



Tips for Grantseekers

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General Best Practices:

- Assume that your grantor is very busy and regulate your correspondence with them accordingly.
- Be able to provide grantors with references in your field.
- Be honest with grantors – if there are shortfalls in your organization’s management, board oversight or operations, ask for assistance and guidance and be willing to negotiate contingencies or benchmarks for grant payments.
- Collaborate with organizations that share or support your mission. They should be viewed as partners, not competitors. Funders frown on bad relations among organizations that could better serve constituencies through collaboration.
- Expand your base of support and avoid relying on a small pool of funders. Ask your current funders for recommendations of other funding sources.
- Google your organization. Grantors will. You should know what the internet generates about your organization.
- Have a succession plan – Key Person insurance and legally drafted documentation regarding the disposition of assets and future management of the organization can protect the organization (i.e. the constituencies that the organization serves) in the event of unplanned departures of key persons (executives, founders, managers).
- In general, anticipate a grantor’s needs and how you can accommodate them. While it is incumbent upon the grantor to avoid putting undue burdens on applicants, applicants should incorporate the same philosophy in their processes.
- Know the meaning of Best Practices and how that term fits into your fulfillment of your mission, your daily operations, your stewardship of donations and your cultivation of donors. There are volumes of information on the subject. Search them out and read them.
- Maintain an updated website.
- Regularly update your profile at www.guidestar.org including uploading your most recent 990 filing.
- Remember that grantors view their grant dollars as an investment. Their ROI (Return on Investment) is your proper stewardship of grant dollars and satisfactory completion of all grant requirements.
- Think of yourself as a business, not a non-profit – all businesses and non-profits cannot operate without revenue, so think in terms of revenue instead of profit, but recognize that you are a business and conduct your operations accordingly.

Applying for a Grant:

- Avoid sending paper documents to grantors. Use scanners and email whenever possible unless otherwise requested.
- Be able to project and ultimately demonstrate measurable outcomes for the grants for which you apply.
- Be able to provide grantor with annual budgets and line item budgets for the project for which you are applying.
- Be prepared to conduct a site visit and take the initiative to invite a grantor for a site visit – this is key to building a long-term relationship.
- Check the grantor’s website for grant application/inquiry instructions and follow them. Don’t call for clarification or assistance with a question that can be answered by familiarizing yourself with published guidelines and instructions.
- Draft a press release for grants received – you can make a template that you use repeatedly. Send the release to local newspapers, neighborhood publications, internet sites, etc. Explain the grant’s purpose and how it will benefit your organization’s constituents.
- Get an audited financial statement if you can afford it; if not, be able to provide a balance sheet to the grantor.
- Grantors must engage in a due diligence process to make sure that your organization and project are worthy of funding. Prepare your proposal and accompanying documentation with this in mind.
- Provide all required and/or requested documentation, including photos, vendor quotes, financial data, etc. when applying for a grant – more is better as long as the documentation is relevant to the grant you’re seeking.
- Publicly acknowledge a grantor’s support of your organization – list their grant on your web site and in member/constituent communications. Ask permission to put their logo alongside your public recognition. Thank you letters are nice, but public recognition is much more meaningful to a grantor and it gives your organization credibility when applying for grants from other funders.
- Use correct grammar and punctuation in ALL correspondence, especially the application.
- Use grant funds exactly for their stated purpose. Every grant represents a contractual obligation to fulfill the purpose of the grant as stated in your application or amended in your grant award. If you cannot spend the grant on its restricted purpose, consider asking the grantor for permission to use the funds for a related project if available or for general operating expenses; otherwise, you must return the money with the knowledge that your diligence will gain favor and strengthen your relationship with the grantor, which could lead to future grants.
- When considering what grants to apply for, weigh the size of the grant (or any other fundraising project) with the amount of time and effort you put into receiving money before applying. Some funders require excessive documentation and follow up which will reduce the “net grant,” which is defined as the amount of the grant minus the value of time spent attaining it and fulfilling its obligations.