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Grant Writing 101
FOR CREATIVES AND CREATIVE BUSINESSES

What You'll Learn

- How to find grant opportunities and determine your eligibility

- Best practices for writing a compelling grant narrative

- How to set up a simple budget for a grant application

- What to do once you receive a grant

- How to avoid common pitfalls

Jump to:

About Grants

A grant is an award given by a company, foundation, or government to an individual or company to facilitate a goal or incentivize performance.

Pros: They can fund projects and needs that otherwise wouldn't be funded. You don't have to pay them back.

Cons: It can be a long process and it isn't exactly free money—applying and reporting take your valuable time.

Preparing to Apply

When deciding whether or not to apply for a particular grant, ask yourself:

1. Do you actually need a grant? Do you have a specific project in mind? Or do you have a specific need or emergency?

2. Is this the right grant? Is your project aligned with the grant program or funder's mission and purpose? Will the timing of the application and funds disbursement work for your project or need? Does the grant size match the size of your project or need? Do you meet all the eligibility criteria?

You can find information to help you answer these questions on the grant website or announcement sheet.

Common pitfall: Designing a project around a grant.

✓ **Design your project and then find the right grant (or other funding).**

Building Rapport

1. Identify the program/grant officer
2. Send a brief email requesting a few minutes to chat by phone about your grant application
3. Pitch your project idea and ask for feedback (take notes!)
4. Ask how proposals are reviewed and how decisions are made
5. Ask if they'd be willing to review a draft

Applying: The Narrative

General Guidelines

- **Follow instructions:** Look out for character/word count maximums, font size and style requirements
- **Answer questions completely but efficiently**: Include only and exactly what they ask for
- **Use their language**: Tailor your answers to funder/program interests and priorities
- **Make it easy!** Use simple terms and short sentences.

Common pitfall: Using acronyms!

✓ **Spell out all acronyms and abbreviations, just in case.**

Summary

As briefly as possible—one line, maybe two—cover the following:

- Who? You/your business
- What? What will the funds be used to do?
- When? What is the timeline for the project?
- Where? Where will the project take place and/or where are the people who will be served?
- Why? What's the end goal or purpose of the project?

About You/Your Business

Describe what you do and why you do it. Why are you a good candidate for the grant?

COMMON PITFALL: Downplaying your previous success!

✓ **Include evidence that you and/or your business is a good choice for the funding by demonstrating previous success, relevant experience and qualifications.**

Need

Use narrative and quantitative data to support your answers to:

- What issue(s) will be addressed?
- Why is it important?
- Who will benefit?
- Why now?

Example: *Approximately 70% of artists in the Two Rivers region could increase their income by 10% or more if they had access to affordable studio space: 'I could be creating large paintings for commercial purchase" says Jane Doe, a painter in Newbury, "but I don't even have space in my home to fit the canvas."*

Strategies

These are the actual action items involved with the project. Sometimes these are called "activities". Sometimes a timeline is included, sometimes it's separate.

This is where you get specific about what activities will take place when and for how long. You can use a bulleted list or table.

Impact

What does success look like, broadly?

- Start with yourself/your business

- Include impact on your peers, customers, staff - those directly impacted by/benefitting from the project
- End with impact on your community at large - your town, your region, Vermont or even the world

Goals

What are the measurable benchmarks of success? These should be **S.M.A.R.T.**:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**elevant
- **T**ime-bound

Example: If your impact is that "Families in the region will have better access to theater programs.", your SMART goal might be: "Add two outdoor, daytime performances to the 2023 Two-Rivers tour at a flat family rate."

Evaluation

What metrics will you track to determine your progress toward goals? Examples:

- Sales # or $
- Ratings
- Satisfaction
- Participation
- Views/visits

What tools will you use to track them? Examples:

- POS or other sales report
- Review solicitation
- Survey
- Registration form

- Sign-in sheet, RSVP form

Applying: The Budget

A simple budget breaks down the income and expenses associated with a project.

Sample Budget - You can make a copy and adapt it for your needs.

Remember that your expenses likely include labor— your time and anyone else's time working on the project.

Common pitfall: Grant request covers the total cost of the project.

✓ **Demonstrate other support/investment from other sources, including you or your business in cash or in kind.**

Applying: Supporting materials

Some grant programs will require or invite you to submit letters of support, a resume, a portfolio, a profit & loss (P&L) statement, or something else.

Be sure to include anything required in the format they list.

Common pitfall: Sending stuff that isn't requested.

✓ **Include only what is specifically required or allowed.**

Submitting the Application

- Give it a descriptive title & file name
- Proofread, then have others proofread
- If welcomed, send a draft for officer review at least a week ahead of time

- Confirm the format and channel for submission (i.e., PDF attachment to email, online portal, print and mail?)

Common pitfall: Waiting until the last minute.

✓ **Give yourself plenty of time to make changes and anticipate a variety of technical/logistical issues.**

Grant Management

You got a grant! Now what?

- Follow up to thank the funder
- Add reporting deadlines to calendar
- Document use of funds – spreadsheet, file folder, pen & paper, accounting software–whatever system works best for you
- Track measurables according to your evaluation plan
- If your project changes or you can't follow through, contact the grant officer and ask for advice

Finding Grants

Signup for email newsletters and listservs

- VT Arts Council
- VT Humanities
- Agency of Commerce & Community Development
- Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission

Check out the Vermont Small Business Development Center and contact your advisor—let them know you're seeking grant opportunities.

Keep an eye out for language on similar businesses' websites and other materials indicating that a grant was accessed

Network: Talk to other creatives and attend events, ask about funding sources

*New this year: Contact your town's selectboard or view meeting minutes to find out how the town is using ARPA funds and whether or not there's a process for proposing a project

Grants to explore:

Vermont Humanities - Rapid Response Grant

Vermont Arts Council - Artist Development Grant