The Basics of Grantwriting

By Ann Marie Lonsdale
with edits by Erica Wray Barnes + Adam Mummery
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1. **Know the difference between a General Operating Grants Proposal vs. Project/Program Grants.**
    - **General operating support** is an unrestricted grant in support of a nonprofit organization's mission rather than specific projects or programs.

    - **Project/Program grant support** provides restricted funds (monies set aside for a particular purpose) towards the awarded project or program outlined in the proposal and cannot be used for other expenses outside of the project or program.

2. **Follow the Rules.**
   This is probably the most important piece of advice for any grant seeker to follow. Grant applications have several kinds of rules that are laid out by the grant-maker that are often non-negotiable. These guidelines exist in part to streamline the grantmaking process,and to ensure fairness among the applications being reviewed.
    - **Eligibility.** Most grants have prerequisites, and it is your responsibility to make sure that you meet these requirements before you go through the process of writing and submitting a grant. Don't waste your time on a grant you are not eligible for - you have art to make!

    - **Due Dates.** It is your responsibility as a grant seeker to know the deadline date and time, and to meet those requirements. Inform yourself, add dates and times to your calendar, and keep on top of these deadlines. No grant maker will make exceptions for late submissions, unless there is a massive failure of a computer system on their end (...and even then…). Again, this is about fairness among all the grant seekers, and exceptions are rarely given.

    - **Reporting.** Once you receive a grant (good job you!) it is also your responsibility to report on that grant in a timely and professional manner. Most grant makers require some type of report - short form, long form, or meeting style. The due date is usually in the award letter, which you should save for your records.

3. **Write like Yourself.**
   Put another way: **Be Authentic.** Don't write like you think a grant writer would write. Write like yourself.
    - **Tell us your story.** Don't string boring sentences together with things you think we want to hear. Tell us the story of your organization.

- **Consider your audience.** Talk about your work as if you are describing it to someone for the first time. The narrative is made up of your best elevator pitch and a description of your mission, vision, values, and programming. Believe it or not, panelists are really rooting for you. They want your application to be the one that makes it easy to say, "I have no questions, let's fund them."

- **Study the Evaluation Criteria.** If grantmakers make the evaluation criteria publicly available, study it. Some evaluation criteria are weighted equally, some criteria are weighted higher than others. If you can find the evaluation criteria on a grantmakers website, look for the questions they want answered under each of those criteria and answer those questions! Keep in mind, panels are made up of PEOPLE. Many (not all) grantmakers are doing their best to ensure the equity of the panel process while welcoming human understanding of the evaluation process.

- **You are in control of your narrative.** We, as humans, are storytellers. If you leave questions unanswered, the panel will MAKE UP A STORY to fill in the answer for you. Some of them will make up a nice story. Some will not.

- **Use concrete, active language, but don't forget to show us your heart.** Banish the painful, run-on sentences. Write in the active voice. Use concrete, specific language and imagery. But also tell us why you do this now, why you started, or why you keep going. It is often a good part of the story.

- **Sorry, you are not "the only" in NYC.** You make theatre. So do a lot of other people. When a grant panel reads 50 proposals all of which describe the work as the "only", it becomes borderline hilarious to read it the 51st time. If you have a signature style, tell us what it is. Distinguish yourself and your company's work by stating what it IS.

4. **Edit, Copyedit, and Edit Again.**
   Edit, spellcheck, and do a grammar check on your writing. Have a friend/someone not part of the company proofread your draft. Make sure that the final version of the document is what ends up being uploaded.

5. **Show Your Work.**
   Remember in math class, when you could get partial credit just for showing how you solve a problem? The same is true in grant writing and budgets.

   - **In writing a narrative,** showing your work is about guiding the reader step by step through your argument. Make the case for funding. Don't assume that a

panel knows who you are and what you do. If your theatre company's mission is the "problem" to be solved, then your programming is the work you do to get there. Walk us through it item by item so that we understand how you decided to pursue these activities in order to accomplish your mission. Chelsea Goding-Doty from NYFA likes to use Steve Blank's formula for writing a Value Proposition, which is: **We help (x) do (y), by doing (z).**

- X = Who is your target audience? The more specific, the better.
- Y = What is the outcome you are enabling? Or in other words, what unmet need are you addressing?
- Z = How are you uniquely solving the unmet need at hand?

- **In budgets**, showing your work is about being able to rationally explain how you arrived at your budget numbers. Usually, this happens in the context of budget notes. Every grant maker has different rules about budget categories that you need to follow, but budget notes are your chance to TELL THE STORY OF YOUR ORGANIZATION <u>in dollars.</u>
  - Explain anything that might be out of the ordinary or a significant increase or decrease across fiscal years.
    - If your company has never received foundation support before, and your budget projections include $10,000 in foundation support, explain which grants you have applied for and secured.
    - If you project box office income, use a budget note to explain the size of the house, ticket price, length of the run, and the expected occupancy (i.e., a formula like "half the house at half price").

- **In work samples,** make sure what you offer supplements what you have written in the narrative.
  - If you talked about both productions and programming, include work samples from your productions AND programming.
  - Use testimonials! Testimonials are the clearest way for panels to understand your work written outside of your own perspective.
  - GIVE US PICTURES OR VIDEOS. Theatre is a visual medium! Most grant applications require you to do most of the writing at the top of the application and work samples are considered at the end of the application.
  - Imagine yourself as a panelist. You are making your way through the application, reading about an organization and trying to hold all of the pieces of the story together and you get to the work samples. These work samples should make the panelist go, WOW! This is exactly what I was imagining! Or even better, WHOA! This work is incredible and even better than what I imagined. You never want a panelist to get to

work samples and go, HUH? The work samples should tie the bow on the application.

6. **Be Specific, Not Generic.** When you give specific details, concrete examples, and clear, concise descriptions of your company and its work, you give the panel something to sink their teeth into. In fact, they can often do a sort of elevator pitch on your behalf when they discuss your application in the room if you provide enough specifics. Again, demonstrate the special qualities of your company and its work by explaining your programming fully and in vivid detail. You needn't be longwinded to offer concrete examples.
    - Use data from the tools you already have.
      Data does not have to only mean surveys and pie charts.
      Tie programming to goals. Make the connection. Ground your argument and description in facts, data, and anecdotal evidence.
        - Who, what, where, when, why, and how.
            - Who are you impacting? What are you providing? Where does it happen? When do you do it? How do you do it?
            - Back all of that up with numbers! Number of program participants, audience/tickets sold, retention rate, number of artists you work with.
    - Leveraging Outside Data
        - Quote data from recent reports in the field. (TCG, A.R.T./New York, Dance/NYC, etc.)
    - Serve on a panel.
        - Many borough councils and arts service organizations who act as regranters seek panelists and many of them pay! Check out your local borough councils and find out what it is like to be on the other side of the table. The experience will make you a better grant writer.
    - Please DO humblebrag.
        - Running an organization is not easy. Celebrate your wins. Talk about what you do well. Keep going! ❤️