

# Local/State Funding Report

Grants Series

THOMPSON

Grantseeking Quicktips

## Grantseeking Quicktips

### More Tips to Make Your Grant Proposal as Competitive as Possible

The Institute of Museum and Library Services offers this list of useful and unique considerations for grant applicants in its funding announcements.

- Start with a good idea! Identify the problem you are trying to solve and a potential solution that grant funding would support. In general, projects that benefit more than one institution and reach a broad audience will be the most competitive.
- Match your idea with the appropriate funder and program—contact the program officer to find out if your idea matches the goals of the program.
- Read the program guidelines carefully and note all instructions and deadlines. It takes time to develop a good proposal and a good project, so give yourself plenty of it.
- Assemble your project team, including external partners—your team will be your most important asset.
- Meet to discuss all aspects of the project and all of the program evaluation criteria. Identify assets, weaknesses and potential allies. Ask questions: Who is the target audience? What are the anticipated outcomes (who will benefit and how)? How can the benefits be measured (how will you know if you succeed)? Who will know about it? Generally, projects involving two or more institutions will require time and ongoing discussions to develop a strong relationship, but projects based on these kinds of collaborative relationships will be more competitive for funding and more successful in execution. Involve potential allies as partners, members of advisory boards, or writers of support letters. They will help to disseminate results and extend the benefit.
- Develop a draft proposal—follow the recommended format and all instructions, and address all of the evaluation criteria in the order prescribed. Be sure to highlight your assets and try to resolve potential weaknesses (e.g., arrange to hire a consultant if your team lacks expertise in a specific area). Write in plain, understandable language.
- Avoid piecing together an application using remnants of past applications. This technique may save you time, but it can also find you submitting information that is not exactly tailored toward the specific funding opportunity you are seeking. Your proposal may end up sounding inaccurate or out of date.
- Don't repeat language used in the funding notice. The applicant reviewers oftentimes are those who helped write the notice of funding availability, and they are not likely to be impressed at seeing their words inserted into your proposal.
- Contact your program officer for clarification of questions. Develop a relationship with the agency contact listed on the funding announcement from the beginning of your application process.
- Ask others who have not been involved in the project to read your draft—they may notice an important omission or weakness.
- Revise your proposal and submit it on time. Be sure to provide all the requested documents with your proposal.
- If your proposal is not successful, do not be discouraged. Read the reviewers' comments carefully, they can provide important suggestions for improving your project. Ask your program officer to help clarify any comments that you do not understand. 🏠

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- When discussing both the problem your community faces and the solution you are proposing, avoid generalizations and vagueness. Provide specific examples of how every dollar you are given by the grantor will be put to good use.
- Talk about the needs of your clients, not the needs of your organization. Many grant applications focus on how funding will affect the status of their organization when proposals should be focused clearly on the impact the funds can have on their community, or who will be served by the organization if it receives funding.
- Do not make promises in your proposal that you cannot keep. Most funding announcements have very specific, clear-cut rules for how grant funds can be used, so there is no sense in trying to propose other activities. Simply show how you can most effectively implement what is asked of the grantee and who will benefit from those objectives being carried out in your community.
- Offer examples of how your organization has seen success using grant funds in the past. If you have not received federal grant funds before, show how your community or organization is set up to make the best use of funds.
- If possible, study proposals from the grant program's previous years. Many agencies offer the same grant program at various levels of funding every year, and make available to applicants copies of proposals from previous years that were successful in communicating the abilities of their organization and were awarded funding. You will be able to get a clear sense of what the funding agency is looking for.
- Make sure to keep all relevant documents organized and at hand, even if they are not all initially required for the proposal. Documents such as a list of board of directors, proof of nonprofit status and financial records are good to have in case the funding agency asks for them even after the initial proposal has been submitted. This will save time and ensure that the funding agency is able to be thorough in its review of your application. This will also make applying for several grant opportunities easier in the future.
- When a funding agency asks that applicants be able to provide a cash or in-kind match in order to assure an organization's commitment to their cause, you should always exceed their match request if possible. Proposing a match on behalf of your organization that is larger than required will show the agency that you have strong organizational and community support. It will also ensure that your organization does not become too dependent on federal funding to carry out projects.
- Most agencies provide applicants with their estimate of how long it should take to write a complete proposal for the grant programs. Generally, applicants should add on extra time to that estimate in order to be sure they can truly fulfill all the requirements asked of the agency. 