



Grant Writing Tips

Make sure the proposal is neat, clean, grammatically correct and readable. Ask 1-2 Ohio AFHK Zone Members to **help proof-read**. Ask Jan or Deanna to help do a read-through before submission.

Have someone who is not involved with your program edit the proposal to make sure it is understandable to an “outsider.”

For your cover letter, **use Ohio AFKH letterhead**. Contact Jan, Deanna or Shelly for the State Partner Letterhead.

Be brief, **concise** and simple.

Spell out each abbreviation or acronym the first time it is used.

Avoid jargon. Don’t assume the reviewer has knowledge of Ohio AFHK and the work you do with the schools and in the community.

Obtain signatures from authorized persons for required forms early in the process. This may be the Zone Leader, State Chair, school official, etc.

Use concrete examples and **success stories** from the Ohio AFHK Zone Teams.

Follow directions. Include all required documents. Pay special attention to restrictions on length and formatting requirements, including font size, margins, number of copies submitted, etc.

Double-check the budget and budget narrative to make sure they agree and that the numbers add up correctly.

Give yourself enough time. Collecting data, writing multiple drafts, developing a budget, getting required signatures, and copying materials requires time.



Types of Funders

Government Agencies: Federal agencies know exactly what they want and issue NOFA (Notices of Funding Availability). Awards tend to be larger (\$100,000-\$500,000) and multi-year. Proposals can be lengthy and may take up to a month to complete. Specific forms are generally required. All federal government proposals are now submitted on-line via www.grants.gov.

You can find out about open NOFAs by visiting the web sites of specific federal agencies or by checking the Federal Registry. Some NOFAs are cyclic.

Until you receive a federal grant and are assigned a program officer, relationship-building is difficult, although there is a contact person listed for each NOFA. Reviewers tend to be experts in the field who use a scoring method. You will usually receive your “scores” shortly after notification of award or denial of award. Various factors may determine whether or not you get funded, including your geographic location and the political situation.

Private Foundations: A foundation is a legal non-profit entity that awards grants from a permanent invested endowment. There are more than 100,000 private foundations in the U.S. Foundations tend to be more relationship-oriented than government agencies. Large national foundations are interested in projects that are of national significance, replicable, and on the cutting edge of change. Regional foundations may have a broad range of interests within a specific geographic region. Small local foundations are often family-based and reflect the interests of the family members they represent. Funding decisions are made by the foundation’s board of trustees.

Directories provide basic information about foundations, including location, board of directors, funding range, funding restrictions, and areas of interest. Contact the foundation for their guidelines or go on their web site if they have one.

Community Foundations: Community or Public Foundations receive their funds from a variety of sources and are usually regional in focus. The Columbus Foundation and Cleveland Foundation are examples of community foundations.

Corporate Foundations: Corporate foundations are distinct from corporate giving. Corporate giving consists of contributions to non-profit organizations located in geographic areas where their employees work and live. Contributions may not be monetary and may include in-kind donations. Corporate foundations, on the other hand, are separate legal entities, although they receive most of their funds from the donor company and are company-controlled. Because contributions can be used as a marketing tool, corporations want recognition, e.g. name/logo on publications and signage pertaining to the proposed project. Corporations and corporate foundations often prefer that their employees be involved in the proposed project as volunteers. There are currently over 2000 corporate foundations in the U.S.



Trends

1. More foundations are requesting on-line submission. All government grants must be submitted via www.grants.gov.
2. Because of the trend towards on-line submissions, proposals are becoming shorter. Many web-sites require not only a word count but a character count. On-line submissions create a more equal playing field between larger non-profits and grassroots organizations. However, they also make it more difficult to explain complex problems and/or programs and to list all of the agency's achievements.
3. More foundations and government agencies are requesting that documents such as financial audits, IRS determination letters, and letters of support be scanned and submitted on-line.
4. Collaboration is the name of the game, as more foundations and government agencies prefer collaborative projects between two or more community-based organizations. Instead of competing for limited funding, non-profit agencies can collaborate as a way to pool resources, avoid duplication of effort, and reach different populations.
5. More foundations and government agencies are requiring involvement of the target population in the design, implementation and evaluation of the proposed project.
6. The trend is toward evidence-based programs and measurable outputs and outcomes. Evaluation and accountability is becoming increasingly important.

What Funders Look For:

1. A logical link between the proposed program and the specific problem outlined in need statement.
2. Appropriateness of proposed program for target population.
3. Justification for proposed activities
4. Innovative solutions to social problems that can be replicated in other communities facing similar problems



The Grant Process:

1. Pre-Research

Almost all corporate and private foundations and government agencies require submission of the agency's IRS determination letter as evidence of non-profit status, the most recent audit, current organizational budget, a list of the board of trustees, and job descriptions and resumes of key program staff. These documents can be kept on-hand, both in hard copy and electronic form. Statistics and information regarding your agency and target population can be used to make a compelling case for funding and should be regularly updated.

2. Researching Funding Sources

Sources:

- Directories of private and corporate foundations
- Foundation web sites
- Federal Register
- On-line computerized databases, e.g. Foundation Center, Guidestar
- Subscription services
- Newsletters, e.g. United Way
- Other organizations' annual reports
- Word of mouth: leads from board members, co-workers, collaborating agencies, other grant writers

Determining eligibility and compatibility of interests:

- Do areas of interest match?
- Look at restrictions (geographic restrictions, budget size). Sometimes foundations will not accept unsolicited proposals, proposals from United Way agencies or proposals for already existing programs.
- Most foundations and government agencies have budget restrictions. For example, many foundations will not contribute to capital expenses, individuals, political/religious causes, payment of debt, equipment, or general operating expenses.
- Once you find a potential foundation, find out all you can about it, including its board of trustees and previous giving history. Lists of past grantees can be found on foundation web sites, annual reports, or 990 forms.

3. Relationship-building

You do not have to wait until the Request for Proposal (RFP) appears or a funding cycle to start to begin building relationships with potential funders. If the foundation is local, set up a meeting with the foundation to discuss their funding priorities as well as your agency and programs without a direct request for money. Identify a project officer who will address your questions and may provide feedback and technical assistance.

4. Read carefully the giving guidelines or Request for Proposal (RFP). The RFP or guidelines contain the following:

- deadlines for submission
- number and amount of awards being granted
- eligibility and reporting requirements
- review timetable
- formatting requirements, including font size, margins, line spacing, and number of pages
- Contact information.

In determining whether to submit a proposal, consider the following questions:

- Are the foundation's priorities consistent with the mission and goals of your organization?
- Does your agency have the resources (staff, space) to implement the program?
- Does your agency have access to the population targeted by the RFP or guidelines?
- Is the amount of money being offered worth the time and expense involved in going through the grant process and implementing a program?
- If funded, would funds be available before the start date of your proposed program?

5. Letter of Inquiry (LOI)

Many foundations prefer receiving an initial LOI rather than a full proposal. An LOI is a 2-4 page "mini-proposal" that briefly describes the proposed project, the problem being addressed, target population, goals and objectives, expected outcomes and evaluation plan, and amount requested. The purpose of submitting an LOI is to see whether there is a "match" between the foundation's funding priorities and the agency's needs before expending time and energy on developing a full proposal. Follow foundation guidelines carefully when submitting an LOI.

If the foundation is interested in the project, it will then invite you to submit a full proposal.

6. Meeting of Key Players

Once a decision has been made to pursue funding for a particular program, all key staff involved in the project should be contacted. Each staff person's responsibilities in terms of collecting data and/or writing sections of the proposal should be spelled out. Deadlines for draft sections should be set. Establish a review, feedback and editing process for written sections. Collaborating agencies should be contacted immediately and letters of support/memoranda of understanding obtained.

7. Writing the Proposal

Brief, make a compelling case. Very competitive. Why should they fund you? Tell a compelling story. Use anecdotes. Use action verbs. Say will, not would.

8. Editing and revision. The program director should also review the proposal and check for accuracy. If possible, have someone unfamiliar with the program read through the proposal to ensure it is understandable to someone outside the field. Make sure that all sections of the proposal are consistent with each other. For example, the amount requested in the narrative should match the amount requested in the budget.

9.Submit proposal. Check the deadline. Some foundations will want to have the proposal in their hands by the due date while others will accept proposals if they are postmarked by the due date. If possible, send the proposal before the actual deadline. Some foundations have a bias against proposals submitted at the last minute.

Unless stated otherwise, do not staple or bind. Send proposals by certified mail as evidence that the proposal was sent on time. Notification of award is generally made within three-four months of submission.

10.Post-award. A personalized thank-you should be sent to a private or corporate foundation regardless of whether or not the proposal was accepted or denied. If funded, the agency will be responsible for submitting required interim and final reports. If your proposal was rejected, find out why, if possible. Some foundations will discuss the proposal with you and offer suggestions as to how you can improve future submissions.

During program implementation, changes may occur, such as re-allocation of funds or replacement of key staff. Immediately notify the funder of the changes.



Part of a Grant Proposal

Proposal Summary/Abstract:

The proposal summary appears at the beginning of the proposal but is written last. An overview of the entire proposal, the summary should include a brief description of the problem being addressed, goal and objectives, expected outcomes, the cost of the project, and amount requested.

Organizational Background/Description

The organizational description is a brief synopsis of the agency's mission and history, past and present programs and services relevant to the proposal, target populations served, experience with the target population, and evidence of accomplishments. The purpose of this section is to establish the agency's credibility, qualifications and areas of expertise related to the proposed program. An account of administration of funds from other significant funders may be included.

Need Statement/Problem Statement:

The Need Statement describes the problem being addressed. It answers the question, "So what?" The problem should be one of reasonable dimensions that can be significantly impacted by the proposed program.

You may support your case with both hard data (facts, statistics) as well as soft data (anecdotal evidence, quotes from experts). Focus on the needs of the people you serve, not the needs of the agency itself. Concentrate on the particular geographic area and population you seek to serve, and include local studies and statistics. Tables and graphs may be helpful, particularly in proposals with an abundance of statistics.

Research may be needed to support your case. Use the most current statistics available. Statistics and other information related to hunger in Ohio include the *2006 Hunger Report*.

Goal and Objectives:

Goals are broad statements that describe the ultimate purpose of the proposed project. It answers the question, "What do you want to achieve?" Each project usually has one goal.

Objectives quantify the changes brought about by the program and answer the following questions: Who will change/ What behavior will change? By what time will this change take place? In what direction will that change be? Objectives generally begin with the word "to" followed by an action verb. Objectives are to be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-referenced.

Program/Methods:

The program section describes the actual activities that staff will undertake to achieve the objectives. The section includes times and locations the program will be implemented, the number of people the program will reach, the curriculum or model to be used, collaborating agencies, the qualifications of key staff implementing the program and a timeline for when activities will occur.

Budget:

Unless the request is for operating support, most foundations will request both an organizational and a project budget. Multiple years must be presented if requested. The project budget should be developed early in the process. There should be no surprises: nothing should appear in the budget that was not referred to in the narrative.

A budget narrative for the project budget is often requested. The budget narrative is a written description and justification for each expense. There should be no unexplained amounts or “miscellaneous” category. Budgets are evaluated for their reasonableness. Do not “pad” the budget with unnecessary expenses; however, a budget may be rejected if the agency does not request enough funds to adequately implement a program.

Amounts listed are estimates, as actual expenses may change once the program is implemented. Funders should be informed, however, of major re-allocation of funds; if substantial, special permission may be required.

Most government agencies and some foundations will allow agencies to include indirect costs. Indirect costs are institutional costs that support all of the work of the agency and are not directly tied to the proposed program. Indirect costs may include rent, utilities, and administrative costs.

Common pitfalls in developing program budgets include:

- Incorrect figures
- Numbers do not add up
- Costs are not well-researched
- Items are either overblown or understated

Sustainability:

A brief description should be included as to how support for the project will be obtained once the funding period has ended and any steps the agency is taking to decrease reliance on grant support.

Evaluation:

Evaluation is used to determine the degree to which objectives are achieved. The evaluation section describes the data gathering method and timeframe, the process of data analysis, and who will conduct the evaluation. Measuring instruments may include pre-posts tests, questionnaires, and interviews.

Evaluations help program directors to assess the success of their programs and to improve them. Evaluations provide evidence to potential funders of the organization’s ability to run successful projects. The results of evaluations may be used by policy makers as a tool in determining what changes to make in policies.

In assessing the impact of a program on a target population, funders will often ask for reports on both outputs and outcomes.

Example:

Outputs: number of children getting nutrition education.

Outcomes: number of children changing behavior.

The impact is that children are healthier and for that reason doing better in school.

Appendices

Appendices usually include the following documents:

- IRS letter
- List of board of trustees with affiliations
- Audit
- Job descriptions and resumes or staff bios of key personnel
- Letters of Support/Memoranda of Understanding

Some foundations may require the following:

- Copies of the agency's 990
- annual report
- evaluation instrument (e.g. pre-post tests)
- table of organization.

Depending on the guidelines, you may want to include agency literature, news releases and evaluation tools. If the proposal runs over ten pages, a table of contents is in order.

Letters of support should be addressed to the correct foundation contact and refer specifically to the RFP and the proposed program.

Online Resources

www.fdncenter.org

The Foundation Center has an affiliate office in Cleveland. Trainings are provided in various cities each year. The web site provides online training courses, publications, articles, funding news, foundation profiles, and an online searchable database. Individuals and agencies may sign up for funding alerts in specific areas of interest. Many public libraries have access to the Foundation Center online directory.

Federal Register <http://ocd.usda.gov/nofa.htm>

The Federal Register contains daily announcements of rules, regulations and notices of government organizations, including NOFAs.

www.guidestar.org

Subscribers may search databases for foundations by geographic location and fields of interests and view foundations' 990 forms.

www.tgci.com

The Grantsmanship Center is recognized for its excellent training courses. Members receive a newsletter with articles pertaining to grant writing, access to the foundation database, and the opportunity to network with other members via a list serve.

<http://charitychannel.com>

Fundraising web site that features newsletters, list serves, book reviews, interviews, articles, and funding announcements. The website is free to the public.

www.philanthropy.com

Web site for the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, a bi-weekly publication focusing on the non-profit world that is available in many libraries. The site features articles about changes and trends in the non-profit world, reviews of new publications and other fundraising resources and the latest news about grant awards and grant-related conferences, workshops, and seminars. Subscribers receive access to the *Chronicle's* database, online discussions, and funding alerts.