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## FUNDING RESOURCES

# Effective Grant Writing

## How to get what you need

by Deborah Ward

As we all know, school budgets today are getting tighter and tighter. Pursuing grants is becoming less of a choice and more of a necessity. If you are planning to pursue funding for foreign language acquisition, you may find that the following information about common grant-writing mistakes will save you time and effort securing these funds.

The key point to remember when applying for grants is to leave a reasonable amount of time to develop your project and to write your proposal. If you do, many of the following mistakes can be avoided. As you might suspect, many of us do not do our best work when we are under a short deadline and scrambling for information.

### **The project doesn't match the funder's interests.**

As you conduct research to identify potential grant opportunities, you must be sure that your project idea closely matches the funder's interests. If it does not, save time and effort and move on to the next opportunity. Do not expect funders to change their interests because you have a great project idea. When possible, contact a program officer and discuss your project before you even start to write the proposal.

### **The writer ignores the instructions.**

Every funder has specific rules and directions about how to write and submit a proposal. If you want your proposal to be read and considered for funding, read the instructions and follow them carefully. Any violation of the instructions can be cause for your proposal to be disqualified.

### **The writing isn't succinct**

This results in a proposal that is confusing and just doesn't make sense. Be especially cautious of this when several individuals are writing proposal sections. You cannot just put them together and send them in as a completed proposal. One person should have the responsibility of putting the entire proposal together and making sure that it sounds like it is written in "one voice."

### **The focus of the project is not on students.**

Keep in mind that funders are interested in projects that have an impact. Education grants should focus on meeting student and/or teacher needs. Usually, this will mean an improvement in student achievement – by improving existing skills or acquiring new ones. Technology should be the tool that you use to do this and you should support your choice of technology with hard data. Make every effort to have a curriculum expert work with a technology expert in putting together a project so the academic needs of students are balanced with the use of technology.

### **No need for the project has been established.**

I see this happen frequently. Instead of using data to support a needs (or problem) statement, the writer says "we want to do this," rather than sharing a sense of urgency and saying "we must do this for the following reasons." For foreign language acquisition grants, you must make the "case" for why it is so important for your students to learn another language. How can doing so benefit them? The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has some good resources for this information at [cal.org/resources/onlineResources.html](http://cal.org/resources/onlineResources.html). Try to tie your project to your state and/or national standards in foreign language when possible. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) outlines the national standards at [actfl.org](http://actfl.org). Additionally, a 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages can be resourced at The Partnership for 21st Century Skills at [p21.org](http://p21.org).

### **The proposal contains typographical and/or grammatical errors.**

Never rely solely on spellcheck! I once reviewed a proposal that contained the following sentence: "This project will become a curse at the high school." Was the writer being humorous? I think the word should have been "course" and the sentence did make me laugh! Keep in mind the subtle message that is sent to a funder when they receive a proposal that contains many mistakes.

## The budget and the narrative do not match.

The budget should be a numeric representation of your methodology (activities) and personnel section. Do not surprise reviewers and have expenses listed that have not been discussed in the narrative portion of the proposal. People often forget to describe the technology they need in the narrative section but place the cost in the budget. Another common mistake is to forget to include all personnel expenses in the budget. Reviewers might decide not to fund any unexplained expenses listed in the budget, which will reduce the amount of your award.

## Objectives are vague and open to individual interpretation.

Your objectives should always be specific and measurable and will correlate to your evaluation activities. For example, "Students will learn French" is too vague. You need to specify how many students and at what level will they be performing within a certain time period. Look at samples of funded grants (many can be found by typing in "funded proposals" in a search engine like Google) and study the specificity of the objectives. Keep the number of objectives manageable during a one-year project.

## The proposal contains buzzwords and acronyms.

The proposal reviewers may know nothing about foreign language education. Do not assume that you can use buzzwords that everyone will immediately recognize. The first time you use an acronym, be sure to spell it out and take care not to have a narrative full of different acronyms--it might be hard to keep them all straight!

## The proposal was hastily assembled.

In most cases, reviewers can easily spot proposals that were put together at the last minute--the narrative is confusing and choppy, the budget does not add up, and in the worst-case scenario, items are missing. Always leave plenty of time to work on a proposal, especially if other people will also be working with you to put one together. Be sure to have someone outside the field of education review the proposal and make comments before submission.

## Funding and Grant Writing Resources

- *E-School News On-Line K-20 Technology Solutions Center*  
An on-line database of technology grants.  
[www.eschoolnews.com/funding/](http://www.eschoolnews.com/funding/)
- *The Foundation Center*  
An independent nonprofit information clearinghouse on grants available throughout the United States  
<http://foundationcenter.org>
- *The Edward E. Ford Foundation*  
A funding source for secondary private schools.  
[www.eeford.org](http://www.eeford.org)
- *Grants.gov*  
An online source to find and apply for competitive federal grants.  
<http://grants.gov/>
- *Technology Grant News*  
Publishes a subscription-based newsletter covering the latest available technology grants.  
<http://www.technologygrantnews.com/technology-funding.html>
- *The NEA Foundation*  
An independent, public charity supported by contributions from educators, corporate sponsors, and others; partnering with education unions, districts, and communities to create powerful, sustainable improvements in teaching and learning.  
<http://www.neafoundation.org/>
- *Levenson, Stanley. (2002). How to Get Grants and Gifts for the Public Schools. Allyn & Bacon.*

"Also consider contacting local community foundations, service organizations and businesses in your area, or your state department of education, which may provide school site-based grants in support of educational technology." (edutopia.org)

### About the Author:

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