

# Grant Writing Tips

Consider the following principles when preparing your proposal and writing your grant application.

## PREPARATION

1. **Read the grants guidelines thoroughly.** Take the guidelines literally and follow the directions.
2. **Call the NAC if you have questions and to discuss project eligibility.** Make sure that your organization/project fits within funding guidelines. Ask to view examples of successful applications. Do not wait until the last minute.
3. **Review panel comments from the previous year, if applicable.** These comments can provide valuable insight into what a panel did or did not understand about your proposal. This can also help you strengthen your current proposal.

## NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT – TELLING THE STORY

The narrative section of an application is your opportunity to present your project in a way panelists will find compelling and persuasive.

1. **Draft your application narrative.** A good narrative is like a good story and flows and builds from one section to the next. The application should clearly make a case for your grant request.
  - Understand the importance of the delicate balance between being succinct and sacrificing important points to achieve brevity in your writing.
  - There is a difference between organizational history and organizational planning. Every organization has a history and a story; every organization and project needs a plan.
  - **A grant proposal is not an emotional appeal.** Typically panelists are professional grant makers themselves. Present evidence that supports your statements.

- Do not make the reader hunt for information.
  - Don't be repetitive. Use each question as an opportunity to flesh out more of your story.
2. Do not use jargon (words that only people in a specialized field will understand) or hyperbole (extravagant exaggeration or making a point by overstating it).
  3. Write in an active voice and maintain a positive tone, even when addressing issues of financial, managerial or programmatic problems.
  4. Remember that panelists are reading many applications. Assist them and yourself by keeping your proposal focused on the main points.
    - Do not assume your reviewers know anything about you, your proposed program, your partners or your beneficiaries. Remember the majority of NAC panelists are out-of-state specialists.
    - Be specific. How do you identify populations for your outreach services, and/or determine what your capacity is for delivering quality outreach services as outlined in your application? How do you develop appropriate and dynamic interactions with new audiences?
    - Connect the dots. If your mission states that you support multicultural programming, then your programming should reflect it and your application should include your definition of multicultural programming.
    - Include demographics and statistics to clarify those in your community that you actually serve, or plan to include – not just the numbers found on the Census Report!
    - Your narrative should describe your organization, program and/or project. Do not depend on Support Materials to fill in the picture.
  5. **Use an impartial proofreader. Before you submit your application, let someone who is completely unfamiliar with your project read and critique the narrative.**

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## BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

The projected budget is key to any grant application. Consider the budget a restatement of your proposal, but this time using the language of dollars. It is imperative that the budget supports the goals of your narrative. Make the best estimation of the expenses and income you anticipate.

1. **Estimate expenses, obtaining cost estimates as necessary.**
  2. **Estimate donated goods and services (in-kind).** The NAC Final Report **requires hard figures** for in-kind contributions. We recommend that you request a statement of donation or an invoice with “in-kind” noted on it from any entity that provides you with in-kind goods and services to keep for your records.
  3. **Estimate anticipated revenues (income) for the project.**
  4. **Check to be sure that the budget as a whole makes sense and conveys the right message to the grant panelists.**
  5. **Remember that the budget should not raise any red flags.** Review the budget through the eyes of the individuals who will be reading your proposal.
    - Where would more budget explanation be helpful?
    - Can you accomplish the intended proposal with the proposed budget?
    - Is the budget consistent with the proposal’s program plan and methods?
  6. **Check your math.**
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## SUPPORT MATERIALS

The quality of your Support Material enhances the professionalism of your grant application. Read the guidelines carefully and submit exactly what Support Materials have been requested.

1. **Less can be more.** A positive critical review is more valuable than a press release from your own organization. One specific letter of support from the right person is worth ten that read like form letters.
  2. **Make sure that everything crucial to your application is in the text or narrative of the proposal.** Support Materials enhance assertions in your narrative. If you write that you are collaborating with the school district, enclose a letter from the Superintendent for verification. If you said you have completed an Economic Impact in the Arts study, include the Executive Summary.
  3. **Show the reviewers your work and your vision through well-produced materials.**
  4. **Your Support Materials should be clearly labeled and well organized.**
  5. **You should not submit more than is asked for in the grants guidelines.**
  6. **Your work samples should be of the highest quality you can attain.** Panelists need to see examples of your work to determine quality.
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## FINAL THOUGHTS

1. **Make your narrative reader friendly.** Remember staff, NAC board members and panelists read hundreds of pages during application review.
  2. **Remember that a grant application is not a marketing or publicity document.**
  3. **Ask for feedback.** Have someone who is not intimately involved in the design of your project critically review your narrative. This feedback can help you understand where your narrative can be strengthened for the final application.
    - Was the need clear?
    - Did the proposed methods and objectives seem like the appropriate response to the need?
    - Does the budget make sense?
  4. **Always print a copy of your narrative and all pertinent documents and correspondence.**
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