



Grant Application First Aid Kit
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3 easy steps to write the perfect grant application

For many people — especially those new to grants — the thought of actually sitting down to write an application is frightening. After all, you're really a police officer — or administrative assistant or financial expert — and writing just isn't your thing.

The bad news is that you will probably have to work a little harder at it than someone who is first and foremost a writer. The good news is that you can, in fact, write a pretty great grant application if you apply yourself. Most grant applications these days don't require 20 pages of narrative — they typically have word-limited sections to fill in. For some, that makes it easier to write, but it also means you need to make each word count by being clear and concise.

Just don't let it overwhelm you, and keep in the back of your mind that your application will not be judged by how technically and creatively it is written, but by the quality of the project — and how well you are able to relay that information.

So just how should you go about this daunting task?

1. Gather Your Information

This is the most important step in the entire process. If you have made the decision to apply for a grant, you should already have most of what you need for each of the sections of the application. That would be your need statement (the problem you are trying to solve), the project narrative (what you will do and the expected outcomes) and the budget (what you will buy and the narrative describing each item and its value to the project).

While you are in the decision-making process, make note of any additional information that will be asked for in the application. This could include crime stats or UCR numbers, any fiscal issues that make it unlikely you can afford this on your own. Have this on hand to assist you in writing the narratives.

2. Start Writing

Obviously you don't want to start the longer narratives at the last minute. This part of the process is where you will find those gaps that need answers, so give yourself time to finish it before the deadline.

Use a Microsoft Word document (or a similar word-processing program) to begin — you don't want to do this within an online application. Put in everything you have. Then check the length against what the requirements are, and that you have answered all of the questions or areas requested for the section.

3. Review, Edit, and Submit

There's an old adage that states, "There is no good writing, just good rewriting." Once you have all of the narratives complete, have several people not involved with the project read them. Don't give them any additional information since the idea is to make sure your application is clear and complete. Once they have read the narratives, ask them what the problem is, how you are planning to solve it, and what you need to be paid for to accomplish the goals. If clarification is needed, ask how you could better address the issue to make it more obvious to a reader.

Do each section as word documents, fully edited as detailed above, before you cut-and-paste into the online application. You can make changes at this point, but you don't want to be making huge edits after the application is started.

You truly don't have to be a great writer to submit a successful grant application, but you do need to be able to write well enough that the reviewer can visualize your project — the why, the how, and the outcomes. Don't make the reviewers wonder what you mean, show them.