

Helpful Grant Writing Tips

from your friendly neighborhood North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Some universal things to keep in mind before you submit a grant, regardless of what the particular grant is:

Formatting and Grammar

- Be sure to follow **all the guidelines** in the RFA regarding formatting, what attachments/appendices you need to include, signatures, application face sheet, etc.
- **Quadruple-check** for typos and inconsistencies! Misspelled words, grammatical errors, and inconsistencies (e.g., a statistic says one thing on one page, and the same statistic says another thing on another page) seriously detract from an otherwise strong application.
- Always double check the numbers in your budget—make sure that *everything* (all the number and line items) adds up correctly.
- Be sure to mail in original and signed signature page(s) for *every* grant you submit. Otherwise, the grant doesn't count and you do not have a binding contract.
- If possible, get all required original signatures in **blue** ink.
- Don't be like *The New York Times*—avoid plagiarism and provide citations for every piece of data you use! Not only is citing sources a sign of a good writer, it also adds legitimacy and weight to your grant application and to why you should be funded.
- Use the most updated data possible! If you are using old data, then grant reviewers won't understand why you need funds to address a problem that doesn't seem to really be a problem since you haven't supplied any current data.
- When you're talking about data, always make sure you use local data, too! National- and state-level data are important, but you absolutely need to demonstrate local-level need.
- Likewise, only use data that is specific to your work and to the application. If you're applying for a grant about miniature horses, don't include a bunch of data about supernatural occurrences—that wouldn't make sense!
- When you use relevant, up-to-date data, you will more effectively demonstrate the need that is present in your community, as well as why the grant reviewers should fund your proposal.

What the RFA asks for

- Make sure **every** document that is requested by the RFA is included in your grant application!
- If the RFA includes a checklist, use it! Grants that have built-in checklists as part of the RFA are giving you a roadmap to ensure you are sending in everything you need to!
- If the RFA doesn't include a checklist, make your own. Go through the application and make a list of all the questions the application asks. Similarly, go through the application and make a list of all the documents and supplemental materials that the application requests. Combine these two lists into your very own checklist!
- Recycling glass and paper = **good**. Recycling letters of support = **bad**. **Do not** reuse letters of support from past grant applications. **Do not** use letters of support from other grants. **Do not** use form letters for your letters of support. Nothing sticks out more than an outdated letter of support that doesn't even talk about the grant for which you are applying.
- When you're answering sections and questions in the grant application, be specific in your answers and give detailed examples. Don't just parrot back and restate what the RFA says.
- Writing well goes a long way! Transitions between sentences, paragraphs, and sections will make it easier for reviewers to follow and comprehend what your application is trying to say.
- Always have another pair of eyes (heck, three other pairs, twenty other pairs) read your grant application before turning it in. These other pairs of eyes can catch missing elements and illuminate areas where you need to offer more detail—since we are so wrapped up in writing the grant, our brains often fill in missing information that isn't actually there.
- Please use the provided (and oft required) forms and place the requested items in the section(s) where they are supposed to be placed. For example, if the RFA says, "Use this form for the budget," then use that form for the budget. If the RFA says, "Put the budget in Appendix F," then put the budget in Appendix F!
- Everything does not have to be doom and gloom—use the strengths-based approach when grant writing! Intentionally highlight the relevant strengths of your work more than the challenges and make these strengths the focal points of your application. Be sure to also provide enough detail and examples about these strengths, and tie them into the narration so they are relevant.

- Just like with a hot dog, filler never makes anything better. The same holds true for grant applications—if you add extraneous materials (aka—filler) to your application as a substitute for what the RFA is really requesting, this **will be** detrimental to your application and to your credibility.

Safe Assumptions to Make

- Assume that reviewers do not know your program nor its accomplishments (even if you have applied and/or received this funding before). You really need to go into detail about your program and the successes it has generated. Spell everything out!
- Assume that the people reviewing your grant do not know any acronyms. Define any terms that are not commonly used by the general public. And always, *always* spell out acronyms. A good rule of thumb is to spell out an acronym the first time it appears on a page, on every page. For example:
 - Page 1, first paragraph—“...Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)...”
 - Page 1, fifth paragraph—“...in X county, the SANE program is a vital...”
 - Page 47, third paragraph—“The need for a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)...”
 - Page 47, seventh paragraph—“...resulting in a decrease in the SANE department...”