Tips on Creating an Effective Grant Application

Application Submission

Applications can only be submitted through the online application system. Paper, handwritten, hand-delivered, faxed, emailed, or mailed applications will not be accepted.

Guidelines

Guidelines can be your key to understanding all of the rules a grant – whether you're eligible to apply, what the money can be spent on, how decisions are made, etc. Before beginning your application, carefully read the guidelines so you be prepared to best complete the application.

Grant Criteria, Priorities, & Narratives

Decisions on whether to fund an application are made by a grant panel consisting of community members and these community members evaluate and score applications based on the grant criteria and priorities found in the guidelines. The application will have questions and narratives that cover a specific area related to each of these things. Prompts will detail what information to provide.

Specific, Clear, & Complete

Make sure you answer the questions and complete the requested information. Missing, vague, or incomplete information may hurt your chances for funding. Provide a lot of details and be specific, clear, and complete.

Simple, Direct, and Understandable

Be personable, generate enthusiasm and excitement, but remember you're asking for grant funding and your job is to provide information in your grant application that will allow a panel to make an informed decision. Try to avoid flourishing language or "grant speak" intended to impress. Use simple and understandable language. Additionally, use active voice and action words to give your application confidence.

Start Strong

It's important to start your narratives as strong and clear as possible, making it immediately understandable what the project is about and what you're requesting funding for. You don't want a panelist to piece through different parts of the application to get a sense of what the grant is all about.

Presentation & Consistency

Use consistent language throughout your application. If you call a class a class, don't later call it a workshop. Being consistent will make your application less confusing. Inconsistencies could cause confusion. Additionally, since many applicants repeat projects from year to year, it's important to make sure you've updated dates and numbers to reflect the new application.

Multiple Drafts

Your first draft should only be the beginning. It's important to work on multiple drafts of your narratives and have someone else review them. Often you think something is on the page when really you are subconsciously filling in missing information. You can become too close to your project and it's important to make sure your application makes sense to someone unfamiliar with it.

Artistic Versus Entertainment

Grant panelists look for a project's artistic and cultural merit. There's nothing wrong with being entertained, but artists and their activities should be fully integrated and vital to your specific application.

Community

When speaking to the community that your project will benefit and impact, it's important to specify exactly who this community is and to think about the project from their perspective. A community has a lot of definitions – it could be as large as a town or as small as a neighborhood or even a specific group of people that attend programs at your nonprofit. Defining who your community is will help inform much of your application.

Similar or Prior Funding

Support in the past does not imply or guarantee that an applicant's project will be funded.

There is also no guarantee an applicant will receive the same funding as an applicant with a similar and/or joint project. Organizations who partner up with other organizations to do the same or similar projects should consider applying under one application.

Grant Panel Prior Knowledge

Sometimes grant panelists won't be familiar with you or your project and it's important your application is understandable to them. Applicants also shouldn't assume a grant panel will read between the lines of an application. Whatever information you want an applicant to know should be included in your application.