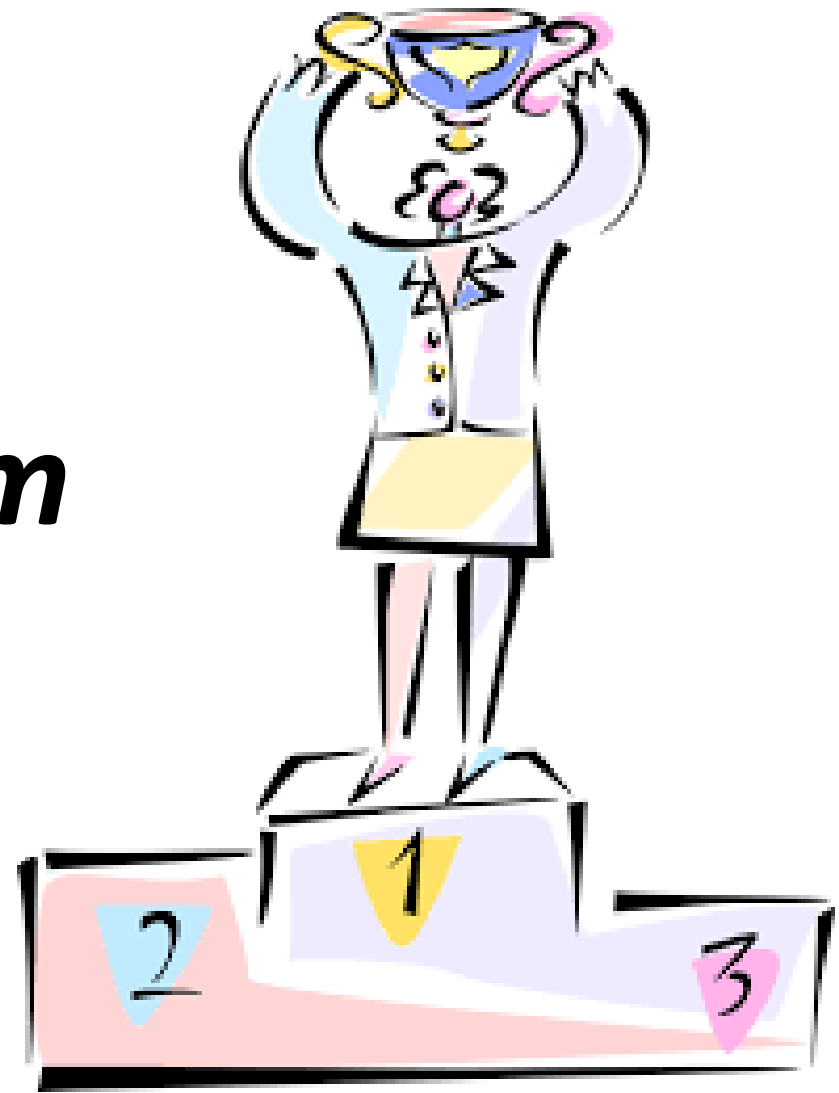


Going for the Gold! ***Nuggets of*** ***Grant Writing Wisdom***

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Successful grant writing is a combination of:

- Art (good writing)
- Science (good data)
- Luck (good fortune)



While I don't have a map to the pot of gold, I will share 20 nuggets of grant writing wisdom I acquired during the past 23 years that can help tip the odds of winning in your favor.





Nugget #1: Read and re-read (and re-read) the grant announcement and guidelines.

- Use highlighters, Post-It notes, flags, etc. to gain a full understanding of a grant's purpose and application process.
- Study the application website (if available), watch webinars, read FAQs and scoring rubrics, and correspond with the Program Officer if you have questions.
- Create a synopsis or outline to share with your team or Board.
- Revisit the guidelines and website throughout the grant writing process to remain on track.



Nugget #2: Determine whether your organization is eligible to apply for a grant.

Funders will specify the types of organizations that can apply:

- Nonprofit with 501(c)(3) status
- Governmental
- Educational
- Faith-based
- For-profit
- Geographically restricted
- Specific target population
- Annual budget/financial capacity



Nugget #3: Only pursue grants that are a good fit for your organization's mission and needs.

- Does your mission align with the purpose of the grant?
- Can grant funds be used to address the needs of your organization and its clients?
- Is the amount of funding enough to complete the project?
- When will funds be available?
- Is the performance period long enough to complete the project?
- Is matching required (cash or in-kind)?



Nugget #4: Consider your organization's capacity to apply for and manage the proposed project.

- Can you complete the application by the deadline?
- Do you have the resources to hire a grant writer if needed?
- Do you currently have the personnel to manage the grant if awarded, or can they be hired with grant funds?
- Do you currently have the resources needed to conduct the project, or can these be funded through the grant?
- How will you sustain the project after funding ends?



Nugget #5: Verify access and credentials early in the application process.

- Is your 501(c)(3) status current? Check your status at the following link: <https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/>.
- Does the grant require SAM registration? Register or check on SAM status at <https://sam.gov/>.
- Can you access the funder's online application platform?
- If leadership has changed, have passwords been shared or updated?



Nugget #6: Create a plan for preparing and submitting the grant application.

- Assign roles to members of your organization, including the person who will be responsible for ensuring completion and submission of the application.
- Hire an external grant writer if needed and determine how they will assist your internal team with the application process.
- Establish a timeline for preparing the application, including presentation to your Board and/or partners before submission if required.



Nugget #7: Make yourself known to the funder to the extent possible.

- While some funders limit or prohibit contact during the application process, demonstrate your interest by attending webinars and asking appropriate questions when permitted.
- Some foundations use a multi-step process that can include interviews or meetings before they invite an application.
- All communication with a potential funder can become a factor in an award decision so craft questions and correspondence with care and thoughtfulness.



Nugget #8: Funders talk to each other so keep all communication positive and professional.

- Use grant applications as opportunities to tell your story and cultivate relationships with funders.
- Invest care in every application, regardless of grant amount, as you are building a reputation and demonstrating capacity.
- If you request feedback when denied funding, politely ask for constructive criticism and avoid complaining or negativity.
- If awarded, meet all reporting deadlines and accommodate the funder's requests for meetings, site visits, and documentation.



Nugget #9: Use data to help describe the needs of your organization and clients.

- All grant proposals require applicants to describe the need or problem their project will address. This section is often called a Needs Assessment or Statement of Need.
- A Needs Assessment written in general terms, by a human or AI, is not compelling and will not be well-regarded by reviewers.
- Needs Assessments lacking data also suggest an applicant may not have verified the current level of need, which makes it difficult to measure the impact of a grant-funded project.

Statement of need without data:

Eastern North Carolina is a very large, rural area with persistent healthcare workforce shortages. Every year, hospitals in the region must hire hundreds of RNs, LPNs, and CNAs to meet demand.

Statement of need with data:

The 23 North Carolina counties served by the Eastern Area Health Education Center (AHEC) comprise an area nearly as large as Maryland and Delaware combined, with 17 of the counties classified as rural. According to a 2025 analysis by the NC Health Talent Alliance, this region must annually graduate and place 570 RNs, 130 LPNs, 850 CNAs, and 250 MAs, with supply deficits and high churn rates that create challenges for employers.

Statement of need without data:

Hispanic or Latino adults in the US were the most likely population group to report their health was fair or poor in 2024. This same group, however, reported the lowest number of days per month on which they had poor mental health (KFF.org).

Statement of need with data:

Among Hispanic or Latino adults in the US, 26.2% reported their health was fair or poor in 2024, compared to 19.4% of all adults. This same group, however, reported only three days per month on which they had poor mental health, compared to 4.9 days for all US adults. (KFF.org).

Where to find data about your community or your cause



US Census Bureau: [US Census Bureau: https://data.census.gov/](https://data.census.gov/)



State Library of North Carolina: [Community Data Resources | SLNC \(ncdcr.gov\)](#)



US Dept. of Agriculture: [USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service - Census of Agriculture](#)



Kaiser Family Foundation: <http://kff.org/statedata>



NC Child: <https://ncchild.org/>



National Center for Children in Poverty: <https://www.nccp.org/early-childhood/?state=NC>



Center for Immigration Studies: [Immigration Data Portal](#)



FBI Crime Data Explorer:
<https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home>



ALICE NC income data: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview-mobile/north-carolina>



Feeding America:
<https://map.feedingamerica.org/district/2023/overall/north-carolina>



Nugget #10: Never describe your organization as desperate or failing.

- Funders typically regard grants as investments, not gifts, and few are willing to invest in a failing organization without the capacity to fulfill its mission or execute the proposed project.
- Be respectful but do not sound like you are begging or pleading.
- Balance statements of need with descriptions of your organization's strengths and capacity.
- Assure potential funders that despite challenges and needs, your organization is strong and is poised to turn a corner, rise up, or move forward with its assistance.



Nugget #11: Match the tone of your writing with the culture of the funder.

- Grant proposals to national organizations, corporations, or government agencies should be written more formally, using 3rd person (the organization, it, they, their) rather than 1st person (we, us, our).
- Grant proposals to local or community funders can be more personal, using 1st person to show collaboration and partnership. Avoid the use of “I,” as you are representing an organization rather than yourself.



Nugget #12: The higher the stakes, the higher the standards.

- An organization's ability to follow directions during the application process can be viewed as an indication of its capacity to successfully manage the project if funded.
- Attention to detail in the application including spelling, grammar, font, and spacing suggests that the organization is diligent and capable.
- Obvious and/or overuse of AI-generated text that restates generalities and is not specific to the project can diminish credibility.
- Inclusion of unverified data or information can discredit or disqualify a funding application if a funder fact-checks your data.



Nugget #13: Begin with the end in mind: Incorporate data collection into all activities.

- Every activity should generate data regarding implementation and/or impact, which will be monitored throughout the project.
- Don't wait until the end of a project to evaluate whether it accomplished its goals. Make mid-course corrections as needed.
- Clearly explain this approach in the project design and evaluation sections to convince reviewers that you are committed to measuring the impact of the project and their funds.
- Use data collected from the project to support future funding requests.



Nugget #14: Align the budget with the project narrative.

- Every item in the budget should be described in the narrative.
- Every expense referenced in the narrative should be included in the budget.
- Reviewers should be able to figure out what the project entails by reading the budget and budget narrative.
- Do not include disqualified items in the budget or exceed caps on specified categories.



Nugget #15: Record all volunteer hours to meet in-kind matching requirements.

- The value of volunteer labor contributed to your organization can often be used as an “in-kind” match when matching is required in a grant application.
- The cash value of volunteer labor is annually updated at the following website: <https://independentsector.org/blog/new-value-of-volunteer-time-2025-released/>
- Create a sign-in process for meetings, work sites, and events, or use online or app-based tools to enable volunteers to record the hours they contribute.
- Compile volunteer hours regularly and use this information in grant applications and promotional materials.



Nugget #16: Partnerships can multiply both risk and reward.

- Funders want to know that organizations are working together to avoid duplication and increase their impact in a community.
- Only one organization can serve as fiscal agent for a grant and the procedures for managing funds should be established during the application process.
- Develop an agreement that outlines the roles and responsibilities of partners and consider binding the agreement legally to protect all partners.
- Consider back-up arrangements and/or sanctions if partners violate the agreement or abandon the project.



Nugget #17: Letters of support should include more than praise and encouragement.

- “Boilerplate” letters of support that praise the applicant and all sound alike do not increase the value of a grant application.
- A strong letter of support includes specific ways the supporting organization will contribute to the project.
- Quality is more important than quantity.
- If more than one partner is contributing the same type of support to a project, consider submitting one letter that is signed by multiple organizations.



Nugget #18: It is better to ask permission than seek forgiveness when handling money.

- A grant agreement is a legal contract that commits the organization to spend funds and conduct activities as described in the grant proposal.
- The applicant/fiscal agent organization is legally responsible for overseeing all aspects of the project, including activities assigned to partners and staff.
- Grant funds must be spent as stated in the approved budget and changes must be made according to the funder's rules and procedures.
- Segregate funds from each grant within your accounting system so the use of funds from every grant can be reported separately.



Nugget #19: Where to find grants: Free and fee-based grant databases

Free Grant Databases

Candid (formerly Foundation Center) Newsletters: <https://candid.org/stay-up-to-date/newsletters>

Federal Grant Newsletters & Notifications:

<https://www.grants.gov/connect/manage-subscriptions.html>

GrantWatch GrantNews: <https://www.grantwatch.com/grants-for-nonprofits>



Nugget #19: Free and fee-based grant databases

Fee-Based Grant Databases

Foundation Search (\$35-\$125/month): <http://www.foundationsearch.com/>

Foundation Directory Online (\$133-\$220/month - \$1,600/year)

<https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/>

Grant Station (\$699/year): <https://grantstation.com/>

Instrument1 (\$179 - \$499/month, free 14-day trial):

<https://www.instrument1.com/>



Nugget #20: Foundations with funding for Hispanic/Latino and immigrant-related causes

- Vilcek Foundation: <https://vilcek.org/grants/>
- National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures: <https://www.nalac.org/about/>
- South Arts, Inc.: <https://www.southarts.org/grants-opportunities/cultural-sustainability>
- Until She's Free Fund: <https://cjifund.org/until-shes-free/>
- Aaron Sanchez Impact Fund: <https://www.aaronsanchezimpactfund.com/grants>
- Confluence Grant Program: <https://conservationalliance.com/confluence/>
- SPF: The Discretionary Fund Grant:
<https://southernpartnersfund.org/application-process/>
- Synod of Mid-Atlantic: <https://www.synatlantic.org/grants>

- State-Level Systemic Change Grant: <https://zsr.org/grant/state-level-systemic-change/>
- NEO Action Fund: <https://neoactionfund.org/#grants>
- Reboot Representation Grant: <https://rebootrepresentation.org/grant-eligibility-quiz/>
- H.C. Gemmer family Christian Foundation Grant: <https://gemmerfoundation.org/application-process/>
- Brave Actions for a Better World Grant: <https://braveactions.italianonprofit.it/>
- FAWCO Foundation: Development Grants: <https://www.fawcofoundation.org/programs/development-grants>
- CareQuest Emergent & Relief Fund: <https://carequest.org/grants-overview/>
- AJMMI: Social Justice Fund Grant: <https://ajmste.org/apply/organizing-grants>
- PCC Rapid Response Grants: <https://popcollab.org/grantmaking/rapid-response-grants/>