



FUNDING EXCHANGE, INC.

Helping Nonprofits, Tribes and Agencies Build Healthy Organizations and Do Their Good Work

What do Funders Have to Say about Applicants?

by Sharon Gherman, Funding Exchange President/CEO

We've asked a variety of program officers for feedback about their 'pet peeves' when it comes to communication and proposals they receive from prospective applicants. Their responses have been very similar whether they work for a government agency or a private foundation, and they hold valuable warnings for every grantwriter. Let's hear directly from them:

✓ ***Do your homework.***

- Know who else in your area offers similar products or services. We expect you to avoid overlapping or duplicating services already offered in your community.
- Read our organization's website *thoroughly* and make a list of questions before contacting us or writing your proposal. Don't ask us questions that have already been addressed on our website or in our publications.
- Contact us directly before starting your proposal. Be sure you understand the RFP and have interpreted the requirements correctly. Ask about anything you don't understand.

If you state in your proposal that you "know" or "think" something, tell us why – How do you know? Give us the statistics or documentation to support your statement – or take it out.

- Fully explain and document every factual statement in your proposal -- or take it out.
- Be certain of what you actually want or need. Don't come to us just seeking general funding.
- Review what you have written thoroughly *before* you submit it... make sure it is accurate and consistent throughout.

✓ ***Follow the directions.***

- Use the format we have provided in building your proposal.
- Include complete information and provide every attachment we've requested in our RFP.
- Place complete information in the same section of the proposal where it's asked for – don't make us have to search for the significant information.
- Don't ignore page number limitations.
- Don't apply for ineligible activities.
- Explain project activities in detail – who, what, when, and where.
- Know our foundation's procedures and timeline up front, and be sure they sync with your timeline and ability to comply with our requirements before you submit a proposal.

*Don't apply to a
chemistry
foundation for
financial
education*

✓ ***Despite your need for funds, your application should be about us as much as it is about you.***

- Spend time matching your program mission and need to our mission and focus. Learn what our funding priorities are, and stop asking for things we don't have an interest in funding.
- Understand our limitations (policy and otherwise) and respect them. Don't attempt to negotiate changes or exemptions just for your program.
- Assume we know nothing about your organization and program, even if you've spoken directly with us. Give us complete information and clearly identify your purpose, need, project goals/objectives, and benchmarks.

- Don't send out proposals en masse -- there's very little that can hurt your chances for funding more than our receiving a proposal with another foundation's name somewhere in the text.
- Know what our overall mission is, and why our organization exists. Know how we seek to implement our mission, and help us accomplish that with your proposal.
- Your proposal should be clear, precise, and straightforward. Don't give us 'eye wash' or fluff... it's no substitute for good program planning.
- Clearly explain how you will fund the program after the end of grant funding. What is your plan to sustain the program for the long term?
- Give us confidence that you can handle our dollars responsibly -- Tell us about your past successes and what the impact of your previous projects has been.
- Build real, lasting partnerships and clearly describe them. In today's competitive climate, 'win-win' collaboration with others is required to get even innovative and competitive proposals funded.
- Don't ask for amounts outside the realm of possibility. Know the average size and range of our grant awards and if you're applying to us for the first time, keep your request on the low side of our range.
- If you want to be successful and submit a second grant request in the future, follow up on the first grant and provide the documentation and information we require. Show the foundation how you have spent their money.
- Don't expect us to pick up all the funding without asking others to help. If it is a funding need that will benefit the community, how much is the community investing in the project? Why should we fund a project or program that the community is not funding?
- Even if we don't require it, follow up at the end of your grant by sharing pictures and a description of the grant's impact.

I want to know they have a good, active board with members who attend meetings and contribute time and funding, are well organized, maintain good financial recordkeeping, and have a professional organization

- Address our questions promptly.

Be concise about your nonprofit, have a passion about your mission, and be specific about your greatest funding need.

The message from the funders is clear and direct:

- ✓ Do your homework
- ✓ follow the directions, and
- ✓ think like a funder.

The more completely you accomplish these three guiding principles, the more successful you'll be as a grantwriter!

www.fundingexchange.org

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