1. Start reviewing the grant application requirements and developing the proposal early enough so you can ask questions and get answers. Don’t be afraid to ask!

2. Always look at the donor’s philanthropic vision. The number one reason grant requests are turned down is that they didn’t match the funder’s criteria.

3. Follow exactly all guidelines from the funder regarding how to complete the grant proposal. This is not the time to get creative with your presentation!

4. Write the “purpose” statement as a one-sentence, direct, concise explanation of what you will accomplish.

5. Assume the funder knows nothing about you or your agency. Even if you are the “grant-award poster child,” don’t assume proposal readers can fill in any missing information.

6. Assume the development of a proposal is a multi-person job. In most cases, collaboration or consultation with others is required.

7. Check for consistency in both the budget and the narrative.

8. Be sure your organization wants and/or needs what you are requesting. It is important not to just chase dollars.

9. Saying it once is usually enough. Unnecessary “fill” or “fluff” or redundancy takes away from a well-written proposal.

10. Develop your budget first. Then make sure your proposal supports each item in that budget.

11. Use Melissa Data www.melissadata.com to find foundations by zip code.

12. Write a compelling need statement for the grant reviewer. Make them use their hankies to dab away the tears after they have read it.

14. Use the same terms in your proposal that the funder uses.

15. When grant guidelines call for something that is not applicable or necessary, make a simple statement to indicate why it is not included or discussed.

16. Identify the funder’s program officer who will address your questions. Build a strong relationship with him or her.

17. Stick with factual and direct writing for government grant applications. For foundation and corporate grant applications, be creative, bold and magnetic!

18. Show in your proposal that you are aware of those who have done similar projects. The funder will know that you have done your homework.

19. Prepare and submit your proposal well before the deadline. Don’t rush.

20. Go to Guidestar at www.guidestar.org and read Form 990-PF’s to understand what specific foundations are funding.

21. Make friends with a research librarian. She or he can help you find the data you need.

22. Use active verbs. Paint a picture with your words.

23. Make friends with your financial officer so that you can work hand-in-hand to secure the financial information you need for your proposal.

24. Analyze the amount of time that each staff member will be devoted to the project. Be sure to include it in the budget.

25. Choose your partners wisely.


27. Learn to incorporate charts and diagrams in your narrative.


29. Always double check your figures to see if they truly “add up.” The number two reason that grants aren’t funded is that the figures don’t add up.
30. Make sure letters of support or letters of authorization mean something. They should state exactly what collaborators will do and how their expertise will contribute to the project.

31. Put yourself in the reviewer’s place. Would you know what the proposal was saying if you did not write it? Would you want to fund this proposal?

32. Avoid using jargon and buzzwords.


34. Commit to spending at least one day per quarter shadowing program staff. What you see, hear and experience will augment your writing.

35. Combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches to the evaluation in order to examine data from multi-dimensional viewpoints.

36. Keep all of your notes – handwritten and typed.

37. In the budget, ask for items only described or mentioned in the narrative - no budget surprises!!

38. Have someone else read through your proposal before you submit it.

39. Join a grant writers networking group or start one. You will meet other grant writers who will share their knowledge with you.

40. Check out grant writing blogs like The Grant Helpers. Com and Pamela’s Grantwriting Blog.

41. Check the Foundation Center’s website for their Cooperating Collection located closest to you http://foundationcenter.org/collections/ccfl.html. Then visit this free resource to search for funders.

42. Invest in a good Thesaurus.


44. Ask a friend who doesn’t know about your programs to proof the grant.
45. Ask other grant writers to name their favorite grant writing books. My two are Winning Grants: Step-by-Step by Mim Carlson and Storytelling for Grantseeker’s: A Guide to Creative Nonprofit Fundraising by Cheryl A. Clarke

46. Ask not what the grantor can do for you. Demonstrate what you will do for others with their money.

47. Discuss the evaluation plan with your program people who are going to conduct the evaluation. Make sure you are measuring the right things.

48. Prepare the CEO/CFO for a site visit. Be sure they understand the details of the narrative, budget and any other measurements providing in the proposal.

49. Write the executive summary after the proposal is completed. It is easier to summarize than it is to flesh something out.

50. Arrange to get all necessary signatures well in advance.

51. Submit all grant reports on time.

52. Check out Charity Channel www.charitychannel.com. You will find many helpful articles.

53. Learn as much as you can as often as you can about the nonprofit sector.

54. Improve your computer skills.

55. Talk to others who have been awarded grants by the funder to learn as much as possible about the process.

56. Tell the funder how you will fund the project or program after the grant expires.

57. Remember to state the need as the community and the client’s need not your need.

58. Take advantage of all the funder has to offer. Many will provide training or fund workshops.

59. Once notified of a successful grant proposal, be sure to thank the funders...and thank them again. Funders comment that they are often not thanked!!

60. Be careful what you ask for; you just might get it!!