



Top Tips from JVA Grantwriters

JVA CONSULTING, LLC

partners in community and social change

In the last three years, JVA Consulting has raised over \$100 million in grant funding for our clients. Here are some of our grantwriters' top tips for grantwriting.

On demonstrating the impact of your work...

Funders are looking for impact for their investment. Use the accomplishments section to show them why your organization is the best investment: present concrete findings about results, and make sure that those results are directly related to addressing the problem that you have identified. Similarly, having clear goals with defined, measurable objectives and an evaluation plan to gauge accomplishment of those objectives shows funders that you have thought through your program and how you will spend the funder's money. You are drawing the line between the donor's desire to help and the tangible results that will occur as a result of the donor's generosity.

On sticking to your mission...

Don't change your work to fit a donor's interests. Focus on building strong programs to achieve your mission, and then seek out funding partners to bring your vision to fruition. You can't be the best at all things to all funders; strive to be the very best in delivering your program or services to your community. Your record of achievement and impact will be far more appealing to donors.

On showing why your organization should be funded...

- It's not enough to convince the funder that you've got a great program; you've got to convince the funder that you're the right agency/staff to run the program. This means making sure that staff is well-qualified, well-trained and culturally competent, and that you've got the accounting systems in place to give the funder confidence that the grant will be well-spent.
- Conduct a thorough impact evaluation and take the results seriously. Make sure that you know why your program works (or doesn't) and let that information guide your decisions about how to better serve your constituency.
- Your agency needs to develop a strategic plan that will help ensure long-term financial sustainability with decreasing reliance on grants to fund program and operating support. Think creatively about how your agency can raise income through earned income and better individual donor retention. It's easier to keep a donor than replace one. Does your agency really show appreciation to each donor—in a way that will matter to him/her?

On making the needs section compelling...

Weave stories, statistics and pertinent research in your needs section. Include statistics that you obtain through your own organizations' research or research from other sources (institutions, schools, major research studies).

On writing a tight narrative...

Before writing, think of it as a puzzle. You want to put the pieces together tightly so they flow for a seamless picture. As reference, complete a logic model. Using the same piece of paper that the logic model is written on, write one interesting, emotionally gripping sentence about the organization's history and a second interesting sentence that demonstrates how a client's life was changed. Determine where you can slide these more flowery sentences into the tight puzzle. This is the glitter which will stick out.

About polishing your narrative...

After writing the narrative, give yourself at least one night to let it sit. The next morning, re-read the text and make changes. Proof a final time before assembling.

On tailoring your proposal for different grantmakers...

Always customize, never use the same proposal for different opportunities. Insert the funder's language and keywords, and mention successes that are important to the funder. It shouldn't sound canned.

On financials...

Financial statements should be prepared by the CFO or another finance person. No matter how good your proposal is, some foundations may reject your proposal entirely if these are not accurate or done properly.

On the importance of building relationships...

Your proposal is only as good as the homework you do before and after: doing solid funding research, creating a relationship with the funder, calling to follow up with your application, cultivating the funder. Your proposal then stands out because your grant application isn't just a piece of paper, it is a demonstration of a relationship.

On the "look and feel" of a proposal...

I think that visual affect goes a long way: using headings and subheadings, bulleted lists, and other tools for breaking up the page visually and leading the reader through the proposal.

A few last words...

- In each section of your proposal, think in terms of your "unique selling point" to differentiate yourself from any other groups.
- Always craft your proposal's narrative from the perspective of how you can help your constituents, rather than how much your organization needs help.
- Always keep the theme of your request central to every component of the proposal.
- Remember that your reader may be reading hundreds of proposals. Tell a clear, concise and passionate story. Help your reader to picture exactly how you are going to accomplish what you propose to do.