



Writing a Strong Application

First steps:

- **Read the Guidelines thoroughly.** This will ensure you are eligible, qualified, and ready to begin writing. Note any directions or narrative questions for which you need clarification and contact staff with plenty of time before the deadline.
- **Make sure to give yourself plenty of time.** Make a calendar of grant-related dates that includes the “hard” submission deadline, any needed technical assistance, internal due dates, and any follow-up dates (such as panel meetings and reports due).

Writing a draft:

- **Read the Narrative Questions carefully.** Draft your responses in a word processing document to later paste into the online application. Check your word or character count limit for each question and make sure it is not over the limit.
- **Answer the question that is asked** (The #1 grant writing tip). Applicants often feel the need to justify their work and sound like an expert. However, a grant panelist is reading dozens of applications and may not take time to parse through roundabout language. Be concise and clear and answer the question that is asked.
- **Give yourself plenty of time.** Waiting until the last moment to create and submit a grant application can only lead to heartburn. You never know what could come up, so make sure you have enough time to handle whatever unexpected twist or turn may arise.
- **Think beyond the narrative.** Too often people spend all their time writing an amazing narrative and then throw some numbers on a budget form that do not support the story they’ve told. A budget can feel scary and unfamiliar, but seeing it as another opportunity to tell your story will help make it a cohesive part of a bigger picture.
- **Take advantage of technical assistance.** This handbook, sample grant applications and online resources are created to help you. However, don’t assume you can call at 3:00 p.m. on the deadline date and have someone read and respond to your questions. Be respectful of everyone’s time and make sure you get help early in the game.
- **Know your audience.** If you are writing a grant to your State Arts Agency, you don’t need to write paragraphs defending the value of the arts. Think about who will be reading your grant application and write through that lens.
- **Use stories and statistics.** In the arts, there is an impulse to avoid data and err on the side of feel-good storytelling. Consider how you can use data to support your request. Similarly, propose clear and concise assessment tools that indicate how you will

measure your goals. A strong grant narrative utilizes both statistics and a compelling story to make a case for funding.

- **Be specific.** For example, if you are talking about the reach of your programs, don't talk about "many" schools that you serve; specify how many schools in what communities reaching an estimated number of students. Avoid terms like "in the future", "several", and "about".
- **Be honest.** Know what you can accomplish with the funding and then be honest in the application. Don't promise a Broadway-quality production or 600% program growth if you know that is not realistic. Also, if your organization has experienced some bumps along the road, e.g. a deficit or a drop in audiences, be honest and talk about your strategies for overcoming the issue.
- **Don't overuse acronyms.** It is fine to establish your name in the beginning of a grant application and then refer to it as an acronym. Too often panelists find themselves swimming in a sea of meaningless letters. Don't assume the reader knows what you mean when you use internal shorthand.
- **Proofread, proofread, and then get someone else to proofread.** It is vitally important to present a clear, concise, and polished application. Did you abuse the use of exclamation points? Did you use proper grammar and spelling? Did autocorrect change "art education" to "rat education?" Have someone who is unfamiliar with your project read it to see what you miss.
- **Use the checklist.** You will find a checklist in the guidelines. But you might want to make your own, so you can ensure you have dotted every i and crossed every t.

Submitting your application:

- **Again, give yourself plenty of time.** Avoid causing yourself added anxiety by waiting to submit the online application within a day (or an hour) of the deadline. You can never tell if you will have a slow internet connection or whether you have forgotten a required attachment.
- **One last look.** Look at or print out the PDF of your application before you submit it. Make sure you did not go over the word limit so that the system cut off your narrative response, and check all your links and support materials to make sure everything is working.

The panel review:

- **Listen to the grant review panel.** You can call in to the panel reviewing your application. The panel dates, agendas and dial in codes will be posted on the website approximately one month prior to the review meeting. Much can be learned from listening to panel

discussions, not only of your organization or program, but also of other applicants. Take notes about how you could adjust future applications based on the feedback.

- **Give yourself time.** It is always heartbreaking when an applicant tunes in 10 minutes after their grant was discussed. Grant panels often operate on a suggested timeline, but it is possible for them to get ahead of schedule. It is better to call in to the discussion for an hour before yours is reviewed than to show up after the fact. In addition, you can learn from the review of other applications.
- **Don't get defensive.** This can be difficult because applicants care so much about their programs and projects. It is easy to interpret constructive feedback as a personal criticism, but you will be well served to learn by listening. Observing a panel with an open mind will make your future applications stronger.

Follow-Up

- **Find out whether you can get feedback.** Whether or not you receive funding, there is always room for improvement. This is one of the simplest ways to get feedback.
- **Know future deadlines.** Use your favorite reminder system or calendar to note deadlines for reports on the grant. These will be your responsibility and missing any deadlines may jeopardize future funding.
- **Make a checklist of post-award responsibilities.** The process does not end once you receive a grant. Make note of due dates, submit any follow-up documents requested, commit to what your responsibilities are to the granting organization. Be sure to credit the grantmaker and contact regional and national legislators and news outlets. Make sure to acknowledge the funder in your communications and on your website.
- **Keep us up to date!** Make sure you update us on any changes in grant contacts and organizational leadership.

Many thanks to Ashley Kerns Brown, Arts Education Director, [South Carolina Arts Commission](#) for much of this content.