

HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL GRANT APPLICATION

Shane McConnell has more than 30 years' experience as an educator and more than 15 years' experience writing successful grant applications. She has taught for both K–12 and higher-education institutions, including Harvard, Yale and MIT. Shane has also written many grant applications aimed at raising funds for projects that incorporate innovative technology applications. She offers you the following tips.

Ask yourself how technology will help achieve your goals

Remember that equipment is merely a tool to help you achieve your goal. Acquiring technology should not be the ultimate objective of your project or grant proposal – it's just one component.

Grant application reviewers want to see how technology purchases will quantifiably help you achieve your larger goals, such as improved learning outcomes, increased engagement or higher attendance.

Be sure your project matches the foundation's mission statement

If your goals don't match the objectives of the foundation from which you're seeking funding, you won't receive any money, even if you've submitted an outstanding proposal.

Foundations have mandates and will not accommodate projects that don't fit their criteria. It's best to find out in advance what a foundation's goals are so you can relate your application to their mandate.

Research foundations online

The Internet is a great place to research foundations. Find one with a mission statement that best fits your specific project. Check out listservs, bulletin boards or blogs to find online discussion groups where you can ask questions and get support from peers.

As well, spend time surfing websites such as www.foundationcenter.org or www.grantwrangler.com for all kinds of national grants, including those related to education.

Teach the teachers

Remember to allocate one-third of project funding for professional development. Savvy grant application reviewers know that educators need training to use technology effectively and meet project goals successfully. A grant proposal that doesn't address professional development may be considered incomplete.

Plan at least a year ahead

It takes several months to write a good grant proposal and another three to six months for a grant to be approved. Keep this in mind when planning a start date for your project.

Build relationships

Fundraising is more than just submitting grant applications. Foundations are more likely to award money to a project they know about. Don't be afraid to contact a grant organization well in advance of the application deadline to make your intentions known and establish a rapport.

Relationship building is also important when approaching local corporations – another great avenue for fundraising. Encourage citizens to volunteer at your school, making your facility an integral part of the larger community.

Know the national technology and literacy standards

For your project to gain acceptance, grant foundations need to feel confident that you're working within recommended guidelines. Check out the National Educational Technology Standards <http://www.iste.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=NETS> and be sure to reference them in your proposal.

Demonstrate that others have already invested in your project

A foundation is more likely to award funding to a project when they see that other organizations are already involved.

In addition, many organizations will often match funds that have already been raised, giving you more budget to work with.

Educators must have a vested interest, but don't be afraid to hire professionals

Foundations know that for a project to succeed, educators must be behind it all the way. Grant applications shaped by teachers themselves typically garner greater interest than those written without educator influence or support. That said, don't be afraid to seek input from a professional grant writer if you feel overwhelmed. Many offer training specifically for educators.

Show off your successes

Once you've obtained outside funding, it's important to maintain the relationships you've worked so hard to cultivate. Invite donors to visit your school and see what the students and teachers have accomplished. It's like sending a thank-you card!

Above all, don't forget to put on your marketing hat and remember that grant writing is essentially selling someone on your idea. Communicate with enthusiasm!