

How to Write a Winning Grant Proposal

If your nonprofit humane organization is like most, you probably apply for grant money from foundations and corporations now and then. Maybe it's for operating expenses. Or perhaps it's for a specific program or capital project. In either case, you have to persuade someone to fund your organization or program instead of someone else's. And because the only "voice" a decisionmaker hears is often your written grant proposal, it's important to make your proposal shine.

So after you've done your research and identified those foundations and corporations—or "grantmakers"—whose funding interests include animal-related programs, it's time to write that grant proposal. Here's how.

■ **Tailor your proposal to the grantmaker's mission and follow the grantmaker's guidelines.** Each year, for example, The William and Charlotte Parks Foundation awards grants to local humane organizations. The foundation does not typically underwrite local spay/neuter programs and says so in its guidelines. So no matter how worthy you think your program is, don't waste your time—and the grantmaker's—on a proposal seeking a grant for a program that the grantmaker will not fund.

Follow all directions, from placing your attachments in the correct order to meeting the deadline. Avoid asking for an extension, faxing your proposal, or sending your proposal via overnight delivery to arrive on the due date; it will reflect poorly on your organization.

■ **Organize your proposal in a clear, logical format.** Many grantmakers require you to fill out their own application forms that come with detailed instructions. Others simply list criteria that they consider important and require you to submit a proposal. In that case, use the format on the following page to make your proposal stand out.

■ **Make your proposal appealing and easy to read.** If possible, use a word-processing program to write your grant proposal. Most word-processing software now comes with desktop publishing features that you can use to spruce up your proposal—such as attractive fonts and graphic lines. Design a unique, eye-catching, professional-looking cover sheet that you can use and modify for all your proposals.

Remember, your grant proposal is your organization's résumé. Every smudge, typo, misspelled word, or missing document contributes to a poor image. Conversely, every well-chosen word, smart-looking font, attractive cover sheet, and helpful supporting document contributes to a professional, credible image. Spend time checking the details and polishing the format. It's time well spent that can pay off handsomely.

■ **Write a cover letter and enclose it with your proposal.** The cover letter should strategically outline the link between your proposal and the mission of the grantmaker. Keep it short, use your organization's letterhead, and include your name and title.

Learn More!

Dozens of books and manuals describe the grant process and give in-depth guidance on writing an effective grant proposal. Many resources also list foundations and corporations that may fund local humane organizations. Check your library for these books and ask other local nonprofits in your area about grant-making support organizations near you. Write to The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L St. N.W., Washington, DC 20037, for a list of national organizations that specifically fund local humane organizations.

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A Recommended Grant Proposal Format

■ Title or Cover Page

■ Table of Contents

■ Summary

Describe the basics of your proposal in concise terms.

■ Introduction

Explain what your organization does, state its mission, and describe its history and its accomplishments. Make your group sound like the effective organization that it is!

■ Statement of Need

Identify the problem that your program will solve. For example, if your program is an anti-cruelty initiative, describe recent acts of cruelty in your community that aren't being adequately resolved.

■ Objectives

List the goals of your program in measurable terms. For example, how many animals do you expect to have spayed or neutered as a result of your program? How many children's humane education coloring books will you distribute to local elementary schools?

■ Project Description

Describe the program from start to finish. What will it involve? What methods will you use to achieve your objectives? When will it start and end?

■ Project Management

Explain how the program will be supervised. What other responsibilities does the project leader have? What are his or her qualifications? Include a résumé of the person who will oversee the program.

■ Evaluation

State how you will evaluate your program's success. For example, if your program is a public-education campaign about the link between animal abuse and child abuse, will you conduct telephone surveys to measure awareness of the issue before and after your campaign?

■ Supplemental and Future Funding

List the guaranteed sources of funding, other than the grantmaker's, that will ensure that the program is completed and/or continued in the future.

■ Budget

Itemize all expenses for the program, from staff salaries to postage. Specify what the grantmaker's funds will be used for.

■ Appendices

Include your organization's annual report and audited financial statement, copies of your incorporation certificate and bylaws, contact information for members of your board, and letters of support from prominent people in your community.