

"Dos" and "Don'ts" for Writing Successful Grant Applications

Preparing to Apply

Do:

- Register for Grants.gov and SAM.gov as soon as you are confident you will apply.
- Read the funding announcement carefully for: application format, budget limits, duration, due date, focus.
- Review the associated website for detailed instructions and helpful info.
- Pay attention to reviewer evaluation criteria to make sure your project fits.

Don't:

- Wait until the due date to submit your application.
- Wait to identify key people/ institutions and their roles.
- Wait to communicate with the program officer regarding your project if you have questions after reading the announcement.
- Submit an application written for another agency or announcement.

Components of the Application – The Project

Do:

- Design measurable objectives that relate to the funding announcement.
- Organize your application logically as it relates to the reviewer evaluation criteria.
- Relate your project to the mission of the agency.
- Demonstrate the need for your project and why YOUR approach is appropriate (include a strong rationale for the project *approach*, as well as topic).
- Identify the target audience.
- Discuss how results of project will be shared, outreach or dissemination plan.
- Align timelines and milestones with the project description text.
- Have someone who is not involved in the project proofread the application for clarity and proper grammar.
- Include literature citations.
- Incorporate NOAA assets, as appropriate.

Don't:

- Ignore significant requirements of the funding announcement.
- Fail to identify your project's audience(s) up front.
- Use inappropriate methods to engage target audiences.
- Ignore underserved/under-represented populations.
- Forget to leverage your past successes.
- Ignore sustainability of project after the duration of the grant.
- Forget to reference letters of commitment in application text.
- Include web page URLs that don't work.
- Use too many acronyms.
- Waste space on poor images or try to save space by bulleting everything.

Components of the Application– Project Evaluation

Do:

- Identify your evaluator and include them in the application writing team.
- Use specific and appropriate approaches to project evaluation.
- Provide the questions that the evaluation will address.
- Include evaluation data from previous efforts (qualitative and quantitative).
- Use a logic model, if requested.

Don't:

- Provide a two-sentence general description of the evaluation.
- Think reviewers will be impressed by broad outcomes that the evaluation is not assessing.
- Forget to include the evaluation's cost in the project budget.
- Underestimate the cost of conducting a project evaluation.

Components of the Application– The Budget

Do:

- Make sure it is within the required range.
- Make sure your math is correct.
- Look at where your money is allocated and what this says about the project.
- Provide clearly delineated description of costs, use cost categories.
- Use a budget template or model.

Don't:

- Apply for the exact full amount allowed unless your project needs it (i.e., don't add extraneous equipment, supplies, or activities to "pad" your budget).
- Ignore costs for interns and teachers.
- Ignore administrative costs.
- Cite an indirect cost rate without providing appropriate documentation.

Other Project Issues

Do:

- If you are developing instructional materials, make sure your efforts are not redundant with other products.
- If you are expanding an existing program, state the new target areas and criteria for expansion.
- If developing a website, state who will maintain it and how it will be evaluated and marketed.
- Be sure to include adequate description of personnel qualifications (CVs or resumes) and organizational capacity to do the work being proposed.
- Include letters of support/commitment that demonstrate partners' involvement.

Don't:

- Underestimate the time and resources involved in creating a new curriculum.
- Assume building a website means people will use it.
- Include general letters of endorsement from prior participants, members of Congress or other civic leaders (i.e., from non-partners).
- Include letters of support/commitment that all have the same boilerplate text.

Additional Guidance

Do:

- Address comments from the pre-application (if pre-applications were required).
- Be specific in describing your project activities.
- Remember the primary readers are external reviewers and not NOAA staff (so you may need to explain NOAA assets in more detail).
- Volunteer to serve as a reviewer.
- If application reviews well, consider revising and resubmitting.

Don't:

- Assume the reviewers already know your organization's or the PI's qualifications.
- Believe all excellent projects will receive funding.
- Be overconfident.
- Be afraid to talk to the program officer for input.

Additional Information

NOAA's Environmental Literacy Program: www.noaa.gov/office-education/elp

NOAA's B-WET Program: www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet

Program Contact Information

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