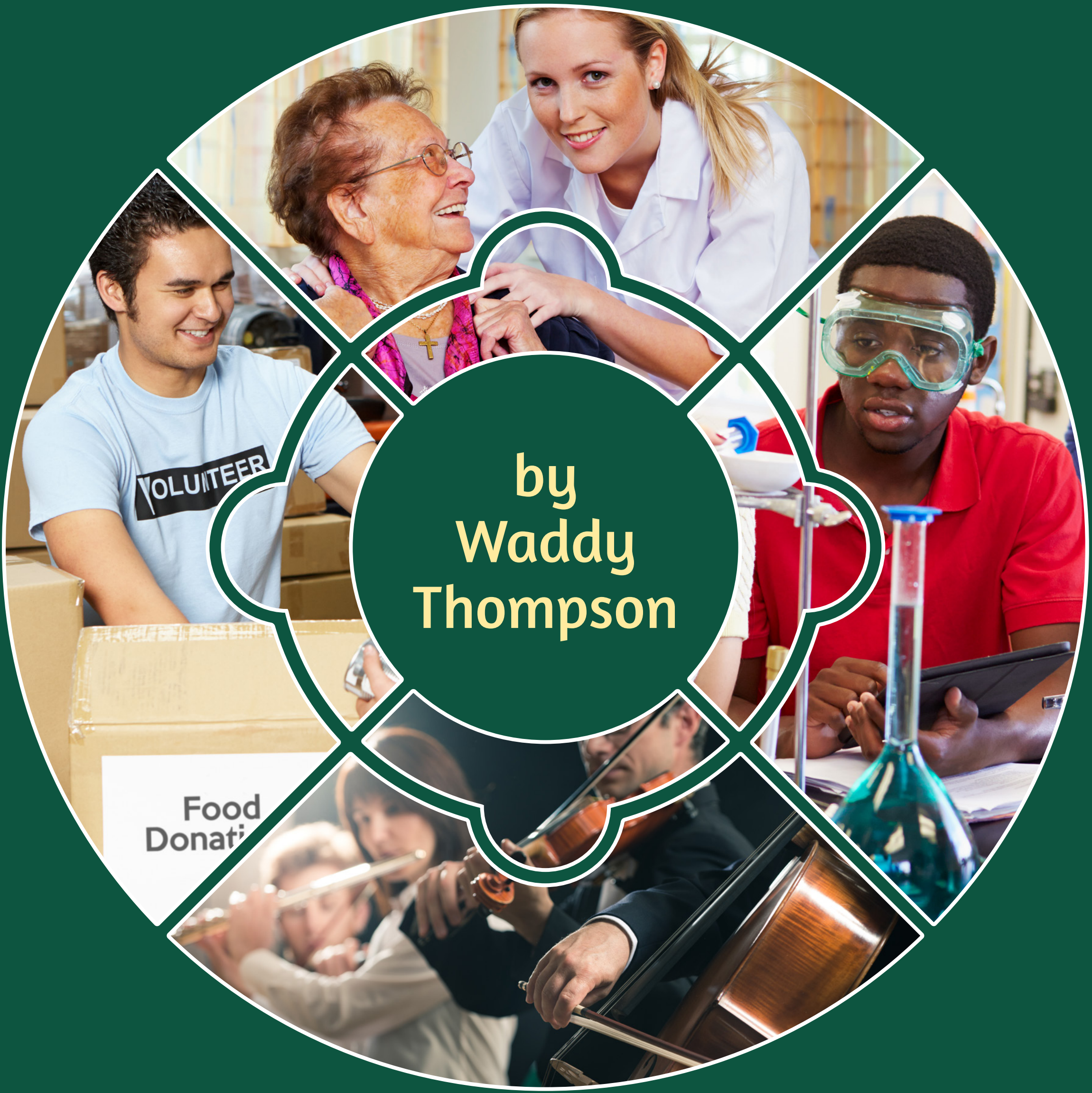
THE WISE GUIDE TO WINNING GRANTS



by
Waddy
Thompson

How to Find Funders and Write Winning Proposals

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CHAPTER 1

The Practice of Grant Writing

In This Chapter

- Grant writing defined
- Why grant writing is right for you
- How the economy affects grants
- What it means to be a grant writer
- Time line for success

Grant writing is one of those topics that seems very technical and esoteric, yet you probably already know more about it than you think you do. But before I go any further, let's be clear about just what grant writing is and isn't.

Grant writing is the skill or practice of asking for money in the form of a grant from a foundation, corporation, or government agency by crafting a well-considered document (the proposal) that outlines how the money will be used, what receiving the money will accomplish, and who will undertake the tasks described in the proposal.

Grant writing is not about writing a group of friends to get each of them to give $25 for the local library. (That sort of fundraising is called direct mail or unsolicited third-class mail, but never junk mail if you are in the business of raising money.)

Grant writing is about creating a proposal, which you can send to local corporations or foundations asking for several thousand dollars for the local library. On occasion, proposals will be written to individuals when a four- to seven-figure gift is being sought, and I cover that in this book, too. But for the most part, you'll be concerned with getting largish sums of money from some kind of institution or another. Grant writing is an important part of any fundraising program, which would likely also include at least direct mail, major gifts, and special events.

I start off with what I think you already know and finish this chapter with the key things you need to know about the practice of grant writing. Then I show you how to pursue the technical aspects in the remaining chapters of the book.

You Already Are a Grant Writer!

If you're anything like me, when you were in college or away at summer camp, you found it easiest to remember to contact home just when your wallet was getting a little thin. Believe it or not, that was your first grant-writing experience. (I hope you were successful!)

Asking for money is never easy, but anyone can acquire the skills to ask like a professional fundraiser. This book tells you how to do that, but like so many important life lessons, you'll find you learned the basics much earlier in life. In case your memory is fuzzy on what those emails home were like, I've included a "Dear Mom and Dad" email to refresh your memory.

> ***Dear Mom and Dad,***
>
> ***Thanks so much for the check you sent a couple of weeks ago. It really came just in the nick of time so I could get all the books for the new semester.***
>
> ***College is great! You probably saw the basketball game on TV last weekend. It was really something to actually be there. The college has a terrific series of concerts in the Coliseum, too, with first-class bands.***
>
> ***There are so many things to do and see, but recently I have not been able to do and see as many things as my friends because I've been running low on funds. If you could send me an extra $100 to tide me over to the end of the month, that would really be great!***
>
> ***It's not that I expect to go out every night. Most of my time is still spent studying, especially for Psych 101, which is really tough, but I think it is the subject I like the best. Reading the case studies has really brought home to me what great parents you are.***
>
> ***When do you think you'll come up for a visit? Hope it's soon, and if you could help me out with a check really soon, I'd really appreciate it.***
>
> ***Love,***
>
> ***Jack***

Like Writing Mom and Dad

You can learn many things from that "Dear Mom and Dad" email that will serve you well as a grant writer. Let's take a closer look at it to see some of the points of similarity.

Because Jack's email home was not the first time he had ever asked for money, he was seeking a renewal grant. So Jack naturally started out telling his parents how he had used the last money they sent. And note that his very first word was "Thanks"—the magic word that can open so many doors. It's so important to always acknowledge past support. No one—not a parent or a funder—ever wants to be taken for granted.

Jack follows his opening by telling his parents what has been happening at school to make them feel involved and current. Every funder will want to know what significant things are happening in your organization right now, whether they're related to the specific grant or not.

Eventually Jack had to actually ask for money, which to be convincing, had to include some ideas on how he'd spend this new money. Jack's pretty vague on this, so he must be looking for general operating support rather than funds for a specific project.

Note that he does at least ask for a specific amount. People like to know what you expect of them, so always be specific in your grant proposals—don't make them guess how much the new bus will cost or how much it takes to build a website. And don't ask a funder for too much or too little. Your best guide to how much to ask for is how much the funder has given to organizations similar to yours. Check the funder's annual report or IRS return for lists of grants.

Usually, when seeking general operating support, you would make a point of covering a wide range of issues your charity addresses. Jack can assume his parents have an intimate acquaintance with his general operating needs, so he doesn't have to go into detail here.

Jack knows to end on a high note, staying positive and connecting emotionally with his parents one last time to remind them why they really want to write him that check. He isn't shy about pushing his parent's emotional buttons. (Who knows best where they are; he probably "installed" some of them!)

Jack's big advantage over you or me in writing a grant proposal is that he wrote based on a relationship built up over nearly two decades. The prospects were knowledgeable about the cause to which they were being asked to contribute. And because of the long relationship, they were predisposed to responding positively to his request.

So how do you create a level of knowledge and (hopefully) a predisposition to a positive response? In the fundraising business it's called cultivation, through which you develop the prospect over a period of time so the proposal arrives on the desk of someone who is well informed about your organization (if not necessarily about your project). "Cultivation before solicitation" is one of my favorite sayings, and one everyone who works for me is tired of hearing. You don't have to hear too much more on the subject from me until Chapter 10.

Now let's use Jack's email as a guide to write a simple—very simple—grant proposal:

> ***Ms. Betty Smith***
> ***Executive Director***

Small Town Foundation
123 Main Street
Anywhere, IL 60000

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you again for Small Town Foundation's generous $15,000 gift to support our after-school activities last year. It was much appreciated by our staff, board of directors, and all those we serve.

Since we received your gift, 75 additional children have become regular participants in the activities offered at our center. You might have seen the short write-up that appeared in the local paper about us. Although this recognition was important, the looks in the eyes of our children are the true rewards.

We are writing now to ask that you renew your $15,000 gift this year. Your funds will be used to further expand the number of children we can accommodate each day by making it possible to retain an additional teacher's aide.

I would love to arrange a visit so you can see firsthand what your gift can accomplish. Please give me a call at 312-555-1212 or e-mail me at execdir@all4youth.org, and I'm sure we can find a time to meet. Your kind consideration of this proposal is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mary Stuart
Executive Director

That's a much simpler proposal than you'll ever write, but you get the point. Grant writing is no big mystery. It doesn't require a Ph.D., but you do need to know how to put the parts together, avoid amateurish pitfalls, and convince others of the importance of what you're writing about.

If you were good at writing please-send-money emails home from college, you're going to be a great grant writer. And if you lived at home and never wrote one of these emails, well, congratulations! You probably have experience in face-to-face solicitation, which is also a good skill in fundraising.

You say you never needed money from your parents? Well, maybe you'll soon be the one making grants to your own kids. But whatever your experience, this book will take you from simple show-me-the-money letters to fully developed grant proposals.

Why Grant Writing Is the Answer

No one grows up wanting to be a grant writer (or any kind of fundraiser, for that matter). Most of us fall into it out of necessity, either as part of our jobs or because we want to raise some significant money for a cause we believe in.

You might want to write a grant proposal, for example, if...

- You can't face one more bake sale for the soccer team.
- You see your local seniors' center needs a big infusion of cash to keep a program going.
- The local library's new book budget has been slashed by the city, and a group of neighbors want to help out.
- You're on the board of a new nonprofit group that can't yet afford professional development staff.
- You're raising funds for your own arts project.

Whatever your motivation for wanting to be a grant writer, you'll want to produce a professional proposal that will withstand the scrutiny of foundation staff *and get funded!*

Despite the proliferation of new foundations in the last two decades, there are still far more organizations and individuals seeking grants than there are organizations and individuals making grants. In fact, nonprofits outnumber grantmaking foundations by about 20 to 1. Many well-known organizations have large, well-paid development staffs vying for this money, but that doesn't mean you won't be successful. Fortunately, there are foundations and other grantmakers for every size organization and every conceivable cause. Private foundations in the United States alone give away as much as $58 billion annually.

In this book, I cover everything you need to know to write a successful grant proposal. You'll learn how to research prospects, cultivate relationships within and outside your charity, develop a complete proposal in several common formats, create a budget that also tells a story, and end up with a proposal that will stand out from a foundation's slush pile.

The Stock Market and Grants

Everyone whom you might approach for a grant lives in the same economic world as you and I. This means that when times are good and the stock market is riding high, foundations have more money to give away, corporations have greater profits from which to support charities, and governments are flush with taxes. Obviously, the opposite is true when times are hard.

If your charity receives a large percentage of its income from foundations and corporations, economic downturns will dramatically affect your funding. Individuals tend to give more to the causes they most believe in during tough times, but they might drop charities in which they have less interest. Government funders generally are affected a bit later, when tax income falls. All this, of course, is a good argument for not relying too heavily on one source of funding.

Foundations are required by law to spend 5 percent of their assets each year on grants and related expenses. Few rarely give more than that. After the national tragedy of September 11, 2001, occurred, many foundations dipped into their principle to make large emergency grants—that is, they gave away more than they earned on their investments in 2001, but that was an exceptional time in every regard.

A grant writer should always be aware of how the economy might be affecting those she is soliciting. In lean times, foundations tend to take on fewer new grantees, preferring to maintain their commitments to their current charities. When times are tough, one of the first things corporations eliminate is corporate giving. And because many corporate foundations are funded year by year, there's not even an endowment to fall back on. Government funding can be particularly capricious, being affected by the political agendas of those in power as well as by the economy. In 2010, states sharply reduced or eliminated support for many sectors, including social services that were already struggling to meet basic human needs.

In a slow economy, the grant writer's job becomes much more difficult. The grant writer must spend more time getting current funders to renew grants rather than sending out lots of new proposals. Just remember, though, that foundations still have to give money to someone, so it might as well be you.

The Complete Grant Writer

A grant writer is someone who is able to craft elegant, clear, concise sentences that can convey passion as well as detailed information. Often you'll be called upon to describe technical facts (for example, in a grant for a new computer network) or concepts and procedures about which you know nothing (as in a scientific proposal) or abstract concepts that lie well outside your daily life (as in a research proposal).

A good grant writer learns enough about the subject to write intelligently and make the subject comprehensible to others who have no background in the subject. The grant writer also reflects the passion and enthusiasm of the people who run the project or program to get whoever reads the proposal equally excited about the project. Don't be shy about asking program staff about their program—they'll probably be thrilled to know someone is interested in what they do.

A Diplomat

A grant writer must be a diplomat who helps the people running programs get their ideas into shape. Many people who run programs are so close to the program they can't see how to explain it clearly to someone unfamiliar with the project or organization—and many simply are just not good writers.

The grant writer takes the words from the program staff and states their ideas in plain English, without making the program staff feel belittled. The grant writer must often also be an advocate with senior staff and board members.

A Financier

A grant writer is a financially savvy person who can make numbers speak as clearly as words. Numbers can tell any story you want them to tell. Your budget should reflect the project's narrative description and include enough detail to be convincing, but not so much as to restrict the execution of the program.

Crunching the numbers and presenting the numbers are very different talents. The grant writer needs to do both, but more of the latter.

A Nosy Parker

A grant writer is also full of curiosity, willing to go to any length to ferret out information about funders to find the right match for his organization.

A grant writer is interested in people—those for whom he is trying to raise money, as well as those from whom he hopes to get the money.

A Passionate Advocate

But mostly, a grant writer needs passion for the cause at the heart of the proposal. After all, if you don't care deeply about your project, why should the funder?

Although grant writing might sound like a solitary activity, in the course of preparing a grant proposal, you actually interact with a wide range of people, including program and executive staff at your charity, members of your board of directors, and staff at foundations and corporations. On the other hand, it's something you can do on a part-time basis working from home.

Grant writing can be quite a lucrative profession. The positions at different charities go by a variety of names, including grants officer, institutional giving manager, foundation/corporation/government affairs manager, director of development for institutional giving, and many others.

Salaries for grant writers vary widely, according to the type of charity and the size of its budget. Generally, fundraisers at hospitals and universities make the highest salaries; social services charities tend to pay the least, with the arts somewhere in between. Expect to make from $30,000 with a small organization away from a major metropolitan area to $100,000 for writing grants and supervising others at a major institution.

If you're considering doing grant writing as a consultant, be aware that, in many states, all fundraising consultants must register with the state attorney general. In some cases, you must also register with the state in which any funder you approach is located.

If you're hiring a consultant to help with grant writing, check with your state's attorney general's office to see if registration is required, and be sure your consultant has the necessary registration (if any).

One final note on consultants: professional fundraising consultants work for a flat fee, never a percentage of what they raise. (You can learn more about being a consultant in Chapters 23 and 24.)

A Week-by-Week Guide

It's important to allow yourself enough time to prepare your grant proposal, especially your first one. The great unknown in preparing a grant is how long the internal review at your charity will take. If your executive director is a real stickler who lives to edit someone else's prose, allow additional time for review.

The following time line assumes you've spent at least several months cultivating a range of prospects so that when the right project came along, they were already primed and ready to receive your proposal.

> *Week 1:* Most proposals you write will be for specific projects, so you'll have to get to know the ins and outs of the project before you can do anything. Allow at least a week to get information from others and digest it. You'll have time during the inevitable rewrites to continue learning and digesting.
>
> *Weeks 2 and 3:* Conduct research to find the best funder matches for the project, and write or call for guidelines (if not available on the Internet). This is the most crucial stage in the proposal process. If you haven't done *all* your homework, you won't stand a chance at success.
>
> *Week 4:* Complete research, checking to see if anyone connected with your organization knows anyone connected with the funder, and review information received from funders.
>
> *Weeks 5 and 6:* Write the proposal, and share it with program staff and others. Make revisions and more revisions.

Week 7: Make final edits, contact the funder when appropriate, and mail the proposal or complete the online form well in advance of the funder's deadline.

Week 8: Relax and wait.

Week 9: Make a follow-up call to see if the application was received.

Weeks 10 through 25 or longer: Patiently wait for news from the funder.

Weeks 12 through 52: The check arrives! General rejoicing!

As you can see, grant writing involves a lot more than just writing, but that's what makes it interesting and challenging for those of us who do it. I love learning about the new projects I raise money for, and it's so gratifying when a grant is successful and you know it was you who helped buy the books for the library, provided daycare for more kids, or helped people learn to read.

Note: If you need money in less than 3 months, you're better off approaching an individual. Institutions move slowly.

But what makes you eligible for a grant, and what's a reasonable grant request? You'll find out in Chapter 2.

Important Points to Remember

- Asking Mom and Dad for money and approaching a foundation aren't all that different.
- Grant writing can produce substantial sums.
- Grant monies for charities decline in a down economy—just like everything else—and rise when times are good.
- The grant writer's best friends are knowledge and passion.
- A good grant writer possesses diplomatic skills, financial acumen, curiosity, and passion.
- From concept to grant check can take 6 months to a year—or longer.

CHAPTER 13

The Parts of a Grant Proposal

In This Chapter

- Making a convincing argument for support
- What goes into a program description
- Addressing your proposal to the right audience

When you use the word *proposal,* the program (or project) description is probably what comes to mind. It's the heart and soul of your proposal—the place where you go into all the details about the program's execution as well as its underlying philosophy. Although the pitch you make in the cover letter (see Chapter 16) might more obviously be written to sell your program, don't forget that the program description must reinforce everything you put in the cover letter, continuing to sell the funder on the program and your charity's ability to perform it.

To write a program description that sells, you have to keep in mind what the funder wants to support and balance that against what your charity plans to do. You have to preserve both perspectives through the numerous stages in editing. I show you how to do that, as well as explain the many elements that go into a proposal, in this chapter.

Making the Case for Support

If you want a funder to support your project or organization with a grant, you have to present a convincing argument to bring them to that conclusion. This is known as making the *case for support.* Each element that makes up the project description helps make the case for support.

A good case for support immediately captures the reader's imagination, usually with a bold statement of purpose or a surprising fact the reader might not know. It goes on to describe the problem you plan to solve and how your charity will work to solve it. It must also convey a feeling of urgency to make the reader want to give you the grant *right now.* The case for support is the essential part of any funding request. It engages the reader, explains why the project or organization needs and is worthy of support, and demonstrates the urgency with which funding is needed.

Good cases for support bear a strong relationship to other types of persuasive writing. In their book *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die,* Chip Heath and Dan Heath sum up their guide to successful writing with the mnemonic "SUCCES," which stands for "simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and stories." That's the best summary of how to create good fundraising copy I've ever seen. As you read on, think about how each part of the case for support fulfills one or more aspects of their principle.

Here are the essential parts of the proposal (or case for support):

Purpose of the program. Stated simply, what will the project accomplish?

Why you are doing this project. Why is the program needed? Does any other organization have a similar program? If so, how does what you will do differ? How does your program fit with your charity's mission?

How you will make it happen. What resources (personnel, technical, facility, financial) are needed to carry out the program? What are the steps you'll take to prepare for and to execute the program?

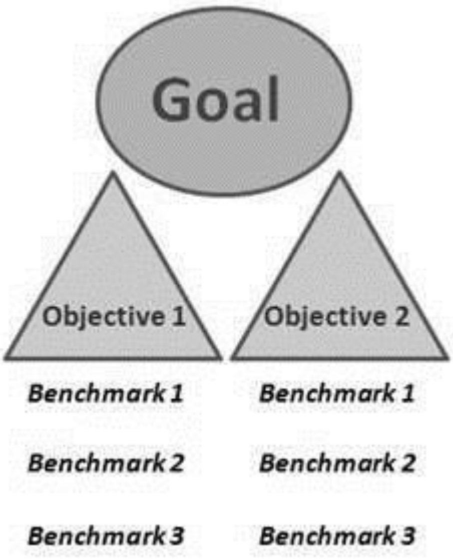
Who will do what. Who will run the program? What staff will be involved, and how much time will each person devote to this project? Will you use consultants? A combination of staff, consultants, and volunteers? What will the roles of each be?

Who will benefit. How many people will the program serve, and who are they? Why is it important to serve these people? Can you illustrate the effects of your program with a story about one of your clients or constituents? This is one of the most important parts of any proposal!

How you will know you've done well. What results do you expect from the program? How will you evaluate the program? What are its *goals* and *objectives?* Goals and objectives are often spoken about as if they are the same thing, but they're actually quite different. Goals represent the ultimate achievement of your program or organization; it might well be unreachable. Objectives are the measurable steps you need to take to get there. You usually will have several objectives to reach to achieve the goal. Likewise, there will be a number of benchmarks you must achieve to complete each objective. Goals are broad and about the outcome. Objectives are narrow and about the process.

For example, the ultimate goal of the United Nations might be thought of as world peace. Its objectives would embrace universal education and health care and elimination of nuclear armaments. The benchmarks to be achieved would include resolving specific disputes around the world and improving agriculture in different countries.

The chart below shows how these important terms relate to one another.



Summing it all up. Can you sum up the proposal into two or three sentences to leave the funder with a simple picture they can readily remember? People tend to skip to the end of documents. Can you use a surprising example here to stick in the reader's memory?

The ability to weave together the answers to these questions into a seamless, readable narrative represents the grant writer's primary skill. In large organizations, different people conduct research, and still others prepare the budgets, but writing the project description remains the province of the grant writer.

The order you present the necessary information can vary, especially if a funder specifies some other order. Always follow the funder's instructions to the letter.

You can use this list of elements as a questionnaire to gather information from the people running the program. You'll probably go back to them several times in the process for more information or clarifications. Be sure to let someone directly involved in carrying out the program read your proposal before you submit it to be sure nothing got lost in the translation.

Now let's look at each part to delve more deeply into what makes a successful grant proposal.

Purpose of the Program

So what is the purpose of your program? You might be able to answer that question in one or two words: alleviate hunger; purchase library books; vaccinate children; find a cure; make a film. Unfortunately, you can't stop there. The funder knows that any number of organizations have programs that work toward the same purpose, so you must show why *your* charity should receive a grant to pursue this goal.

A strong, even bold, statement of purpose at the beginning of a proposal can grab the reader's attention and set an ambitious tone for the rest of the proposal. For example:

> ***Community Food Bank will provide two meals daily to 100 homeless people, none of whom are now reached by any other agency.***
>
> ***Nonprofit managers attending the Managing Your Board workshops will come away with the knowledge and skills to transform their relationships with their boards, resulting in more productive nonprofits throughout the city.***
>
> ***People living in refugee camps will receive high school and college educations that will allow them to find work in the local economy, which is often the only way out of these camps.***

Note that in each of these examples, I used the helper verb *will* instead of *would*. *Will* makes a more positive statement, implying that the project will go forward no matter what. *Would* is weaker, implying that the project is not only conditional on this grant coming through but perhaps on other factors as well.

Beginning grant writers often hesitate to make bold, sweeping statements, having been taught in English classes to avoid generalizations and not to make any unsubstantiated statements. Sweeping statements are a means of getting the reader's attention, and although you need to support your assertions somewhere in the proposal, the substantiation doesn't necessarily have to immediately follow your bold declaration.

You should always create a one-sentence summary that describes the project's essence in a way that makes a strong case for funding. And it should be a *really* good sentence! If you can't do that, you don't understand the project well enough to write the proposal. Review your notes and talk again with people involved in the program until you can write one dynamite sentence.

A good accompaniment for your bold statement (and possibly preceding it) is a dramatic and surprising statistic related to your project, such as:

- 2,800 adults and 1,200 children in our city go to sleep hungry every night.
- 98 percent of nonprofit executives identify working productively with their boards as one of their top three issues.
- The 400 children living in our city's largest homeless shelter have no access to after-school activities.

Why You Are Doing This Project

One of the critical points you have to make concerns the *need* for your program. The funder wants to know you have a thorough knowledge of the issue you seek to address and how what you propose to do fits in with what others are doing or have done. Is your approach different or complementary? Why is it needed? In what way will the program aid the program's clients? What would they do if your program didn't exist?

“Need” is one of those nonprofit words that gets bandied about in many guises. Every project must fulfill some need, but every grant award is not "need based." Need-based grants use the need of the applicant as the primary or sole criteria in deciding on the award. Disaster relief grants are an example. Your proposals will mostly be for merit-based awards. You'll not only have to demonstrate your clients' needs, but also why your charity merits the award.

The need for the program should resonate with your charity's mission. Just because you're a good organization and the community has a need doesn't mean your charity is the best one to address that need. Explain how this program fits in with everything else you do.

Proposals that are too inward looking—that is, concentrated too much on what your charity needs—are doomed to failure in most cases. Proposals that focus on clients' needs—the people you will help—stand a much better chance of success. *Remember: funders make grants to solve a problem other than helping you make your budget goal.*

Never trash the competition in your proposal. Today's competitor is tomorrow's panelist deciding the fate of your grant proposal. It's also not polite or necessary. That's not to say you shouldn't contrast your approach to that of other organizations, but you should do so in a way that offends no one. For example, you'll say...

> ***The Community Food Bank will provide meals to 100 people daily who are now being missed by other social service providers.***

or

> ***The Community Food Bank will provide meals to 100 people daily who are unable to get transportation to food services offered by other social service providers.***

Either version is much more positive than "The Community Food Bank will provide meals to 100 people daily who Food for People does not reach because of its unwillingness to look outside its immediate neighborhood."

You can make your need statement stronger by including in your proposal statements from neutral third parties that express or reinforce the need you seek to address. These could be stories in the press or studies groups other than your charity have done, including studies commissioned by funders. This not only gives greater credence to your cause, it also shows that your charity sees itself as part of the larger issue and that it keeps abreast of the latest thought on a subject. Here are a couple of examples:

> ***The Daily Times reported that Mayor Thomas stated in his speech to the Rotary Club last week that "hunger remains one of the city's most pressing problems, especially among the transient population that lives on the fringes of the industrial area." Community Food Bank agrees, which is why we approach the distribution of meals through a mobile facility rather than depending on our main office to handle all clients.***
>
> ***Social Think Tank, Inc., in its report issued last month, drew attention to the difficulty that traditional place-based food banks have in reaching the most needy populations, which tend to exist outside central urban areas where most of these agencies are located. Community Food Bank agrees, which is why....***

Testimonials to your charity's ability to carry out a project will also strengthen your case for support. We look at how to do that in detail in Chapter 17.

How You Will Make It Happen

You have to give the funder a concrete description of how the program will work. Be as specific as possible without putting too many limitations on your program staff. Will you meet with each client five times? How many hot lunches will you distribute? What are the steps your literacy program follows to involve adults and children? Let's look at a couple short examples:

> ***The Managing Your Board workshop series will consist of four weekly sessions, each lasting two hours. Workshops will begin with a lecture by an expert in board and executive director issues followed by a question-and-answer period. During the final half hour of each session, participants will break down into groups of 10 or fewer to discuss what they have learned in practical terms that relate to their organizations. The themes of the workshops will be Avoiding Micromanagement, Helping a Board Fundraise, Making the Executive Director's Performance Review Work for You, and Building the Board You Need.***
>
> ***The Music for Kids program will provide musical instruction to young people living in the city's largest homeless shelter. Transportation will be provided to our partner's recreational facility after school 2 days each week. The emphasis will be on rhythm and simple songs, rather than trying to teach them how to read music. This remains a transient population requiring short-term goals each of the young people can meet. Most of the 90-minute sessions will be devoted to working all together, but there will be time each day for more personalized attention from the teaching assistants.***

Note that both paragraphs briefly describe the format of the sessions, give information on the content, and give the time participants will be involved in the programs. A real proposal would go into additional detail. You might also want to include a month-by-month time line to show how the different steps in a program will come together.

When deciding how technical you can be in your proposal, take into consideration who will be reading it. You want to give details and examples the reader will understand. In general, proposals reviewed by peer panels can include more technical language than ones that will be seen only by foundation trustees who may or may not possess technical knowledge related to your proposal.

Also take into consideration other grantees of the funder and any other nonprofit connections the funder's trustees might have and how your proposal might affect them. An online service for which I was raising funds, on face value, might have appeared to compete with services offered by other grantees of a particular funder. I was careful in the cover letter and the proposal to describe in detail how our new service would drive people to the websites of the other grantees rather than taking clients away from them.

Do not mention anyone or any organization as participating in your program without clearing it with them first. This is especially true if a peer panel will evaluate your proposal. When writing your proposal, keep in mind who those people might be. If your proposal calls for working with other organizations (or even just using their mailing lists), give examples that include some of the potential panelists if possible. Be especially sure you don't criticize any other organization.

Who Will Do What?

The funder will also want to know who will carry out the program. Will your staff do everything, or will you use outside consultants? It's critical that the staffing described in this section exactly matches the staffing detailed in your program budget. You needn't get too specific, but give them an idea of where the responsibilities will lie.

You want to build in the reasoning for participation by staff members at various levels. Will the executive director be involved in program development or execution in any way? If so, you can allocate a small part of his salary to this project. (After you've done that for enough programs, you've gotten your boss's salary paid for through restricted grants!)

The staffing sections of the two programs described previously might read like this:

> ***The director of programs will select the consultants who will lead the workshops in consultation with other members of the program staff and from referrals from colleagues at other service organizations. Program staff will manage the enrollment of the workshop sessions and be present at each workshop to assist with the***

> ***breakout groups. One consultant will lead each of the first three workshops, with two consultants jointly leading the final session.***
>
> ***Our education staff will provide the musical instruction throughout the program. They will be supervised by the director of programming and the director of education; both will assist in creating the lesson plans and review progress with the instructors weekly. We will be paying a fee to our partner organization for the use of their bus and bus driver. We will also pay the custodial staff at the partner facility from program funds.***

Use the names of staff or consultants when they're well known or are included in a "key staff" attachment. Otherwise, you're just as well off using more general descriptions like "program staff" or "clinicians" to allow greater flexibility in the program's execution and still make it clear to the reader who is doing what.

Who Will Benefit

Who will benefit from the program is, of course, *the* important part of a program description. Foundations and other funders seek to solve some social problem, whether it's hunger, literacy, access to the arts, or helping nonprofits work better. In submitting a proposal, you are volunteering to help them solve one of their problems. Focusing on the needs of the ultimate beneficiaries of the program (rather than on your charity) will resonate more strongly with the funder's "problems."

Emotional stories about the people your project serves enrich this section. Even a short anecdote gives your proposal a human dimension the reader can respond to compassionately.

This section must also include some cold, hard facts about how many people you will serve and how well you will serve them. To corporate and some other funders, the numbers make a huge difference in judging the worthiness of your proposal. Giving exact numbers before the program even begins is impossible, but you can give ranges.

You might feel you need to inflate the number of people who will be served to make the funder feel like it will be getting its money's worth. Don't! Those numbers will come back to haunt you when it's time to report on your results. But don't give numbers that are too low either, or funders might think the program isn't cost effective.

Funders realize that different kinds of projects are more efficient than others and that efficiency is not the sole judge of worthiness. A website might cost $50,000 to make and reach 250,000 people or 20 cents per person, whereas a workshop series might cost $50,000 and serve 100 people or $500 per person, but in a much more direct and personal way. The value of the program is not just in the math—it's in the ability of your charity to deliver a program that accomplishes its goals and serves a worthy purpose.

How You Will Know You've Done Well

Program evaluation should be an integral part of everything your charity does. How else will you be able show others that you have done the job well, if people benefit enough to justify the expense, and if the program should continue? A lot of charities coast along with only anecdotal evidence of program success. These charities eventually get an unwelcome surprise when a funder starts asking hard questions.

Lack of a current outside evaluation has prevented me more than once from approaching foundations that insist on a third-party analysis of a program. One of these foundations seldom makes grants less than $50,000, so it's easy to see how a $20,000 professional evaluation would pay for itself in short order.

Don't let your charity be one of those getting caught short. Talk to program staff about evaluating their programs at various stages. Evaluations can be as simple as a survey given to each participant or as complicated as a multi-month study by an outside evaluator. Find the appropriate solution that best suits your program (and fundraising) needs.

Funders won't judge your program solely on the numbers—the ability of your charity to deliver a program that accomplishes its goals and serves a worthy purpose is much more important. But do supply whatever *realistic* numbers you can to provide an idea of the scope of your program.

Just as your program evaluation needs to be carefully considered, so does the way you describe it in the proposal. Don't say you'll use an outside evaluator (which is usually expensive) unless you know your charity will do it.

Don't try to hide the lack of evaluative procedures by giving some vague statement of your charity's belief in evaluation like "Our charity follows a rigorous evaluative process to assess the efficacy of all programs through surveys, interviews with participants, focus groups, and independent evaluators." That's all well and good, but how will you evaluate *this* program? A sound evaluation provides excellent material for all future proposals.

Nothing in the project description should deviate from the sole purpose of generating interest and enthusiasm for the project. Don't get sidetracked recounting your charity's history or describing other programs.

For the workshop series on How to Manage Your Board described earlier in this chapter, an evaluation plan might read like this:

> ***Short surveys will be provided to participants at the end of each session in which they will be asked to grade the speaker, the content, and the overall workshop on a five-point scale. They will also be asked for information about themselves and the organizations for which they work so that cross-tab reports can be prepared to***

> ***assess the program from many angles. We will also interview workshop leaders to gain insights from their point of view. Subsequent workshop series will be modified should the analysis of this data indicate a need for a different approach or different instructors. The cross-tab reports will also help focus the marketing and outreach for future programs.***

Given the ages of the participants in the music workshops for homeless children (also described in this chapter), surveys would not be as effective a method of evaluation. In this case, an evaluation from the charity's director of education might be best, especially if you can show that she has a background that allows her to do this objectively.

I generally ask you to avoid jargon, but you might want to include common evaluation terms to demonstrate that you know what you're talking about. For example, formative methods evaluate your program as it is in process, whether counting the number of hot meals served daily or correcting a choir's intonation. Summative methods are those used at the end of the program to sum up what has happened, perhaps through a survey.

Summing It All Up

At the end of your proposal, clearly sum it all up for the reader. The summary should usually be no more than one or two paragraphs and should include...

- A moving argument for funding your proposal stated differently from elsewhere in the proposal (which includes both needs and the results).
- A restatement of the amount of the grant you're requesting.
- A thank you for considering your proposal.

This is where you want the reader to hear the violins soar and see the cowboy ride off into the sunset. *This is your big ending.* Make it a good one. Here's an example:

> ***Life in a shelter for homeless families is especially hard on the children. Going to school provides some respite, but often the school day simply exchanges one institutional environment for another. Music for Kids will ensure that for at least 3 hours each week, as many as 60 kids living in these shelters will be taken out of the institutional environment and out of themselves through music.***
>
> ***Individual and small group instruction will provide much-needed personal attention, and group singing will encourage community and cooperation. Such simple activities have an enormous potential to assist these young people, as has been shown in the recent study by Urban Educators Conference. Thank you for considering our $20,000 grant request. It will make all this possible for these lost citizens of our city.***

A common question is "how long should the proposal be?" Without being facetious, the answer is "as long as it needs to be." Some funders impose limits on length (as little as 3 pages), but I've written 15-page proposals that (at least to me) didn't seem long. The important thing is to stay focused on the project and avoid any tangents. If the proposal will be more than five pages, you might want to include a table of contents, and you'll definitely want section headers to help the funder's staff skim through to find particular information.

Important Points to Remember

- If you can't sum up a project in one persuasive sentence, you don't understand it well enough to write a proposal.
- Making a clear case for supporting your charity includes information on what problems you seek to solve, how you will solve them, who will work on the project, and most importantly, who will benefit from it.
- Proposals that focus on your clients' or constituents' needs are stronger than those that stress the needs of your nonprofit.
- Take into consideration who will be reading your proposal when deciding how technical you can be in describing how you will carry it out.
- Use concrete methods for evaluating a program you know you will be able to include in your report to the funder.
- Use a moving closing section to reinforce the key points in the proposal and repeat "the ask."

The Wise Guide for Winning Grants will soon be available from all major online retailers.

For updates on the release date and free information about grant writing, visit www.grantadviser.com.