

# Writing a winning grant proposal

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to requesting grant dollars. It simply doesn't work to create a single grant proposal and send it off to numerous foundations. That's because every grant funder expects something different. To succeed in winning grant funding, you should thoughtfully prepare a unique grant proposal for each grant funder you approach.

By crafting grant proposals that follow the guidance below, your grant writing efforts will be rewarded in better outcomes with grant funders.

## + Step 1: Follow the instruction

Most grant makers outline specific guidelines that the grant proposal must meet. These may include page or character limits, unique questions to be answered, and necessary attachments, among other requirements. Some funders will also require a Letter of Intention as a first step before they'll even accept a full proposal. Don't cut any corners. The surest pathway to rejection is failing to follow a funder's application instructions.

## + Step 2: Write clearly

It's a misconception that grant proposals should be academic, complex, and inflated. Your goal is to make your proposal easy to follow, simple to understand, and even a pleasure to read for the person at the foundation reviewing your grant application. At its core, good grant writing is simply good writing. Remember these tips when you write:

- Use concrete, familiar words that convey your meaning.
- Avoid jargon and pretension. Aim for simpler sentences rather than dense, winding ones.
- Don't bury your points: articulate your main ideas early and lead paragraphs with topic sentences.
- Ensure your ideas follow logically and sequentially flow one to the next.
- Repeat a core message throughout the grant proposal: your reader should step away clearly understanding what you propose to make happen.

## + Step 3: Tailor the message

It's crucial to understand that the reason a foundation makes grants is to see their mission come alive in the world. A funder is seeking to support projects and initiatives that match what is most important to them. Writing a truly compelling proposal requires understanding the foundation's purpose and vision, so that you can tailor your content and message in a way that demonstrates a match. How?

1. Carefully review the funder's website and other available information. Identify where there is alignment between your organization's mission, or the project you're proposing, and the mission and interests of that funder.
2. As you write the grant proposal, articulate this alignment in key places, especially in the cover letter and introductory and concluding sections of the narrative. "Speak to the funder's mission" by using words and ideas that match or imitate the funder's own word choices and priorities.