BEST PRACTICES FOR GRANT WRITING FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

CREATIVE ARKANSAS COMMUNITY HUB & EXCHANGE
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INTRODUCTION

WHAT YOU'LL GET OUT OF THIS GUIDE:

The following guide outlines the best practices for writing grant proposals, detailing common successful and unsuccessful aspects of grant proposals. This guide offers checklists to ensure proposals meet key standards, while offering tips on creating bespoke grants for each institution.

KEY WRITING	01
MATCHING PROPOSAL TO FUNDER	02
COMMON MISTAKES	03
QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE	04
PRE-WRITING PREP	05
PROPOSAL CONTENT ESSENTIALS	05
FORMATTING AND POLISH	06
SUBMISSION BEST PRACTICES	06
COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID	06

KEY WRITING

DO'S

01. The organization should read the guidelines thoroughly, ensuring it understands eligibility, deadlines, required documents, budget limits, and evaluation criteria.

02. Each proposal should be tailored to the specific funder. Organizations should never send a generic proposal.

03. A strong needs statement should be developed, clearly explaining why the project matters—whether for social, cultural, or community impact.

04. Writing should remain clear, concise, and compelling. Jargon should be avoided in favor of vivid language that demonstrates passion and purpose.

05. Storytelling should be used where appropriate. Arts organizations can connect emotionally by sharing short anecdotes or success stories.

06. Impact should be quantified when possible, including numbers such as audience reach, workshops conducted, or community participants.

07. A realistic, transparent budget should be provided, breaking down costs and showing how each expense supports the project.

08. Measurable goals and outcomes should be included, demonstrating how success will be tracked (e.g., number of performances, audience surveys).

09. Strong visuals or supporting materials should be included if allowed, such as artist bios, photos, programs, or press stories.

10. All content should be edited and proofread multiple times, since typos and unclear writing can reduce credibility.

DON'TS

01. Organizations should not ignore the funder's mission. If the goals do not align, the proposal should not be submitted.

02. Proposals should not focus exclusively on the organization; emphasis should be placed on how the project benefits the community or a larger cause.

03. Impact should not be exaggerated. Overpromising damages credibility: proposals should remain ambitious but grounded.

04. Dense or overly academic language should be avoided, ensuring the proposal is accessible to a generalist reviewer.

05. Familiarity should not be assumed. Acronyms, programs, and key terms should be explained clearly.

06. Questions should not be left blank or incomplete; every question asked is important to the review process.

07. Deadlines should never be missed, as late submissions are almost always disqualified.

MATCHING YOUR PROPOSAL TO FUNDER PRIORITIES

- The organization should research the funder by reviewing the website, past grant recipients, and stated priorities (*ex., community development, youth arts, cultural heritage*).

- The funder's language should be mirrored where appropriate. For example, often times funders will provide the specfic goals or objectives to be accomplished through the grant. Use that language, and key words funders use (like accessibility, underserved, innovation, etc) to complete your narrative.

- Alignment should be demonstrated early in the proposal, with the first paragraph clearly showing how the project supports the funder's goals.

- If applicable, organizations should cite similar values, past support, or shared affiliations.

- Always try to speak with the program officer when possible, since the organization should speak with the program officer, since a brief conversation can clarify priorities and help tailor the proposal.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Submitting a one-size-fits-all proposal, neglecting funder specific language of priorities.
- Neglecting to explain the urgency of “why now.”
- Being vague about project details or timeline.
- Failing to demonstrate long-term impact or sustainability.
- Ignoring formatting or character/word limits.
- Submitting without a second review for clarity

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: GRANT WRITING FOR ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

PRE-WRITING PREPARATION

- The organization should read the full grant guidelines and instructions.
- Eligibility should be confirmed before beginning.
- The funder's mission, past grantees, and priorities should be researched thoroughly.
- If permitted, the organization should contact the program officer for additional insight.

PROPOSAL CONTENT ESSENTIALS

- The proposal should define the need clearly: What issue or opportunity does the project address?
- The project should be aligned with the funder's values and focus areas.
- Clear, engaging language should be used, avoiding jargon.
- Stories or anecdotes should be included to illustrate community or artistic impact.
- Goals should be quantified, such as number of performances or attendees.
- A transparent, detailed, and reasonable budget should be provided.
- Specific, measurable outcomes should be defined.
- Methods for evaluating success should be explained.
- Sustainability should be addressed, clarifying what happens after the grant period ends.

FORMATTING AND POLISH

- Formatting and word count requirements should be followed exactly.
- Each proposal should be customized for the funder; generic proposals should not be reused.
- The proposal should assume that the reviewer has no prior knowledge of the organization's work.
- Thorough proofreading and editing should be completed.
- A colleague should be asked to review the proposal for clarity and completeness.

SUBMISSION BEST PRACTICES

- The submission checklist and file formats should be double-checked.
- All required documents (attachments, work samples, etc.) should be included.
- Proposals should be submitted early to avoid technical issues.

COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Overpromising results.
- Writing solely about the organization rather than focusing on community impact.
- Ignoring the funder's stated goals.
- Using insider language or unexplained acronyms.
- Submitting late or with missing components.

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