant writer" is an insufficient label for what you do. Being skilled in writing clear, concise prose that can be understood by, and appeal to, anyone with an interest in the topic at hand comes high on the list of roles at which you must excel, but there is much more involved in the grant-writing process, sometimes requiring a chameleon's talent to fit into a variety of situations. Let's take a look at the many roles you will be called on to play.

Journalist. A good grant writer is a skilled journalist. (In fact, journalists can easily transition into grant writers, the skills sets being nearly identical.) When asked to prepare a grant proposal, you will rarely have all the information you really need at your disposal. Ferreting out the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" of a program is your first responsibility. Beware a grant-writing assignment where you are told, "The program is the same every year—just freshen up the text from last year." Sure, it's much easier to freshen up and reshape an existing proposal and call it a day, but to do justice to your nonprofit, you need to go deeper. It's also unusual for a program to be run exactly the same way year to year, and if you describe past practices in a grant proposal, they will become the standard by which future results will be judged, creating a nightmare when a report is due.

Be sure to question any statistics used in past proposals. When were the stats compiled? Using the most recent statistics and research is just as important in describing the clients you serve—for example, income levels, ethnic breakdown, etc.—as it is in predicting the results of your program. Don't let old information create incorrect assumptions that will make it impossible for your program to appear successful when you report on a grant's impact.

Researcher. As you gather information, you assume another role: researcher. Research is an often underutilized step in the grant process, though it's the most important. Funders' most common complaint is that grant seekers have not spent time learning about the targeted organization's application requirements and programmatic interests. Leave out this step, and your proposal is sunk. You will, naturally, gather your prospect list by delving into foundation databases, noting who funds similar organizations, and closely reading funders' websites.

But you need to go deeper to succeed. Who are the people connected with each foundation? What are their personal interests? Do they have any connections with your organization? Does anyone on your board know any of the foundations' trustees? Distributing lists of the trustees of prospective foundation funders to your board is an important step, but don't forget to research your own board as well. You might discover valuable connections that they didn't realize could be useful; universities they attended, clubs they belong to, and schools their children attend can all be important links to people making decisions at foundations and corporations.

Translator. Once you've gathered information from your nonprofit's staff, another role frequently comes into play: translator. Both nonprofit program workers and funders have a fondness for special jargon. As the translator, you will make both groups intelligible to each other. Appropriate the funder's jargon only enough to demonstrate that you understand its priorities and requirements. And completely avoid your nonprofit's jargon. The last thing you want to do is make the funder

feel puzzled about what you want funded. Writing in plain, straightforward English will eliminate the jargon completely. Do a great job of it and neither group will realize they speak different languages.

Storyteller. The most readable grant proposals illustrate programs with narrative stories, which is why you must also be a storyteller. Who doesn't like a story? Stories make your programs come alive by relating what you do to help real people. Moving stories can come from anyone on your staff, but don't forget to talk to some of the people served by your nonprofit. First-hand accounts of how you have changed a life illustrate, like no other method, the importance of what you do.

Diplomat. Being a grant writer often requires you to also be a diplomat. Board members, volunteers, and program staff will sometimes bring you names of funding prospects, some good—but more often not. You want their involvement and don't want to discourage them in any way, but it is your job to assess which are strong prospects and let them know, in the nicest possible way, that you have stronger prospects to pursue. Try making it a "teachable moment," and help them understand the difference between an ability to give and a proclivity to give.

Accountant. It doesn't hurt if you can also be a mathematician or financial analyst. Even if you are lucky enough to have finance staff at your nonprofit to prepare the program and operating budgets, it remains your job to make sure the numbers add up—add up literally, of course, but also add up in relation to what you have written in the proposal. Is everything in the budget covered in the narrative (and vice versa)? Do the names of the budget categories use readily understandable terms and avoid in-house jargon? Does one large number, in income or expense, stand out and need an explanation? Clarity is just as important in the budget as, if not more important than, in the proposal narrative.

Advocate. Playing all of these roles prepares you for your most important one: an advocate for your nonprofit. This role brings together all the other parts you have played. Armed with thorough knowledge about your nonprofit and its programs, possessed with moving stories of the difference your nonprofit has made in people's lives, and equipped with detailed information about the funder and the people associated with it, you are ready to raise significant funds to make the world a better place.

Playing the many roles of a grant writer doesn't require costumes, mastery of an accent, or wigs and makeup, but just as an actor prepares for each role, so too does the professional grant writer, investing time, gaining the necessary skills, and devoting all of his or her energies to fulfilling the many roles required.

This article was originally published in the *NonProfit Times*.

Your First Freelance Assignment

GETTING STARTED IN GRANT WRITING AS A PROFESSION
TAKES CAREFUL PREPARATION

No one will want to pay you (at least not much) to write your first grant. You'll need one or more samples of past work to be seriously considered for any grant-writing assignment. A writing sample such as a term paper, master's thesis, or published article will demonstrate whether or not you can write clearly and compellingly, but before an organization pays you to write a grant for them, they will want to know that you also understand the grant process and how to write for funders.

Developing a Portfolio

There are two ways you can develop a portfolio. The first is to write a sample grant proposal, using a local nonprofit that you care about as a model applicant organization. You'd do this to demonstrate that you know what you're doing, not to sell the proposal to that organization. If the nonprofit is well-known, potential clients who read your sample will be better able to determine how accurate and persuasive it is, so choose your subject carefully. The proposal should also be addressed to a known funder in your area. Be sure to research the funder carefully to make sure that the program for which your proposal seeks funding is something that funder typically supports. Remember to review a list of their recent grants as well as their guidelines. Also, be certain to label clearly this as a sample proposal so as not to imply that you worked for this nonprofit.

In writing this sample proposal, you'll be at something of a disadvantage. You won't have access to existing proposals from that nonprofit, nor will you be able to interview the people who run the program. Therefore, don't get overly detailed in this proposal and risk stating something that someone better acquainted with the nonprofit would recognize as inaccurate.

A better way to develop a portfolio is to volunteer to create a grant proposal for a small nonprofit without a development department. This could be for your house of worship, kids' soccer team, community chorus, hospital auxiliary, or any such institution or group. You'll have the advantage of access to any past grants and descriptive materials they have and be able to interview the people in charge, including those who run the specific programs.

You may even be able to talk to program participants (like your kids who are on the soccer team) to receive great quotes that will enhance your proposal. Additionally, this is a proposal that you will submit and get a result—hopefully a positive one. A successful proposal will change your standing in the eyes of any potential client.

Creating a Résumé

So let's say that you have written three grants as a volunteer for one or more groups, two of which were successful (which would be a *very* high success rate). How do you present your experience to potential clients? You'll start with a résumé, listing your most recent work first and education last. In addition to the grants you've written, include any published articles you have written, but don't list term papers.

You might include a master's thesis, or even a senior thesis, if its subject relates in any way to the grant work you're seeking. For example, if your thesis was on literacy education in immigrant communities and you're seeking work writing grants about literacy or education, this would be a good addition. A thesis on the use of adverbs in the works of John Donne would not be helpful.

Potential clients will want to see at least one writing sample. Of course, you'll send what you think is your best one, but also consider what you have written that is closest to that you hopefully will be writing for the client. (An environmental client

will respond better to a proposal for a similar organization than to your thesis on literacy.) And naturally, a grant proposal that got funded is always a plus to include.

Some fundraisers like to make bold statements about how much "they" have raised. This annoys me because fundraising is a joint activity that depends on many things, including the relevance of the nonprofit, its past success in raising money, its standing in the community, and connections the nonprofit's staff and board have with funders. The artful creation of grant proposals is, alas, not the most important factor—although without it, the other factors might be meaningless. Similarly, quoting your success rate can be misleading. Someone writing proposals for a major nonprofit with deep community roots and a long history of service will have a very different success rate than a grant writer raising funds for a brand new organization serving an unpopular cause.

In addition to the résumé and your writing samples, you will also need a cover letter to sell your services. So what glowing things can you say about your work in your cover letter? You can state how many proposals you've written and definitely highlight one or two that were successful. You can also write about what challenges you overcame in creating a proposal, such as if the nonprofit had never sought grant support, and you had to start from square one. (But be careful not to sound negative about anyone or any nonprofit you have worked with!) Writing about a great relationship you had with someone at one of your clients is good too.

And by the way—there is no need for you to say that you wrote proposals as a volunteer. That's just between you and the group for which you did so.

Recommendations

The most important factor in getting a grant-writing job will be a recommendation. I wouldn't hire you, or anyone else, without first speaking with someone you had worked for previously. I'd want to know if the working relationship went smoothly, as well as if the proposal was successful. If the reference tells me you had listened carefully, incorporated everything she or he thought was important in the proposal, met all your deadlines, and been a joy to work with, the success of the proposal will be a nonissue (assuming I think it was well-crafted).

Setting Your Fee

After getting past the screening process, you'll be asked the tough question: How much do you charge? Professional fundraising associations all discourage or forbid grant writing based on a percentage of the grant. There are good reasons for this: (1) Funders wouldn't make the grant if they knew that was how you were being compensated. They are making a grant to fund a program, not you. (2) Professionals get paid for their knowledge, skill, and time. As I stated above, your skill in crafting the proposal is only one reason for a proposal's success or failure. (3) It's usually no harder to write a grant for $100,000 than one for $1,000, so why should you be paid differently for proposals requiring equal effort?

I believe that I serve my clients and myself best by working for a fixed fee rather than on an hourly basis. For example, when you're new to the profession, it may take you a very long time to research the funder's requirements, whereas a highly experienced grant writer will already have that knowledge. Although the relative hourly rate of a novice versus an experienced grant writer will compensate the latter to a degree, why should an experienced grant writer be penalized for her or his inherent knowledge?

To figure out how much to charge, I do, of course, take into consideration the number of hours it will take me to complete the project. This will be based on my knowledge of the funder and the condition of the nonprofit's documentation for the project. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there an existing proposal from which to get started?

- Has the funder made a grant to this nonprofit before?

- How good is the program's budget?

- Does the budget need a narrative explanation?

- Is there documentation on the program, such as program evaluations, press recognition, or client testimonials?

- How available to me will the program director be?

After deciding how many hours it will take me to do the project, I tack on a couple more for profit and as a hedge against it taking more time than I expected. Be clear with the client up front how many iterations your price includes. You don't want to be doing endless edits.

Once you've figured out how many hours the job will take, you just multiply that number by your hourly rate to get the fixed fee. What, you might ask, should your hourly rate be? That will be determined by your level of experience and what the market will bear. I don't think many grant writers would work for less than $25 an hour, and the most experienced might charge $100 an hour. With that range of rates and the range of hours required to complete different proposals, a grant proposal can cost a client from a couple of hundred dollars to several thousand dollars. For more about fees, see ProfessionalGrantWriter.org. And you can find a sample spreadsheet to calculate your fee in *The Wise Guide to Winning Grants* (or download it at https://www.grantadviser.com/feecalc).

Not every nonprofit is ready to seek grants—they might lack experience or resources, for example. To help your potential clients get ready to fundraise (and increase the likelihood of a successful grant application), take a look at *The* Quick *Wise Guide to Fundraising Readiness*.

Grant writing can be a very rewarding profession. It's a great feeling to know that you have helped a nonprofit serve the community, and the pay's not bad either.

Additional Reading

Goldstein, Henry. *So You Want to be a Consultant!* (Arlington, VA: Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2006).

Weiss, Alan. *Million Dollar Consulting: The Professional's Guide to Growing a Practice*, fifth edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2015)

Editorial Freelancers Association, "Editorial Rates" (https://www.the-efa.org/rates) provides a broader perspective on fees charged by writers and editors.

About the Author

Waddy Thompson's thirty-five-year career in arts administration encompassed work for a wide variety of organizations serving music, dance, theater, literature, and visual arts.

He has held positions at The Whitney Museum of American Art, InterSchool Orchestras of New York, New York Foundation for the Arts, Poets & Writers, OPERA America, Second Stage Theater, Symphony Space, and the Authors Guild Foundation.

His responsibilities at these organizations have included fundraising, managing donor-advised funds, marketing, communications, and various other administrative areas. He has secured donations, grants, and bequests up to $1 million from the full spectrum of funding sources.

He is also the author of *The Wise Guide to Winning Grants* (Stitch-in-Time Books, 2017), *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Grant Writing* (Alpha Books, 2011), and numerous articles in the *NonProfit Times* and other periodicals. He has taught grant writing for New York University's Heyman Center for Philanthropy and Fundraising, and he has been a guest speaker or workshop presenter for several university programs and various arts councils and conferences.

Mr. Thompson is also a composer and holds degrees from Eastman School of Music (BM) and Florida State University (MM and DM).

Also by Waddy Thompson

The Wise Guide to Winning Grants (Stitch-in-Time Books, February 2017)

The Quick *Wise Guide to Writing Grant Proposals* (Stitch-in-Time Books, November 2017)

The Quick *Wise Guide to Fundraising Readiness* (Stitch-in-Time Books, January 2018)

You can find more information on fundraising at https://GrantAdviser.com.