



SCHOOLGRANTS BIWEEKLY NEWSLETTER  
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Grant Writing Tips

Through the Eyes of the Grant Reviewer

As you prepare your proposals, keep some of these valuable tips in mind to ensure that you get credit for as many criterion points as possible. Form and format matter!! These tips are written with lengthy state and federal proposals in mind but pertain to smaller foundation requests as well.

Think about it! Most state and federal grant reviewers are doing the reviews in addition to their day-to-day jobs. To save money, many agencies no longer bring the reviewers together in a centralized location. Instead, they assign applications to reviewers and mail them where they are scored from the reviewer's home or office. A stack of proposals arrives by Fed-Ex and the reviewers are faced with yet another daunting set of deadlines where they must read 100+ page applications and score them.

At least in Texas, grant reviewers work at their own expense – there is no compensation provided for the hours spent meticulously going through the proposals and assigning scores. Federal reviewers receive some compensation for their time but they too face a tremendous task in reviewing proposals quickly and accurately. The fate of your proposal's funding is in the hands of these humans who are frequently already overworked and stressed!

**Follow the Scoring Criterion.** Make your proposal as easy to read as possible! Follow the stated criterion *exactly*. Highlight each section of the criterion so the reviewer can easily see that you are addressing it. You can do this by starting a new paragraph and including a bold heading. Sometimes this may mean that your proposal doesn't seem to flow as well as you'd like. There are times when the arrangement the agency has specified seems odd. Do not succumb to the temptation of thinking that if your response to the criterion is somewhere within the proposal, you'll get credit for it! If you get a particularly meticulous reviewer, that may be the case. But many reviewers simply do not have the time

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to read through a lengthy proposal several times searching for your response.

**Tables.** Make use of tables! You can show a lot of detail in a fairly small amount of space by using tables effectively. For instance, a good way to demonstrate a project's timeline clearly but using a minimal amount of space is to provide a table something like this:

Activity	Daily	Weekly	Quarterly	Annually
Hire personnel				*
Collect assessment data		*	*	*
Professional development/training			*	

When using tables, make sure you follow the Request for Proposal (RFP) guidelines! Some agencies specifically state that all information in tables and charts must be double-spaced.

When you use charts, make sure they are pertinent to the criteria. I've reviewed proposals where the charts were quite attractive (and took up a great deal of space) but the reason the applicant chose to include them was something I never did figure out nor were their purpose explained in the narrative. It seemed that their primary purpose was to take up space and to look impressive – both of which they did!

**Consistency.** There must be a flow between the various parts of your narrative. The needs you describe should relate to the specific program for which you are applying. The goals and objectives should be based on meeting those specified needs. The reviewers should be able to quickly assess how well the described activities will allow the program to meet its goals and objectives. And, the evaluation should be designed to collect data that is pertinent to the program and activities you have described. Last, but not least, the budget should reflect only those expenses (or expenditures) that have been described in the narrative. Do not throw in the cost of consultants or computers or bus services if you haven't detailed the part they play in your proposed program within the narrative. Likewise, don't describe services in the narrative for which you do not also allocate funds to provide unless you clearly state that no grant funds will be used to provide those services. (For instance, many grants do not allow non-educational activities. You may wish to provide such activities to bring the community together or to announce your program. State that non-allowable funds will be paid with other sources of funds.)

**Attachments.** The goal of the attachments is to add additional information for the reviewer should he or she wish to dig through them. The goal is not to add weight to your proposal or to spare you from fully describing your program within the program narrative. Most reviewers have neither the time nor the inclination to read through 50 pages of attachments (which often seem to be nothing more than advertisements from vendors) trying to decide what your program is all about. Make sure letters of support and/or collaboration have been written for the competition that is taking place. And beware of attaching a lot of support letters that say exactly the same thing. By the way, letters of support for your program – without any obligations on those who are writing

in support – tend not to have much impact on a reviewer. Of course an early reading program is something the Mayor hopes to see come to his city. But, is it something he would like to see so much that he will also help provide some services – for instance, giving city employees paid time off to work as volunteer tutors? What is the supporting consultant or vendor giving back to the program as in-kind or cash donation?

**Templates.** If you work in a large district and are submitting more than one application or if you are a consultant grant writer who is preparing proposals for multiple clients or if you are a school making use of vendor-prepared templates, the onus is on you to ensure that the submitted proposal is for *your* program. I've read proposals that name the wrong schools as participants within the narrative. Perhaps even more dangerous are vendor-prepared templates that still show *Insert District Name here* when submitted for review. Use of templates can save a lot of time but their use can also mean that the reviewer doesn't give much credence to anything that's written in them when it is obvious the plan is not the applicant's.

**Fonts and Margins.** Include as much white space as possible on your proposals. A single-spaced narrative that is written in Arial Narrow, point size 9, with no double spacing between paragraphs is a challenge to read! Overuse of bolding can be disconcerting and takes away its impact. Federal grants often specify that you must use no less than 1" margins and a font size of 12 points. Stick with traditional fonts such as Times New Roman or Arial (not Arial Narrow). And, check your margins carefully! Stories abound of proposals returned unread due to non-responsiveness because of how the printer and/or copier interpreted the 1" margin. As little as 1/16<sup>th</sup> inch off the requirement can mean that weeks of hard work preparing the perfect proposal are negated without being given any consideration at all over something that seems as trivial as the width of your margins.

#### SCHOOLGRANTS SERVICES

Grant writing assistance that available through SchoolGrants includes the SchoolGrants Biweekly Newsletter (<http://www.schoolgrants.org/newsletter2.htm>) and the Let's Write a Grant CD (<http://www.schoolgrants.org/WriteGrant.htm>) as well as free content on the SchoolGrants Web site at <http://www.schoolgrants.org>.

#### **Consultant Services**

Need help with grant writing? SchoolGrants is the place to turn! We can write a competitive proposal for your school or district or provide a valuable review service that will increase your chances of submitting a successful proposal.

Hands-on site-based workshops are an effective way to teach your staff how to write proposals to help fund those programs that are important to your school. I have the knowledge and experience necessary to teach others how to write a winning proposal. One workshop participant wrote this, "*I have been to many grant writing workshops, and I want you to know this is the only one that has been truly practical. One can read and understand the process; it's the "doing" that is so helpful. THANKS!!*"

For more information about services available through SchoolGrants, you can reach me by sending an email to [schoolgrants@schoolgrants.org](mailto:schoolgrants@schoolgrants.org).