

Grantwriting Tips

The Career Services Center has produced a number of grants handouts by type: opportunities abroad, grants for composers, jazz grants, research grants in music, grants for performers and special projects, and music faculty grants. Every grant project is unique and each granting institution has its own guidelines, application, and limitations for types of projects funded. This handout is intended to provide basic general help in the grantwriting process both for people applying as individuals and for those applying as non-profit organizations. For more in-depth help, there are several adult education programs in the Boston area and elsewhere offering short term grant writing courses.

A grant proposal is basically a compelling argument or case as to *why* the funder should specifically fund *your* project. Why are you qualified to do this project? What is your track record so far? What do you plan to accomplish through the project? What will the results be? How will you evaluate your success? Will there be any results for the community? What's in it for the funder?

Getting Started: Mapping Your Project

Let's say you have a dream or an idea of something you'd like to make happen: an entrepreneurial music project. In order to get started, or to even find out if you really want to pursue this, it's important to think through what's involved and what you'd need to make it happen. "Mapping" your project is an important preliminary step to help you organize your goals and your thinking. A project map is a detailed statement of your goals, relevant background, and the resources needed to complete the project. The more concrete you are, the easier it is to get and stay organized, and to successfully complete your project. Complex projects may require funding and/or other assistance. In order to see what your projects requires, in terms of financial and other assistance, the first step is to "map" your project—thinking through and writing down what you anticipate needing and doing in order to succeed.

You can map your project by answering the following questions. Your detailed answers are the groundwork for project planning, grant proposals and fundraising plans, so make sure to write your answers down.

1. *What is the goal of your project?*

Detail what *specifically* you want to accomplish as well as the need or problem this project addresses.

2. *Why are you doing this project?*

Explain how this project will benefit you. Clarify how it fits in to your long-term career plans (or your organization's mission). If your project is for an ensemble or an organization, then you need to also include how the project will benefit others and how it will impact the community.

3. *What specific activities will take place as part of your project?*

4. *What is your "track record" of success so far?*

Detail what you have done in the past that demonstrates your ability to succeed with this project. (Name awards, honors, degrees, examples of performance experience, etc.)

5. *Who will help with or participate in the project?*

Include details of your collaborators' backgrounds and credentials (short bios can work well) and explain the nature and level of their participation.

6. *When will the project be completed?*

7. *What is your desired outcome?*

Explain how you will measure the success of the project (how you will know you have succeeded).

8. *How much money is needed?*

Write out a detailed budget. You may need to “guesstimate” but do some research to be as accurate as possible (for instance, get quotes on recording studio costs). You cannot ask for funding if you don’t know how much you need. The budget should include whatever you need for the project, and whether or not you will have to pay for these. Some needs may, in the end, be covered as “in kind” donations or bartered services: these can include performance and rehearsal space, or services such as printing, editing, and catering. Write it all down so you can see the full requirements of your project.

Research Your Funding Options

Research all your possibilities. Don’t put all your eggs in one basket — you’ll improve your chances immensely by applying to multiple funding organizations. Grantwriters consider a good success ratio to be having one in five of their grant proposals funded.

Researching your grant options should involve using the Career Services Center’s resources, or using the directories found in large university and public libraries. The Boston Public Library is an excellent source (see information at the end of this handout.)

Reference librarians are often extremely helpful and knowledgeable in locating grant information. Directories are set up with detailed indexes so you can look up grant opportunities by type of projects funded (i.e. composition, jazz, grad studies in music, etc.). In the directories as in our handouts, you will find specific limitations on what the institution funds, such as graduate studies in Paris for singers from upstate New York. Most funders only fund grants to non-profit organizations, not to individuals. However, you may be able to apply for organizational grants with the help of a fiscal sponsor. Fractured Atlas is one organization with a robust fiscal sponsorship program—see fracturedatlas.org/site/fiscal for more information. Always *check the application requirements carefully*. If you do not fit the profile, do not waste your time and energy applying. Funders are generally overloaded with qualified applicants and can pick and choose.

Besides printed research sources, individual grant seekers should keep an eye on musicians’ bios for names of awards and grants they’ve received. You may be eligible now or in the future to apply for some of the same, such as grants for recording projects, for study abroad, etc. Keep a “tickler” list of the names of these awards and then consult a grants directory or telephone directory to get the contact information.

After researching you should have a list of possibilities of funders whose stated field interests, geographic areas, and any other limitations match those of your project. On Guidestar.org you can look up the tax records of prospective funders to learn what other non-profits they’ve funded in the past and for how much. Next write or call (make sure if the organization requests inquiries only in writing that you comply) to get the latest guidelines and application sent to you. Read it carefully — you may find out at this point that you do not qualify because of additional limitations details. After you’ve read the guidelines carefully, call the funder and ask about the particulars of your project, its appropriateness for the grant — this can be very helpful before submitting the proposal.

Consider the funders’ motives for funding: they may be a corporation interested in improving their community’s cultural climate or their schools’ arts education program. They most likely want to fund things in their own backyard and they want the good press of doing good deeds. “All altruism stems from self-interest.”

Funders want and deserve to be thanked and acknowledged for the help they’ve given. For example, if you’ve received a grant to fund a concert series, you should include thank you/acknowledgments of the funder on the posters for the concert series in your press releases and advertisements for the series, and on the concert

programs themselves. Also, sending complimentary invitation(s) or tickets to see/hear your project, presentation, or concerts is just common sense and courtesy.

Steps:

1. Identify your goal / project
2. Research appropriate funding source leads
3. Contact funders for current guidelines and applications
4. Read materials carefully — you want a good match between your project goals and funders’ interests. Don’t compromise your project to try to “fit” the funders’ profiles.
5. Begin writing. Follow the guidelines. Write too much and edit down. Proofread carefully. Ask others to read who have written proposals similar to yours. Use spellcheck and a calculator.
6. Make it easy to read and well designed on the page. Follow the guidelines. Use active voice. Avoid jargon and overly technical words. Use bullets and headings to set off paragraphs and main points.

If you are writing a grant as a non-profit organization (as opposed to an individual) you may be asked to collaborate with another organization, to show that your project will serve a diverse constituency, and that it will contribute to the entire community. Don’t compromise your project in order to try to fit the restrictions of a grant — what you want to find is a good match between your project goals and a funder’s interests.

Funders for arts projects within communities may want to explore non-traditional funding options, such as federal funds, housing funds, community development block grants, human services, transportation funds as they might be appropriate for collaborative community/arts projects. These require lots of lead time. Support from elected officials may help with these types of projects.

An often overlooked resource: the trustees of a foundation. Look at the trustee list (it’s part of the annual report and usually included in any brochure on the foundation). Look for connections, get to know the people you have any contacts with. Networking can be very helpful in the funding world, as in all others!

Basic components of most full-length grant proposals for non-profit organizations:

1. Cover letter, to introduce what you are sending, the proposal
2. Introduction/Summary statement: clearly and concisely summarizes request and project.
3. Introduction
4. The issue: What is the need (in your community or field) your project is intended to fill? Back up with statistics or statements from authorities. How does this relate to the stated interests of the granting institution? Make it compelling.
6. The solution: program objectives. Make sure this clearly states how the objectives will “solve” or address the issue.
7. Qualifications of your organization (why you are best suited to do this project and succeed). Your background, your organization’s track record.
8. Methods: How will the objectives be met? Get specific about what you will actually do. Include projected timetable.
9. Evaluation plan. How will you determine how well you’ve met your objectives? What will you measure and how?
10. Future funding plans. How will the project survive after this grant has ended? Or if you only receive partial support?

11. **Budget.** Includes all costs and revenues. Include cash as well as in-kind services (non-cash assistance such as performance space, free copying or printing services, graphic design consultation, etc.). Include other funding sources being sought or already committed.
12. **Appendices.** Evidence of tax-exempt status, supporting documents, letters of recommendation, news clippings, reviews, etc. Keep this sparse but high quality.

Four Strategies for Successful Fundraising

Excerpted from "GuildNotes" a newsletter published by the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts, Jan. 1995

Included in a column in a newsletter issued by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (a large private foundation supporter of the arts), was a quote from George Grune, Chairman of the Fund, from a speech to fundraising executives. Mr. Grune outlined strategies for building successful relationships between grantmakers and fundraisers:

1. **Do your homework.** Learn everything you can about a funder. Foundations are acting more like investors than benefactors, looking for programs, projects and organizations that advance their mission. They want money to influence change, make a difference and bring about long-term benefits. It is essential that fundraisers understand a grantmaker's mission and the strategic investments it is making.
2. **Play by the rules.** Familiarize yourself with a foundation's application guidelines to learn how it likes to be approached. Do what is asked. If a one or two-page query is requested it will not help your case to add videotapes, testimonial letters or supporting documents.
3. **Communicate clearly.** The fund looks for three things in a well-done proposal: goals for the project, strategies for implementation, and benchmarks for measuring success. Whether these points are made face-to-face or in writing, they must be communicated clearly. Convince them you can accomplish what you say you will.
4. **Deliver on your promises.** What matters most is proof through performance. Many foundations have monitoring and reporting procedures to track progress and head off problems. We like information that is clear, concise and delivered on time. Funders want their grantees to succeed. When we hear about problems, we can work on solutions.

Final tips for grant applications

- Be concise, well-organized, and to-the-point.
- Focus on one clearly defined project rather than several ideas.
- Show the "need" – demonstrate what is unique about your project, your voice.
- Answer all questions directly; be sensitive to the funder's interests and priorities.
- Include specifics about:
 - how you will define and measure success;
 - how you will take the next step, building on your project.
- Avoid using adjectives that "puff up" your work.
- Neatness counts: no staples, no fancy paper, no fancy binders, single-sided only.
- For CDs: clearly indicate the duration and track number.
 - Listen before sending, make sure it works on different playback equipment.
 - Include tabs in the accompanying score if any tracks are mid-piece excerpts.

Important – see the funder as a person and develop that relationship.

Don't beg – they don't give money because they feel sorry for you; they do it for the satisfaction of making great artistic projects happen. Funders see themselves as partners, as investors, and you should treat them that way.

If you have questions call or e-mail (well in advance – not at the last minute!)

A great place to get started on your search:

Boston Public Library

700 Boylston Street, Copley Square

Boston, MA 02116

617-536-5400

<http://www.bpl.org>

Hours: Monday-Thursday 9-9; Friday and Saturday 9-5; Sunday 1-5 (October through May)

The Boston Public Library has many resources for grantseekers, including searchable databases, print materials, and helpful staff. These are all located in the Social Sciences Department (McKim Building, 2nd Floor; 617-859-2261) and can only be accessed in-person at the library. To do so, you need a library card. BPL library cards are free and available to: Massachusetts residents, people employed in Massachusetts, and students attending school in Massachusetts.

As a cooperating collection of the national Foundation Center, the BPL provides access to the Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online, and Foundation Grants to Individuals Online.

The BPL is also affiliated with Associated Grantmakers, and provides access to their directory of Philanthropic Organizations in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

In addition to these searchable databases, the BPL has many helpful print materials including a collection of winning grant proposals, a directory of corporate foundations, subject-specific guides and recommendations, and information on how to incorporate as a 501c3.