

## **How to Write GRANTS: The Best Kept Secret in the School Business**

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Technology is expensive -making innovation beyond the reach of most school budgets. And since constant improvement requires continuous funding, how do school districts, buildings or classroom teachers fund the products they need to improve student learning? The answer is through external grants. But grants require applications, and few, if any, colleges or graduate programs have courses or workshops that teach educators how to write grants; consequently, few professors can write them successfully.

While rural schools have too few people doing too many jobs, urban and suburban schools are often shrouded in frustrating bureaucracy. Despite these challenges, well-written external grant funding can make a big difference in technology access, updates and instructional innovation.

### **Systems Approach to Grant Applications**

Grant opportunities have many things in common: The grant announcements come at the busiest time of year, the timeline is always short and the applications are complex. In addition, the documentation you need is never readily available and nobody wants to do it. And even after all the work, the chance of getting the funding is still low since nobody really knows how to write a grant properly.

However, applying for grants can be a beneficial experience so long as the grant writer learns a few vital skills. First, it should be known that the most important stage in a successful grant writing system's development begins before one word is ever written. I recommend putting simple tools and systems in place that let members of a grant writing team add what only they can, whenever they have the time and opportunity to do so.

### **Action Summary Page**

The first step is developing an action summary page, which usually can be done by a secretary who takes all the important submission information from the RFP and puts it onto one page. This information should include the project name; submission due date and time; days remaining until the due date; mailing address to submit application; prior notification date and contact; number of copies; preferred font, margins and spacing; page limit and location of page numbers; preferences and eligibility requirements;

restrictions on grant money use; goals of the funding; acceptable uses of grant money; and requirements for signatures and assurances.

Everyone associated with the grant application should then build a folder on his or her workstation labeled with the grant name. This action summary page should be the first document stored in that project folder. From this point forward, everyone associated with the grant application should know all of the important particulars associated with the correct and timely submission of the proposal. The coordinator of the grant writing team is responsible for keeping track of the date and days left until the grant's submission deadline. As a rule of thumb, use a boldface font for key terms, because the more important the particular, the larger the font size should be on the action summary page.

Each member of the team also must be focused on what the grant will and will not fund each time he or she opens the file to write. In addition, anyone who is required to provide an assurance or signature for the grant must be told that the application is being developed and will require his or her immediate attention when it is completed. The goal is to ensure that there are no surprises for district superintendents or treasurers.

### Vocabulary Highlight Page

The leader of the grant writing team needs to construct a vocabulary highlight page. The leader must also review the RFP for all terms and phrases that characterize the goals and expectations of the funding. This page should be taped next to any computer being used to write the grant application. Make sure to use the same vocabulary for the grant RFP that you use for the grant application, because this vocabulary will appear in any evaluation form used to review the application. Terms and phrases like the ones below should make up a vocabulary highlight page:

- Enhance student learning
- Real-world examples
- Hands-on student activities
- Integrating technology into teaching and learning
- Technologically literate
- Student access to information technology in classrooms, schools, communities and homes
- Achieve high academic standards
- Multimedia and digital content
- Networked applications

### Writing Tips

All grant applications are evaluated by an individual or a team of readers. The people doing this evaluation have preferred learning styles, but they all appreciate clarity since a clear application invites enthusiasm in the evaluation process. The following are some writing tips to help improve clarity:

**Name the project.** For instance, a grant that sought funding for digitally supported lesson development was named "Project Lesson Builder." This project name should be used to begin many of the sentences in the application.

**Take the position of the grant reader.** Put yourself in the role of the grant reader, not the writer. Too many grant writers choose to tell their story instead of considering what the reader is looking for.

**Write the abstract last from copied text.** Cut and paste appropriate sentences from the text to build the abstract. This will help ensure that the abstract actually reflects sections of the manuscript.

**Avoid personal pronouns.** Use the project's name instead of using "we."

**Use semicolons and numbers for clarity.** Rather than use commas to separate lists, use semicolons and numbers to help part lists for easier reading.

**Use short sentences to clarify.** Edit out long sentences and construct shorter, more high-impact sentences.

**Use white space and graphics in the text for clarity.** A common mistake is to use as much space on the page as possible for content; instead, indent for emphasis. Also, something as simple as placing a reduced graphic in the text often helps a visual reviewer better understand the vision of the project.

**Connect goals with objectives, actions, tools, the budget and the evaluation.** Each goal has objectives; objectives have actions; and these actions require tools. The budget pays for the actions and tools, while the evaluation is organized around the objectives. Be sure to make these connections clear in the text.

**Create action teams, as well as phases or stages to implement the grant.** Any team in a grant is more impressive to a reader if it is called an "action team." Proposals that are constructed to reflect phases or stages make implementation seem more thoughtful and likely to succeed.

**is written to ensure continuity and clarity.** When the online template is used to create the text, the author can review prior segments of the grant text to make sure one section connects with another. Start a new writing session by reviewing what has already been written.

**Group edit the text using a projector and individual laser pointers.** Project the grant's text on a screen or wall, and then give the editing team laser pointers to review the manuscript. Also, assign someone the sole, yet important, task of inputting changes.

A systemic approach to writing grant applications saves time and energy. It also encourages district personnel with specific skills to make contributions to the text without the use of wasteful meetings. Finally, once the grant is funded, everyone will know what the money is for and what the plan is for spending it wisely.

### **Online Grant Template Example**

RFPs have parts, and these parts have expectations. The parts should clearly relate to one another since they are sometimes weighted in the evaluation process. The best way to make sure that all the sections of the application are connected is to write them in one place and constantly review whether or not they meet the expectations of the RFP. Below is an example of an online grant template. If it is possible to post a template like this on a district's Web-based environment, the application will move to a draft stage much quicker. The grant writing can be done directly on this template. In addition, only after the grant application is completed should the guidelines be removed so that the text can be made appealing and easy to read.

**1. Proposal cover page** - Page provided by funding agency.

**2. Proposal abstract** - One page of copy-and-paste sentences from grant sections. Write the abstract last.

**3. Narrative** - How will you use multimedia to enhance student learning using real-world or active learning approaches? Identify two or three real-world examples. Explain how teachers and students will use multimedia. What are the expected results, goals or benchmarks? How will you know that you have

achieved your goals? Whom will data be reported to? What will the process be for delivering the information?

**4. Need** - What is the need for technology at your building? Support this with data. How will the grant address this expressed need?

**5. Write grant text.**

**6. Planning and strategy** - How will you scale up? What professional development strategy will be used? What skills will be achieved? Stakeholder commitment? Parents and community involvement? Integration into building technology and continuous improvement plans? How will the project enhance learner performance?

**7. Write grant text.**

**8. Project action plan** - What forms of multimedia will be used? How will multimedia increase student performance? How will the plan address state proficiency outcomes? How will real-world active learning models and special-needs students be incorporated? How will you integrate collaboration, resource sharing and lesson-learned dissemination?

**9. Write grant text.**

**10. Evaluation plan** - What are the goals, benchmarks, deliverables and indicators of success? What is your evaluation plan? How will you collect data and demonstrate success at enhancing teaching? How will you show the project's impact?

**11. Write grant text.**

**12. Budget page** - Page provided by funding agency.

**13. Budget narrative** - A one-page description of how you intend to use the funding. Include additional resources and plans for sustaining the work after the funding cycle is completed. Use the evaluation plan as a guide.

**14. Write budget narrative text.**

**15. Appendix** - Not to exceed three pages.

**16. Federal assurances** - This is a signature page in most grants. Make sure to use their vocabulary.

**17. District commitments** - This is usually a signature page. Make sure to use their vocabulary.

**18. Signatures** - The signatures will vary, but why not get this signed early so you don't have to worry about the superintendent being out of town.

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A grant writing resource from Telex Communications, including a team-based approach to tackling the four stages of grant writing and a 32-step process for completing the grant, can be found online at [www.telex.com/education/grants](http://www.telex.com/education/grants).