

Words Have Power

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Words have power. Your message to all grant makers must be clear, concise and compelling. Your grant applications will have a much higher chance of success if your applications and all supporting documents are well-written and organized. The following are some tips for writing the best grant applications.

1. **Organize your thoughts in a logical sequence.** Of course, you must follow the sequence of questions and all criteria set forth in any application. However, if your application takes the form of a narrative or initial letter, then you should structure your message in a way that flows logically. Use headings and subheadings to reinforce this. Explain to the reader who you are, what you are asking, why you are asking and how you intend to implement the grant.
2. **Use short and direct language.** If you can edit a 20-word sentence down to 5 words that make your point, all the better. Use active verbs. Avoid the passive tense. Consult writing manuals for tips on clean and crisp language.
3. **Use professional language** (not slang or contractions; such as “do not” rather than “don’t”). However, do avoid legalese or “governmental-ese.” These kinds of words may sound impressive, but they are not. They generally are weak and use space without having any real meaning. Your words should stand out. They should be full of meaning and have impact.
4. **Answer the questions asked.** Be responsive. Be direct. Most grant applications suffer because the writer fails to address squarely the precise question asked. If you are not sure how to answer the question directly and responsively seek advice. Do not fake it!
5. **Check your spelling and grammar carefully.** If a grant application has careless errors in typing or grammar your reader will lose confidence. Do use your computer tools for checking spelling and grammar, BUT ALSO read through your own application several times to check for errors. Also, it is always a good idea to get another person to read your application for a “fresh set of eyes” that may catch errors that you might have missed.
6. **Make your request for grant money clear and detailed.** Do not be shy or try to skirt the subject by giving vague answers or open-ended requests. The grant maker must have clarity in what grant money you are seeking – to the dollar if possible. Be confident and direct. Provide a detailed budget or set of estimates if possible, even if the funding amounts are “subject to” further analysis or development.

- 7. Make sure that your application and supporting documents “fit” the grant maker’s mission and scope of allowable funding.** Incorporate the words and concepts used by the grant maker in their application guidelines and background material to show how your request for grant funding precisely meets the grant maker’s goals and requirements.

Ann Kayman is the Chief Executive Officer of New York Grant Company; www.nygrants.com. Ann, along with her team, navigates through government grants and incentive programs as a private consulting firm.