

# 11 Grant Writing Tips from a Federal Grant Reviewer    October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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- 1. Read the Request for Proposal!** And then read it again. Take notes, organize the instructions and create a TO DO list. Some grants provide a template TO DO List that you can start with. Either way, have a list and clearly assign who will do what task and by when. If your grant is to be submitted on a portal system such as Grants.Gov, make sure your account is up to date and ready to go. Organize your thoughts, ideas and responses to what you are being asked.
- 2. Organize yourself in Google Drive.** This assist all who are helping to write to easily add content. Create a TO DO list of who is doing what by when. And check in with your TO DO list frequently. Include a copy of the RFA and all related grant documents in this drive. Google Docs is a great place to facilitate a collaborative, inclusive grant writing process.
- 3. Know the expected outcomes and deliverables.** Understand what you are being asked and assess that there a true fit to the work you want to do. Don't try to squeeze your ideas onto a grant that has totally different outcomes than what you want to address. **Be creative but pay attention.** Does the Grantor welcome thinking outside the box, or do they want you to stick to specific strategies? And if you are thinking outside of the box, are you clear what you are going to do, and do your ideas meet the overall deliverables.
- 4. Follow the formatting directions.** If you are told, for example, to use a certain font, or to label your sections or to keep it to a certain page limit, then do those things. For example, grant reviewers do not read grants beyond the expected page limit, so you can lose a lot of points if you go over the set limit.
- 5. Share and Borrow.** If you know other successful recipients of a grant, ask for copies of their proposal. (Just make sure you do not plagiarize!). Grants do change from year to year in terms of scope or information required, so make sure the questions and responses align. And when you do get funded, be open to sharing your grant narrative with others.
- 6. Start the assessment process early.** This is true especially for the DFC or other Federal grants that require a comprehensive assessment process. I have a timeline I use with applicants that starts in July, 8 months prior to the typical deadline.
- 7. MAKE SURE YOU ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS!** This seems obvious, and yet, so many writers do not do this. And, put your responses where the responses are expected to be. If you are specifically asked to put information in the narrative for example, and you write, "see appendix for information", you will lose points.
- 8. Use simple, clear language.** Although there is jargon that may be used in a grant (SPF, research-based, etc) if you are not really explaining your answer, it's just jargon. Words are powerful and your words should be positive, transparent and actionable. Filling space with meaningless words will cost points, so limit use of fluff and flowery language. You want your grant to stand out because you are doing the work they are asking you to do. This is not about your grant sounding better than someone else's as you are typically reviewed independent of other grants. Shorten long wordy sentences and make the grant easy to read and digest. It's about telling your story, clearly, concisely and, again, **answering all the questions.**
- 9. Use headings and bold important points.** Whether asked to use headings or not, use headings. Some reviewers are not as good as others in quickly understanding your response, so be clear and concise and not afraid to highlight your key points.
- 10. Use charts.** Put some of your data, like the Core Measures for a DFC grant, in a chart or graph. It's not necessary to put every data point in a chart but presenting all your data in run-on sentences makes it difficult to read.
- 11. Have someone read your draft who is not in your field/program.** Assume that the grant reviewers know very little about your strategies and even less about your geographical region. Tell your story as if the reviewer scoring your proposal is someone living in Alaska, who knows nothing about your organization, its mission, or your community (because they just might live in Alaska!).

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- \*Breath\***
- \*Know what is being asked\***
- Bring snacks to your grant writing meetings\***
- Be concise\***
- \* Vision out and focus in\***
- Plan early\***
- Have fun\***
- \* Include your community in assessing/addressing the issues\***
- Laugh\***
- Take walks\***
- \* Use cultural competency skills to be inclusive\***
- Don't panic\***
- \*Make your grant easy to read\***
- \*Answer the questions\***