



Eleven Tips for Successful Grant Writing

By Lois Welk, Director

Dance/USA Philadelphia

Get the Big Picture.

Read the guidelines and the application forms, word for word, from beginning to end before starting to get an overview of the scope of the requirements to confirm with complete assurance that your proposal is eligible. If you have any doubts, do not interpret the guidelines, call the funder's program staff. There is something worse than having your proposal turned down, it's spending weeks writing a proposal and having it eliminated because it wasn't eligible. Call the funder if you are in doubt. Research the proposals that were funded in the past years. Are you a match?

Court an Investor.

Provide the kind of concrete information you would provide if you were asking someone to invest in a business. Eg if you wanted someone to invest in a restaurant you are opening, its better to say : "The concept is American, the chef is Mr. Casey Jones, the location is one block from the ball park, we'll specialize in gourmet hot dogs, the wait people will be dressed as baseball players, here's the budget, now taste this hot dog (that's the video sample). . . rather than, "The concept is American, we don't have a location yet, but it's going to be great and I've always wanted to have a restaurant."

Be Honest.

Never bend a program or project away from its authentic values, goals and mission, to fit the guidelines or criteria of a funder. Be honest. Grant writing is non-fiction.

Protect Your Chances of Success.

Mark the deadline 2 wks earlier than the actual deadline.

Murphy's Law. Cut it close and the printer will jam or a hurricane will take out the power or your Development Director resigns without notice or the Letter of Intent from the collaborating arts is lost in the mail...PROTECT YOUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS.

Budget Time.

Budget the quality time it will take to do a good job and have the person or people responsible block off more than enough time. Budget significant shifts of time, at least 4 hrs, removed from all interruptions, phone and email if possible.

If you or your org are a first time applicant to a particular funder, you need more time than a seasoned applicant. Talk to your colleagues and ask how much time it takes.

Start With The Budget.

Start with the budget. It informs everything other section of the grant and in the case of project grants, it helps you define the scope of the project.

If you add things to the narrative (documentation, new costumes, a reception etc.) you must go back to the budget and add the appropriate expenses and revenue.

Collect Letters of Intent Early.

Collect letters of intent from collaborating artists early in the process. Don't wait until the last minute and discover your composer is currently touring Korea and the mail won't make it in time for your deadline.

Avoid Adjectives.

I learned this from Elizabeth Zimmer. Avoid the use of adjectives unless you can defend it. For example:

“This highly skilled team of emerging artists will create a masterpiece that will resonate for decades with large audiences in Philadelphia.” (No).

“The City of NY Lincoln Center Performing Arts Library is the largest and most comprehensive performing arts library on the planet”. (Yes. They can prove it.)

Check, Check and Re-Check for Consistency.

Your budget has to be consistent with your narrative, your narrative has to be consistent with your budget, your artists bios must be consistent with the narrative, your choice of venue must be consistent with your audience development goals etc., etc., etc.

Video Samples: Does It “Read”?

Have your video sample reviewed by honest and candid colleagues who have not seen the specific sample in live performance. Assume that the panel is not familiar with your work. When you've seen the material live and then watch the video, your memory fills in the blanks.) High quality sound is critical especially if there is text. If there is text, be sure it is legible to people who are not familiar to the work or the text. Beware of samples that are dark and/or slow.

Read the Narrative Sections Out loud

Is your language clear and easily understood?