

Tips and Tricks for Tackling Grant Writing

In June, 2023, ArtsFund hosted a convening, “Grant Writing when you don’t have a Grants Team” with independent grant writers Cami Aurioles (CamiAurioles.com), Olivia Gattuso (Mission Forward Fundraising), and Kaleb Germinaro (ScandiuZZi Krebs), and moderated by ArtsFund’s Vice President of Grantmaking, Thomas Vásquez, which can be viewed [here](#). The below information is adapted from the conversation.

Getting Started:

The following resources are a good place to start with research on what grants may be a fit for your organization:

Funder Directories:

- Candid (www.candid.org)
- Foundation Directory Online (www.fconline.foundationcenter.org)
- Guidestar (www.guidestar.org)
- Instrumentl (www.instrumentl.com)

You can access the Professional Subscription of Foundation Directory Online at local libraries across the state.

Foundation Tax Forms (990s): Towards the end of Funders’ Form 990, you can find a list of awarded grants and grantees. You can also find application instructions, contact information, and board names on 990s.

Local Public Funders: Make sure to sign up for newsletters and/or email reminders from public funding offices, such as:

- [ArtsWA](#)
- [4Culture](#) (King County)
- City programs including [Spokane Arts](#), [Tacoma Arts Commission](#), [Seattle Office of Arts & Culture](#), and more.

Your Network & Similar Organizations:

Review funders of similar organizations in your area or sector. You can find lists on Performance Playbills/Programs, Annual Reports, Websites, etc.

If you choose to engage a consultant for your grant writing research, keep the following in mind. A good **prospect researcher** should provide your organization with the following information:

1. A detailed list of potential prospects, prioritized according to likelihood. A long list of prospects is not useful - you want a long list of *actionable* prospects.
2. Detailed notes about each prospect, their grantmaking process, their funding priorities, average grant amounts, and how the funder can be approached.
3. Clarity around next steps - each actionable prospect should have a clear action step, so that you can take this information and begin developing a workplan around it.
4. This should be well-organized and in a format that allows for easy sorting, like an excel document. Make sure from the beginning that your researcher does not intend to send you a Word doc.

Online Search: Sometimes a simple Google search can help you uncover new RFPs and foundations.

Ranking System: Once you have a list of prospects, it is good to implement a ranking system. Some things to consider as you categorize potential funders:

- How well do the funder's priorities align with *your* organization, community, vision, and/or project?
- What are your organization's most urgent funding needs? Unrestricted or project-specific? Make sure to prioritize prospects that align with those needs.
- How competitive is the grant? Is it a national funder? Do they only award a small number of grants each cycle? If the answer is yes, they may need to go lower on your list.
- Does the grant cover your priority expenses for the project?
- How extensive, difficult, or time-consuming is the application process? If your capacity is limited, this could lead to a lower rank.
- What are the deadlines of the prospects? How do these deadlines align/conflict with current deadlines, special events, and other planned activities?
- Does the funder have a program officer to contact? Or does your organization have a community connection to the funder? If so, this could provide a higher rank.



Building Relationships with Grantors

Getting Started

It's useful to think of funders as partners. You need their funding; but they need you too. It is a privilege and opportunity to support your work. If you research a funder and they don't explicitly tell you not to reach out, go for it. See if you can connect with someone and talk to them about your work. You want to get a sense of if it's worthwhile to apply for funding and if they can provide insight about how you should approach the proposal. If there is no way to connect with someone, identify who you do know that champions your work. Then ask your champions to make introductions for you.

It could go like this:

- Create a short list (4-6) of prospective funders you want to get connected to. Pull from your prioritized list of prospects!
- Identify your champions. This likely includes existing funders or community leaders who have lots of connections and know your work and impact.
- Reach out to your champions and let them know you've identified a short list of funders for whom you're looking for connections. Ask them if they can help make this happen.

Share Updates

Schedule regular updates about your work to send to your funders (e.g. quarterly). If something exciting happens - you're written up in the press, you make a new important hire, you've had a significant programmatic win, etc. - send them an update to keep them in the loop of these achievements and use it as an opportunity to express that they are a part of these wins.

Reporting

Some funders have waived some or all reporting requirements in response to grantee needs, but this is not true across the board. Though reporting may feel burdensome or unnecessary, it can also be viewed as an opportunity to solidify your story about the achievements of your programming and the impact on your community. Grants provide a framework for reflection on the efficacy of your work - if you do not have an evaluation plan for your programs, it's not a bad thing to put some thought into how you assess whether your program is achieving its goals. Whatever the requirements of the funder, **have confidence in how *you* define success for your organization** and make a case for that framework.

Thank you to our Panelists!

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Questions and Answers

1. **What are some suggestions for tools that help to identify ways to quantify impact?**
 - a. You define success for your organization. It's important that you - outside of a grantmaker's framework - determine how to assess that. Some commonly used metrics include pre-/post surveys from participants, staff observations, testimonials, year-over-year retention, # of people served, etc. When you write a grant, you make the case for the methodology that makes the most sense for your programs. Small organizations are not expected to implement a rigorous, sophisticated research methodology - but you need to feel confident in how you define success so that you can better serve your community, not just secure grants.
2. **Is it appropriate to include a grant writing budget or grant writing fees inside a program budget within a grant application?**
 - a. Operational costs can be included in a program budget so long as the funder does not say otherwise. You may want to include grant writing fees as part of this overall budget line (indirect costs) rather than having a budget line specifically for grant writing fees.

3. **Any insights on funding cycles: best times of year to look for grants, apply, when funders looking to disperse, opportunities in terms of timing to be aware of, etc.**
 - a. Every funder is different. Grant application cycles are open at different times throughout the year. Some foundation trustees meet once a year, some meet quarterly. There's no real way to plan in this way. It's best to create a year-long plan that includes an upfront investment in prospect research if you've never done it to see where relevant deadlines might fall; then to plan your capacity accordingly.

4. **What should we know about confidentiality issues in working with a contractor?**
 - a. You can include a confidentiality clause in a contract; contractors need all the information possible to do their jobs well. If you restrict their access, you restrict their ability to do strong work.

5. **How many hours should your budget for a consultant to apply for a grant on your behalf?**
 - a. Every grant is different; it's difficult to say. Some will be simple, and some will take a lot of capacity and decision-making. Rather than think about time spent on a single grant, it's more useful to look at what your goals are overall for your grant needs and to get a sense from a contractor how much that would cost then go from there. If you have a budget for this work, you could also start there, and a contractor can share what they can do for that amount.

6. **How do you screen for the right grant writer for your organization?**

Approach this the same way you would hiring for any other staff positions. You look at their experience, the types of orgs they've worked with, and whether they feel like a culture fit. You can ask for a writing sample. Grant writers are busy so they will also be looking at if you're a good fit for them.

It's important to have the right expectations for grant writers. They are not magicians. They are capacity builders. If you expect a contract grant writer to meet impossible fundraising goals all on their own, they won't be interested in working with you. Fundraising is a team sport.