Ten Pitfalls to Avoid in Successful Educational Grant Writing
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The advantages of grants are numerous. Wonderful programs, projects, and products can be initiated and can thrive because of successful grant writing and grant management. Grants can provide huge monetary rewards with just a single proposal, and some rewards can be worth millions of dollars! Grants can be prestigious and can give your organization immediate credibility and exposure to the public.

However, since money is tight, grant writing is a very competitive sport. The quality of your proposal is of the upmost importance. If you do not have time to submit your best work, wait until the next competition to ensure the quality of the proposal. What follows are some common pitfalls that you should avoid in writing your grant.

1. Don't Work in Isolation: If you have an idea for a program, project, or product that you feel will benefit your students or staff, it is essential to build a team before writing the grant. Learn all you can from the other stakeholders. Organize your team, find out the strengths and interests of each team member, and divide the work accordingly.

2. Don't write a grant if your request is not of interest to the funder: Do the initial research carefully, and make sure that your proposal is the type that has been funded previously. Do not send the same grant proposal to lots of donors and assume they will accept it. If a granting agency determines that you have not bothered to read the directions in their specific Request for Proposal (RFP), your proposal will not only be rejected, but it could hurt your chances in the future.

3. Don't assume the grant reviewers will be experts: Not all reviewers with have the same expertise that you have. Avoid jargon, buzzwords, and highly specialized information that can confuse the reviewer(s). Keep your language clear and direct, and always provide simple explanations and examples that even non experts can understand. An easy way to avoid this problem is to find a person, who is not in your field, to review your proposal before submitting it.

4. Don't ignore the grant instructions: Even if you are a subject expert and an eloquent author, it is essential to *follow all the RFP instructions*. Almost all grant proposals are required to adhere to specific rules and conventions. Most RFPs are very specific. They not only outline what is expected in each section, but contain the word limit for each one, and often contain a rubric for how various sections are scored. Some grant writers inadvertently leave out sections or provide incomplete answers. You can avoid these mistakes by carefully reviewing the RFP. Not following directions is a sure way to have your grant rejected right off the bat.

5. Avoid confusion in defining the problem: Your problem statement needs to be well-defined, documented, and understandable. You must be thoroughly aware of the literature on the problem for which you are seeking funding. Speak to its importance and magnitude. You may want to conduct a needs assessment that will yield data to help you shape your proposal.

6. Avoid confusion in stating your objective(s). All grants require specific and measurable objectives in order to be funded. Your objective is the heart of your proposal, and it must be stated precisely with clarity. The donor needs a compelling reason to fund your project right from the beginning. Avoid unfocused aims, unclear goals, or overly ambitious statements. Your objectives should define a well-thought out, measurable solution to your problem statement**.** In order to create measurable objectives you need to do careful research.

7. Avoid spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors: No matter what your time constraints are, it is essential that your proposal is free of errors. You can lose credibility if your proposal is not carefully edited. Also make sure that there are no inconsistencies or redundant information. If different sections of the grant call for seemingly repetitive information, reread the directions carefully to see if there is a different twist. You can also point the reviewer to a different section to avoid redundancies.

8. Avoid padding your proposal with poorly researched data: You need to convince the reviewers with well documented facts and statistics. If your proposal contains inaccurate, false, or irrelevant, or outdated information you will lose credibility and will assure rejection.

9. Avoid an unsubstantiated budget: Budgets are a problem for many grant writers and researchers. To develop a fully substantiated budget, you need to make sure that the funding you receive helps you meet your measurable objectives in the timeline you have indicated. Do the research. Make sure the pricing for personnel, equipment, and supplies are accurate. You will need to justify each expense. You can look up Office of Sponsored Research for more information on budgeting.

10. Avoid ambiguity when it comes to staff responsibilities: All RFPs require information on key personnel and their specific responsibilities. Unless otherwise directed by the RFP, clear and concise explanations of the responsibilities of each of the key personnel, as well as their respective time commitments should be included in the body of your proposal.

Harriet Isecke is a successful grant writer. As the former Curriculum Director of the Hackensack Public School system she wrote and managed millions of dollars in grant funding from government agencies. Her company, *Readorium*, was funded by three Small Business Innovative Research Grants from the US Department of Education.