# The Grantseeker's Checklist

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## ✎ PRE-SUBMISSION ✎

- ❑ Be sure to get a jump start on applications by maintaining a folder of federal and private grant applications from the previous year. Most grant applications don't change much from year to year, so applications can be started early.
- ❑ Brainstorm new ideas weekly to ensure freshness of potential grant proposals. Query pertinent staff about validity of grant ideas.
- ❑ Keep in contact with program officials throughout the year. These individuals can provide a sense of when the current year grant process will begin and potential changes to the process. A meeting during the off-season is a great marketing tool, too. Federal program officials will consider phone or face-to-face meetings when the grant process for their program is not imminent. Don't rely solely on the grant manager for these meetings, because he isn't the expert. Make sure the nonprofit's executive directors and other subject matter experts are in attendance.
- ❑ Congressional and federal agency staffers can provide information on how you can become a grant reviewer and a member of steering committees that help decide the priorities for grant programs.
- ❑ Make sure your congressional members know what you are doing. Getting to know state and federal congressional members is always a plus, before, during and after submission of grant proposals. These individuals can provide guidance on best opportunities and send letters of support once the grants are submitted.
- ❑ Conduct regular searches for grant ideas. Bookmark the grant Web pages for your pertinent federal agencies and private funding agencies as favorites and visit them at least once a week. These sites generally have the most up-to-date information on funding opportunities, including the crucial contact information.
- ❑ Don't forget to research local funding opportunities. Remember industries in your city, region or state likely have philanthropic efforts and you, as a local nonprofit, will receive priority.
- ❑ Once potential grant opportunities are found, contact the program officials for additional information. Federal funding opportunities don't generally restrict contact with program officials, so contact them. E-mail is generally the preferred initial contact method. Private funders sometimes forbid contact by grantseekers, so check the Web sites prior to contact.
- ❑ Since on average only 20% of applications are funded, nonprofits should be prepared to apply often to numerous federal agencies, private foundations and corporations. Brainstorming sessions should go on constantly to devise innovative ideas for funding proposals.
- ❑ Don't overlook any foundation or federal agency. It's surprising what some federal agencies fund—For instance, many would assume the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention would fund mostly medical research, but it also has a grant program to aid building safety. Likewise, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program at the Department of Homeland Security would seem on the surface to benefit only the firefighting community, but a portion of its funding goes for the Fire Prevention & Safety Grant Program. Any nonprofit with a program with a fire safety theme can apply.

- When conducting research, take a look at the list of previous winners. A previous grantee may have a program you can adapt for your area. These nonprofits generally are more than happy to provide additional information, because the more their project is used, the more cachet the group attains. CD Publications offers a wide variety of past winning grant applications. Log onto www.cdpublications.com, click on "Categories", then click on "Grant Apps".

- Keep a file of boilerplate information, including your DUNS number, employer ID number, bank account information, a good synopsis of your organization's mission and partnerships that are strengthening it. Online applications are becoming the norm with federal and private funders. All federal applications require a DUNS number, while an employer ID and bank account info are requirements for all online applications. Lists of members and donors should be included, too.

## SUBMISSION

- Once the funding opportunities and deadlines are determined, create schedules and task lists for each opportunity. The schedule shouldn't be finite, allowing for tweaking. For example, don't have the end date as the actual deadline day, but have the deadline set for a week prior to allow for unforeseen problems.

- Don't be overzealous in grant submission. Federal and several private opportunities offer short submission windows. Use all of the allotted time. Grants submitted early in the cycle may be considered sub-par, even if they are not.

- Read the grant guidance thoroughly. In general, at least a couple of reviews of the guidance are needed. The guidance should provide a sense of the tone and structure of the grant narrative.

- Keep track of the technical assistance provided. Technical assistance seminars are becoming more popular with federal agencies, as are online grant tutorials.

- Writing the draft narrative and composing the entire application should take 40% of the allotted time, with another 40% taken up by review and fine-tuning. Submission should consume the remaining time. The grant guidance will dictate the most crucial sections of the narrative. For instance, federal guidance usually provides a breakdown of the scoring process. If the narrative says the proposed project portion of the narrative is worth 80 out of 100 points, then 80% of the allotted narrative drafting should be consumed by this task.

- Federal agencies tend to provide preference to those that have never won funding from their programs. Nonprofits that haven't been successful with a certain federal program should always check on the novice priority. If it's there, make sure to play that fact up in the grant proposal.

- Federal and private funders want to see experience in handling funding and partnerships. Novice grantseekers shouldn't panic if they don't have a wealth of experience with grant management. They just need to play up their partnerships. Make sure partners are involved in the grant submission process.

- Make sure the grant narrative is written in an "online-friendly" manner. Remember all style is stripped from the document once it is posted online, including bullets, italics and quotation marks. Either change these once posted, or use other methods (hyphens, parentheses or all caps) from the beginning.

- In spelling out the need for the proposal, provide as much supporting evidence on the problem to be solved as possible. Use timely statistics, case studies, testimony and other measurable data. Do not use outdated statistics.

- ❑ In the grant narrative, clearly spell out goals and deliverables. This is best accomplished with lists, with supporting paragraphs spelling out how each of the goals and deliverables will be accomplished.
- ❑ Assume the grant reviewers know nothing about your organization. Don't confuse them with jargon. Explain things completely.
- ❑ Once a draft narrative for a grant application is finished, contact the grant official for the targeted program (unless otherwise told not to) to see if they will take a look. Be ready to provide a synopsis over the phone, because, while they generally won't review the proposal for you, they will listen to the synopsis and provide guidance.
- ❑ Once the grant application is compiled, get all staff, board members and volunteers involved in the review of the proposal. This is especially crucial if the proposal mentions the participation of a particular staffer or department. The goal is to not have any surprises when the grant is funded.
- ❑ Know your budget. It should be realistic and give credibility to the entire proposal. Online submission systems generally provide space to provide additional information on the expenditure. Do not leave these sections blank, but provide as much information on the line item as possible. This is where collaboration from the financial department is crucial.
- ❑ As a final step prior to submission, have a fresh set of eyes take a look at the grant application. Ideally this would be someone on staff who has some knowledge of the subject matter.

## *POST-SUBMISSION*

- ❑ Make sure to keep the online grant submission verification e-mail. Online glitches occur, so make sure to submit the proposal at least a day before the deadline. This leaves time to contact the agency the next day to ensure the proposal was received.
- ❑ Contact congressional offices, program officials and partners to let them know the grant has been submitted. Provide a copy of the grant application to each, if possible. Ask the congressional staffers and partners to submit letters of support for the program.
- ❑ A good sign you are getting a grant is a call from the agency or foundation to clarify information. This generally means the proposal has been approved for funding, but a few questions are outstanding. Don't panic when this happens, just answer the questions honestly. Sometimes, the agency will lower the proposed budget amount, but not significantly.
- ❑ If your proposal isn't successful, don't become disheartened. Contact the program official to gather insights on the weaknesses and strengths of the proposals. If a federal agency, ask for a copy of the reviewer's comments.

**Avoid the pitfalls—**
**Refer to *The Grantseeker's Checklist* on each grant application**

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