



How to Write a Grant (One Easy Tip)

When I say I write grants, people seem to think I hold the secrets of the universe. (If I did, I'd probably be on a tropical island right now, watching the sun set over turquoise water...ah.) But, really, grant writing is not a mystery if you think about where the money comes from: someone who is very successful, or very lucky, and wants to share the wealth.

Pretend, for a minute, this someone is YOU. You won the mega-big-billions lottery. What will you do?

- \$ Take your dream vacation to that tropical island
- \$ Put the kids – and grandkids – through college
- \$ Make your family, friends, local library, and alma mater as comfortable as you wish them to be

You've still got money left. Most folks now would put money toward causes they care about, whether that's promoting social change or saving an endangered species. To keep everyone you've ever known from knocking on your door, you'd probably set up a foundation to manage distribution of funds. Let's leap past all the legal and IRS hoops and say you're ready. It's time to give away money.

First, decide what matters to you. These are your **Grantmaking Priorities**. Sometimes they're called **Areas of Focus**, or **Applicant Guidelines**. They tell applicants whether or not they should ask for money. In other words, what do – the funder – want to fund? Groups or individuals? Certain cities, states, or regions? Political causes, or not? Maybe you only want to help children, or those with a chronic illness. Or provide access to podiatry for residents of forested regions in the Midwest. Some funders are extremely specific, and that's their right. They (you) might be happy if the same applicants ask again and again, or you might want to give others a chance. Remember, you're making rules for your money.

- ✓ Guidelines ready and published.
- ✓ Deadlines set and publicized.

Now you wait. You're prepared to be impressed. You can't wait to feel good about where your money is helping. Soon applications start rolling in, more than you imagined. You start reading.

- "Wow, this one's great! I'd love to fund this. But they're not in my state! My Guidelines said only my state. If I stick by my rules, we can't fund them. But if I break my rules, that won't be fair to everyone else. Too bad for this applicant."
- "Love this idea, and it's right here at home. Here's how much their new equipment will cost, but how much do they spend on overhead? The budget doesn't tell me what I asked, so if I give them money, how do I know they'll manage it well?"
- "This foundation thing isn't as much fun as I thought...."

Get the idea? Here's the big secret that every grant writer and every successful applicant knows: **think like a foundation**. If YOU had money to give away, and YOU set the rules, what would YOU want? You'd want applicants to *follow the guidelines and answer the questions*. It's that simple.

Well, almost. Following guidelines and answering questions doesn't guarantee funding. You need a solid program or project, of course. You need to describe it well. And you need a budget that makes sense. But *not* following guidelines and *not* answering a foundation's questions does guarantee that you *won't* get funded, no matter how great your program is.

So the next time you apply for a grant, put yourself at the foundation's table. If you were holding the money, what would *you* do?