

Proposal & Grant Writing Basics

Qualify Yourself

Read through the guidelines thoroughly to make sure you qualify. Many organizations are very specific and detailed regarding who is eligible for their funding. If you have questions, e-mail or phone the grant contact to clarify. You don't want to waste your time and theirs by filling out a proposal you don't qualify for.

Attend the Session

If the grantor is offering a session to go over the specifics of the proposal, make time to attend it. There, you'll not only learn the nuances of the proposal and what the grantor is seeking, but you'll have the opportunity to ask pertinent questions.

Time Management

Give yourself enough time to prepare, write, assemble, print, and package your proposal properly. Try to have it done at least two to three days before it's really due. This gives you enough time to relax, revisit it, and have someone else look it over. If you rush on it, you will very likely miss something, and you won't be able to present yourself in the best light possible.

In Their Shoes

Think about why someone would want to give you money/a project/a fellowship. Write your proposal to make them feel good about funding you and your work.

Break Down

Many grant questions are really multiple questions. Break them down and answer each aspect.

Sample Grant Question:

Describe your work. Why do you do what you do? How have you generated the majority of your income through your work in the arts over the past three years (e.g. performances, exhibitions, sales of artwork, teaching an art form, or any combination of these)?

Answer the Question!

Nobody wants to wade through a convoluted mess of highfalutin "art speak," inexplicable acronyms, and overall wordiness. Be concise. Be precise. Explain organizations and events that may be foreign to an adjudicator who may not be from Indianapolis.

Promote Yourself

When writing a proposal for ourselves, we often shy away from really talking ourselves up. Don't. Have some confidence about promoting yourself and your best qualities. If you're earnest and honest about yourself, confidence—not cockiness—will show through.

Simon Sez

Follow the preparation instructions exactly. If the grantor wants you to submit five copies on pink recycled paper with 2-inch margins stapled three times horizontally in the top right corner and then folded lengthwise and submitted in a 10" x 13" manila envelope, (breath) do it! Even if the guidelines don't make sense, there's a reason behind them. Many times, you're making it easier for them to assemble several grants into binders for adjudicators to review them efficiently.

Forest for the Trees

Make sure you have someone else review your application before you prepare it and right before you turn it in. If you've devoted a lot of time to your app, you may miss some very crucial typos, details, or elements. In some cases (like the Arts Council), you can ask the grantor to review a draft before you submit it officially to them.