



Grant Me My Wish

Applying for grants need not be a daunting experience. Here's how to get started and be successful.

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To many people, grants are a mystery. They can seem like magic money that comes from secret places. So how do you decide to apply for a grant and go about getting it done?

Grants are simply money that is earmarked for very specific purposes. Grant makers have money they want distributed to further their unique missions, and if you can be part of their mission, they are willing to give you money. That is truly the key to successful grant writing: making your priorities fit with granters'. In this article we will walk through getting ready to apply for grants in a systematic way that anyone can follow. Grant writing takes time and experience, but you can start making progress and set goals along the way to make your appeals successful.

The good news is, yes, you should apply. Every year the federal government, states and private foundations give away literally billions of dollars. All of these funds fall into specific categories with specific requirements, but when you are eligible for a grant, you should go for it. The fact of grant writing is that most applications are turned down — many for not meeting guidelines, not following instructions or because there were too many applications to fund them all. You can increase your odds if you follow a few simple steps. As one grant consultant says, "The money is there, and it is going to be given to somebody. It might as well be you!"

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Most people and agencies determine they need a grant when they decide they want to purchase something they can't afford in their normal budgeting process. It rarely works that way. Most grant processes are very focused in nature and cannot be adapted to your needs.

So how do you get a grant? First you must understand your agency and have a comprehensive plan for it. Most call this a strategic plan, but at a minimum, you must understand how your operation currently works and what you think it will become in the next 5–10 years. Look at all aspects. Think not just about equipment, but about how things get done. Evaluate your processes to determine where improvements can be made. Having a plan prepared for all areas allows you to be prepared to apply for funding regardless of what your priority might be. In other words, you may really want to get cardiac monitors, but the first grant that comes up may be for data collection. You have to be prepared to fit the grant processes you find to a variety of needs within your organization.

The other thing a strategic plan does is help you identify areas of need, so you can begin collecting data to justify grant requests. Every granter wants you to prove you have a need their money can help meet. You need solid data to make that case. Data is the foundation on which



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you will build your argument, and your argument must be more convincing than the next guy's to collect the cash. There is absolutely no replacement for solid data in a grant narrative.

When you begin planning, think about the end results first. Ask yourself if what you are planning actually makes sense. Is what you want to do achievable? Is it cost-reasonable? Will it provide real improvement to the problem you have? Remember that the people who review your grants are people just like you. They are business people who will know very well if what you are asking is feasible. Think about where you want to be, and then build the steps to get there.

SECRETS OF SUCCESS

Being successful at grant writing begins with finding a grant that matches your needs. Many times agencies will try to fit what they want into a grant process they hear about. Usually this will not work. Your needs must fit exactly within guidelines set forth by the entity with the money.

Next you will need to do research. After finding a grant process, you will need to read every single word in its application and guidelines. Read it all before you start. You may find something that will exclude your agency from applying.

The next important point is attention to detail. The guidelines are written for a reason. If you do not follow them to the letter, your application will be dismissed. When a granter says an application must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, this is exactly what it means. Will the granter throw out your application because you used a 10-point font? Yes, it will. Your appeal will never make it to the reviewers.

Finally, remember that all grant writing has an element of luck. There are many factors you cannot control: how much money a granter has, how many people apply, how much everyone asks for. Even when you do everything right, you still may not get approved. Do not get discouraged. The key is to pay attention to detail and keep at it. You will be successful with consistency and persistence.

RESEARCH

If you have not found a grant yet, the internet is a good place to start looking. Type in *EMS (or Police) grants*. If you're looking for something specific, like cardiac monitors, type in *cardiac monitor grants*. You may find one that way. Also check with professional contacts, colleagues from other agencies and vendors. There's usually someone in the EMS (or law enforcement) community who knows where the grants are.

The other option is to hire a grant consultant. These people can help you find and apply for grants, but there is almost always a fee. Public safety grant consultant Kurt Bradley says, "Time is any public safety employee's most valuable asset and the one of which they have the least control. Procrastination on a grant application is what keeps most agencies from being successful." If you lack the time to spend seeking grants the right way, a consultant may be your best bet.



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Once you find a grant, you'll need to research its requirements and get all the organizational data granters want. Do not forget to get approval from the boss early. There is no sense in doing a lot of work up front if your leaders are not willing to meet the requirements of the grant or provide any required matching funding. Also remember to start a file on your grant and keep every piece of paper associated with the process. You will probably need to refer back to documents later, and even after you get the grant to do reporting.

Your grant idea must be clear and concise, and good data will make your story compelling. Data should be measurable, and you should always quote your data source and the time period measured. Use the best data you have to make your point. Local data is better; using a lot of national data or references to general information is not always helpful. Never make anything up, because many grant processes require auditing and follow-up.

Once you have your numbers in order, it's time to ask for support. If support letters are allowed, ask relevant people you know to write letters specifically supporting your cause. Think about individuals, agencies and even elected officials who might support what you want to do. Do this early, because it takes time to track these down.

NOW LET'S WRITE!

A good narrative paints a complete picture of what you're trying to accomplish, while at the same time persuading the people reviewing your application that yours is more worthy than the next guy's. This is no simple task. Use your data to your advantage. You will need to quantify what critical infrastructure you protect and provide services for, provide call numbers and describe any hazards your agency faces. Your data must be concrete and expose a problem that cannot be repaired any other way. You will need to justify why you cannot purchase the needed goods or services through your normal budgeting process. Many grants require annual reports and budgets from past years.

You will need to estimate what the outcome of your grant will be. You will need to identify reasonable numbers you can track after receiving the grant. Be as accurate as possible (in other words, give it your best guess). While you write, remember that whoever is reviewing your grant probably already understands your issue, but you need to outline the problem and the solution in detail, while being as concise as possible.

It cannot be emphasized enough that you must cover all the details as accurately as possible. Leaving out a single piece of vital information will give granters an excuse to dismiss your application without ever reviewing it completely. Most applications go through a two-part review: first electronic; then those that pass go on to the human reviewers. Countless appeals die in electronic review and never even get considered by real people. Double-check all data and make sure you proofread and spell-check the entire document. Says Bradley: "If you take away all the reasons a reviewer has to say no, then they are simply left with no choice but to say 'yes' and award you the funding."

Make sure you turn your application in before the deadline listed. Grant requests that come in one minute after the due date and time will be turned down. Also try to submit online



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applications well ahead of deadline. Many times everyone tries to turn their applications in at the same time, and granters' websites may slow down or crash.

JUST DO IT

Now is the time to begin your quest for funding. Get your strategic planning and research processes started. Grant dollars can provide additional training, equipment and clout for your agency. Your efforts toward obtaining grants will help you reach your goals and make a real difference in the quality of life of each and every person you respond to.

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