

GRANT WRITING TIPS - NEVADA ARTS COUNCIL

Consider the following principles when preparing your proposal and writing your grant application.

PREPARATION

1. **Develop a timeline.** Do it backwards from the grant application postmark deadline and allow yourself enough time to think through the project, and then draft, revise and edit your proposal.
2. **Think about what you can realistically achieve during the grant period.**
3. **Read the grant guidelines thoroughly.** Take the guidelines literally and follow the directions.
4. **Call the appropriate program coordinator if you have questions and to discuss project eligibility.** Make sure that your organization/project fits within funding guidelines. Ask to view examples of successful applications. Do not wait until the last minute.
5. **Review panel comments from the previous year if applicable.** These comments can provide valuable insight into what a panel did or did not understand about your proposal. This can also help you strengthen your current proposal.
6. **Have your application reviewed by appropriate members or committee(s) of your board.**

PROPOSAL (NARRATIVE) DEVELOPMENT - TELLING THE STORY

The proposal or narrative is the heart of any grant application. It should reflect an obvious connection to an organization's mission and goals. Comments made by panelists at previous grant reviews can be of assistance in developing and then reviewing your grant proposal.

- Panelists continue to note a lack of clear evaluation methods and benchmarks used by applicants to evaluate programs and connect them to goals.
- Panelists recommend active versus passive outreach programming, and sometimes question the authenticity of some outreach services described by applicants. How do you identify populations for your outreach services, and/or determine what your capacity is for delivering quality outreach services as outlined in your application? How do you develop appropriate and dynamic interactions with new audiences?
- Proposals often overlook connecting organizational mission and programming goals. If your mission states that you support multicultural programming, then your programming should reflect it and your application should include your definition of multicultural programming.
- Include demographics and statistics to clarify those in your community that you actually serve, or plan to include - not just the numbers found on the Census Report!
- Many applications don't reflect an understanding of the difference between organizational history and organizational planning. Every organization has a history and a story; every organization and project needs a plan.

1. **Draft your application narrative.** A good narrative is like a good story and flows and builds from one section to the next. The application should clearly make a case for your grant request.
2. **A grant proposal is not an emotional appeal.** Typically panelists are professional grant makers themselves. Present evidence that supports your statements.

3. Make it easy for someone who may not be an expert in your particular field to read your entire proposal and understand what you are saying.

- Do not use jargon (words that only people in a specialized field will understand) or hyperbole (extravagant exaggeration or making a point by overstating it).
- Write in an active voice and maintain a positive tone, even when addressing issues of financial, managerial or programmatic problems.
- Do not assume anything.

4. Remember that panelists are reading many applications. Assist them and yourself by keeping your proposal focused on the main points.

- Do not make the reader hunt for information.
- Your narrative should describe your organization, program and/or project. Do not depend on support materials to fill in the picture.
- Understand the importance of the delicate balance between being succinct and sacrificing important points to achieve brevity in your writing.
- Answer all the questions clearly.

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

The projected budget is key to any grant application. Consider the budget a restatement of your proposal, but this time using the language of dollars. It is imperative that the budget supports the goals of your narrative. Make the best estimation of the expenses and income you anticipate.

1. Estimate expenses, obtaining cost estimates as necessary.

2. Estimate donated goods and service (in-kind) that will be used. In-kind is considered a very important indicator of community involvement.

3. Estimate anticipated revenues for the project.

4. Check to be sure that the budget as a whole makes sense and conveys the right message to the grant panelists.

5. Remember that the budget should not raise any red flags. Review the budget through the eyes of the individuals who will be reading your proposal.

- What might not be clear to you?
- Where would more budget explanation be helpful?
- Can you accomplish the intended proposal with the proposed budget?
- Is the budget consistent with the proposal's program plan and methods?

6. Check your math.

SUPPLEMENTAL/ SUPPORTING MATERIALS

The quality of your support material enhances the professionalism of your grant application. Read the guidelines carefully and submit exactly what supplemental and supporting materials have been requested.

And remember:

1. Less can be more. A positive critical review is more valuable than a press release from your own
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organization. One specific letter of support from the right person is worth ten that read like form letters.

2. **Make sure that everything crucial to your application is in the text or narrative of the proposal.** Supplemental materials enhance assertions in your narrative. If you write that you are collaborating with the school district, enclose a letter from the Superintendent for verification. If you said you have completed an Economic Impact in the Arts study, include the Executive Summary.
3. **Show the reviewers your work and your vision through well-produced CDs or DVDs.** Cue your CD/DVDs to the best possible moment - hit them hard from the very beginning, not with introductory remarks, dead space, audience coughing or applause.
4. **Your support materials should be clearly labeled and well organized.**
5. **You should not submit more than is asked for in the grant guidelines.**
6. **Your work samples should be of the highest quality you can attain.**

FINAL THOUGHTS

1. **Make your narrative reader-friendly.** Remember staff, NAC board members and panelists read hundreds of pages during application review.
2. **Remember that a grant application is not a marketing or publicity document.**
3. **Ask for feedback.** Have someone who is not intimately involved in the design of your project critically review your narrative. This feedback can help you understand where your narrative can be strengthened for the final application.
 - Was the need clear?
 - Did the proposed methods and objectives seem like the appropriate response to the need?
 - Does the budget make sense?
4. **Always keep a copy of your grant application and all pertinent documents and correspondence.**