

From Techlearn – a 3 page hint paper

1. http://www.techlearning.com/db_area/archives/TL/200106/before1.html

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Advice from a Veteran Grant Reader

Saul Rockman, a longtime grant reviewer and grant writer, claims his success in winning grants is in knowing the process from the inside. Here's his advice for success.

Know what you're doing. Writing a grant is easier if you've been a grant reader. Offer to read proposals for state or federal grant competitions, or ask to be included in the list of readers for a foundation (if they use outside readers). Reading proposals helps you begin to see the differences between successful and unsuccessful proposals. And it lets you in on a big secret of grant winning: a reader is a person just like you.

Follow the rules. It is easy to turn down a proposal that doesn't follow the rules. And in competitions where there are many applicants for each award, grant readers are always looking to cut one more out of the competition. So if it says 15 pages are the maximum, write 15 or fewer, not 25 (even if you think you're adding important detail). Be sure to respond to all the questions on the forms, and write answers exactly as they specify.

Organize the narrative. Be aware of the proposal's evaluation criteria and the required sections in the application and use them as a guide to writing. Use headings and make it easy for the reader to know that you have dealt with each of the issues required of the proposals.

Be specific. Readers want to know what you hope to accomplish, so be concrete, and include sufficient detail so that they realize you actually know something. As a reader, I look at the scope of work that you want to accomplish. Then I look at the people listed on the grant to see if they can actually carry it out. Finally, I look at the budget to see if you have asked for sufficient funds and allocated them in appropriate ways to accomplish what you want to do.

Be honest. If it is going to be difficult, say so. And if things look askew, explain them. If the proposed project director is the son of the school board president, he better have some directly relevant experience in his resume. Experienced readers know that it will take more than the first month to hire staff, secure offices, identify needed equipment, put it out for bid, train staff, and start a new Web portal; so write a realistic timeline.

- 2.

Before and After Pointers

By Gwen Solomon

Writing a grant proposal is a work-intensive, time-consuming process. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your effort.

Things to Do Before You Write

Have a solid idea and enough supporting details. Remember: honorable but vague intentions are not enough.

Read the grant guidelines carefully-is this the right grant to meet your needs, or are you bending either your idea or what the grant is asking for to fit?

Build commitment to the idea. Those involved should meet, discuss, plan, and agree to contribute not only to the project but also to the grant-writing process, and agree to carry out the plan if successful.

Evaluate the amount of funding. Make sure that the amount of money in the grant is sufficient for your needs. What staff and equipment will you need? Will this grant cover it? What other sources can you tap?

Determine your ability to carry out the plan and the commitment of your supervisors and the community.

Get outside funders (local community, matching funds) on board and enthusiastic about the ideas.

Read the directions carefully and follow advice from the experts on how to write proposals.

Set deadlines for your team to write their sections, complete the work, get signatures, and make the copies you need to send so you'll be ahead of schedule; and build in a buffer in case things take longer than expected.

After You Win the Grant

Be ready to hit the ground running should you win. Have your plans in place so you won't lose valuable time. Encourage staff to continue planning so they'll be ready, willing, and able to start immediately if and when the funding does come through.

Follow the plan. Do what you've said you want to do. Spend on budget items exactly. Measure what you've said you'll test. Send reports on time.

Understand roles. Make sure that everyone involved understands the project thoroughly and knows exactly what his/her role is in it.

Recognize personnel for their work; thank them publicly. Talk about how well the project is working.

[Advice from a Veteran Grant Reader](#)

[Writing and Winning Grants: Tips from Technology Leaders](#)

Keep the support strong. Maintain enthusiasm for the project throughout its life. When people hear that a project is going well, it motivates those running the project, and convinces everyone that they have a great thing.

Sustain it. Make the program a regular part of the school's or district's program. Find ways to sustain it over time, even after the funding period ends.

Evaluate the outcomes early and often. Make small changes when they're needed-and before they adversely affect the success of your project.

If You Don't Get the Grant

Contact the funder and ask to read the reviewers' comments about your proposal (if the grant program provides them) so you'll know how close you were to winning and what you might want to change for future tries.

Read the summaries of projects that did win and analyze why they won.

Submit it again-if you think the plan has merit, propose it again. Maybe the proposal just needs tweaking to succeed. Don't lose heart or give up easily.

Adapt the proposal to fit another grant or even hire a professional grant writer to help you adapt it.

Start the project anyway-if the idea is important and the staff is committed, begin whatever parts you can without the outside funding. Maybe the groups that said they'd contribute funds will help you anyway.

Find a new idea. It's possible that no one is funding exactly the kind of thing you want to do right now, but there's probably an alternative course you could take.

3.

Writing and Winning Grants: Tips from Technology Leaders

Compiled by Gwen Solomon

We asked tech-savvy educators in a variety of roles for their takes on writing great grants. Here's what they told us.

"Things like more hardware and software or a wish list of 'stuff' are irrelevant. What you want are the programs or reforms that could make your school the place it was intended to be, a world-class school with world-class students."

-Gary Carnow, director of technology, Alhambra, Calif.

"Write in plain language. Avoid jargon. If you want to use acronyms, define them."

-Andrea Gooden, senior program manager, Global Community Development, Sun Microsystems

"Convince the funder that both you and the idea are solid. Use persuasion and concrete images to demonstrate why the idea is important."

-Mike Haney, program director, Elementary, Secondary and Informal Education, National Science Foundation

"Prepare well so you can report easily. Align goals, objectives, and activities; build in a clear evaluation plan to monitor and measure progress; and then communicate the results."

-Jenelle V. Leonard, U.S. D.O.E., Technology Innovation Challenge Grants Program

"Maintain a good set of readily available needs assessment data. If you know what the overwhelming needs of your school or district are (and can point to data to prove it), it will be easy to target appropriate grants and use the data as a resource."

-Larry Leverett, superintendent, Plainfield Public Schools, N.Y.

"Be realistic about what you plan to accomplish: Grant-giving organizations like to support projects that set realistic goals because they are more likely to be successful. If the scope of what you set out to do is too broad and all-encompassing, you are more likely to be turned down. If your project has a focused goal, with steps outlined to reach that goal, it will be more appealing to potential funders."

-Bonnie Marks, director, Region IV California Technology Assistance Project

"Engage as many great minds as possible to help you develop the concepts for the proposal, to make your idea strong and likely to succeed."

-Robert McLaughlin, National Institute for Community Innovations

"Look very carefully at the purpose and goals for the grant and write specifically to those."

-Helen Soule, Mississippi Director of Educational Technology, Training and Support

"Convince the reader that every cent in your budget is necessary, there are no unnecessary frills, and your operation is as economical as is consistent with success."

-Robert Tinker, chairman, The Concord Consortium