

10 Essential Rules For Successful **Grant Writing**

Get the money your non-profit
organization needs.



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To my family, who helped me so much along the way:

My son Bill, who pushed this to completion with his design and media talent.

My son James, for giving me the inspiration to turn my knowledge and experience into a book.

My wife Gwen, for her amazing editing abilities.

My son Joe, for his enduring support and comic relief.

Material in this booklet is comprised from more than 30 years' experience as a program manager, officer and funding agent. However, I found some information posted on the internet and presumed public domain sources to build on my own experience. I have edited these materials to fit within my own experience and I thank all contributors. Additional materials were gleaned from program solicitation calls from various funders. I have edited these to suite the purposes of this book.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last 35 years, in my quest to help organizations gain access to financial support, I recognized a growing need for a practical workbook dedicated to the process of writing grants and proposals. I felt that such a guide would help people succeed in creating their own project proposals.

This need became even more evident when I started teaching classes on the subject at a Professional Development College at my local university. My students came from a wide variety of backgrounds: municipal administration, arts groups, community organizations, and even university staff interested in developing their own proposals. These individuals had great ideas and were supporting worthwhile causes – they just didn't know how to create project proposals that would get the financial results they needed to move ahead.

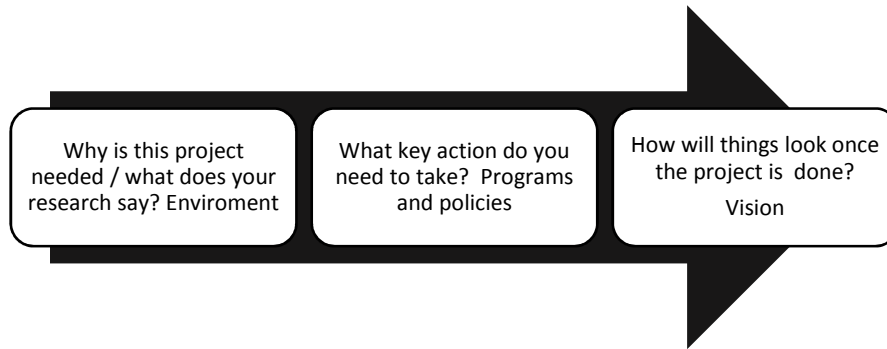
With this in mind, I developed 10 basic rules on how to create effective proposals. In developing these rules I have tried to organize the material so you can take any chapter and work on a particular area you may be having problems with. For example if you are in the early development stage of your proposal, chapters 1 to 7 provide the core elements starting with chapter one which is developing your basic project idea. The core idea is the starting point to building your proposal.

Chapters 8 through 10 help you finalize your proposal with the final chapter guiding you on how you can be successful in working with the funder. This is especially critical if you want to continue that relationship.

The appendix area has some templates to help you present your proposal.



RULE # 1: THINK STRATEGICALLY! See the end in your mind.



Strategy is about seeing, thinking and acting

“In my career I have seen a good many grant proposals. It was always amazing to see the stark contrast between those writers who took the time to formulate a strategy, and those who did not. This seemingly obvious upfront task was missed time and time again. But those that had it... they always caught my eye. What really grabbed me was they knew, what I was in the market place to buy, and they had a strategy I thought worked perfectly. They had a clear vision of success!”

Here are the key questions to ask yourself “on day one” of writing your proposal.

1. Do I know what the funder is really buying in the market place? Is it fighting racism, increasing literacy rates in poor areas, or supporting artists?
2. What change do they want? Less discrimination in the workplace, higher reading rates or new emerging artists?
3. Next do I have a Clear Picture in mind of the Change I want to make? What does my vision of success look like to me? How does it feel, look and act.
4. Finally does my Vision/picture of success match the funder’s picture?

To paint this picture let’s review two basic concepts I will use a lot – the concepts of need and strategy.

What is a Need?

All programs are built around an identifiable need. To be successful you have to be clear about the difference you are trying to make. Simply said, what is the problem, or social pain in a community or in society? This is the need.

(For instance - there is a need to fix literacy for inner city youth, or reduce car thefts, or address a high incidence of school dropouts.)

The underlying causes of addressing the need are revealed by your research. Research helps you understand how the need presents itself, and it helps you articulate clearly what it is! Finally,

research tells you what is happening and gives you clues about the actions you will want to take to address the need. These are the first steps in the beginning of your strategy.

What is a Strategy?

Strategy is a series of actions or steps designed to produce our end result. There is a saying “begin with the end in mind”. However your efforts only work after good research has been done. Research points the way to the actions you need to take.

For example -- You see yourself as out of shape, so you form a strategy to get into shape. To meet this strategy you will have several actions which might include going to the gym, eating less or riding a bike to work. You also define what being in good shape means. You see it as reality your vision.

Strategy answers the following questions:

- ➔ What change do you want to see in the end? What does success look like to you- being in good shape? The end in mind your vision.
- ➔ Where are you doing this project?
- ➔ Who are you doing this project with?
- ➔ How are you going to do this?
- ➔ What tools or resources do you need to make this happen?

In starting your grant writing process we begin with four questions.

Strategy also looks at what kinds of tools or resources are needed in order to support or facilitate your actions -- in the example above it may include purchasing a gym membership, having a working bike, or perhaps accessing dietary resources. As well, Strategy takes the information our research has developed pointing out current weaknesses, and possible opportunities we can exploit.

Here they are:

1. Why this project? What need are you trying to address? What is your vision of success?

Example: Teen literacy: we have found in our research that in the eastside of Potterville schools have been reporting teens with reading levels well below grade 8. This is impeding their success towards high school graduation. We need to fix this low reading problem. Why, because teens in Potterville won't succeed.

2. What is your overall strategy? Who are you working with, where, when, and how are you doing it?

Example: In our research, we have found that our core strategic idea of making reading fun is key to our success. We also found that having other teens show how much fun reading can be attracts teens with low reading skills and makes them feel safe to increase their skill level. Our strategy idea is peer-to-peer learning.

3. What are the key actions and tools you will use in the strategy to trigger the change you want? How are you going to make this project work?

Example: In our research we have found that youth projects are most successful when peer-to-peer processes are engaged. So our plan will be to engage teens who are keen readers, and in turn have those teens show teens with low reading skills cool free books and share some reading time. Our research shows this is best done in places where teens gather for social activities such as, local malls, and virtually.

We have learned that our teen leaders need to be trained in peer-to-peer learning skills. We will also develop some inviting language and some diagnostic skills to help the teen mentors.

4. What change is the funder trying to buy in the market place, what difference are they trying to trigger by their program? How does your idea line up to make that change occur?

This is a good time to ask yourself if your organization is a good fit for the grant, before you invest a lot of time applying.

Example: A funding agency has a program to eliminate low literacy rates. They believe low literacy rates lead to increased crime. In the above example our action is to demonstrate that reading is cool. The way we do this is to develop teen role models to help other teens have fun reading. By developing our project along these lines we have now partnered with their strategy.

Let's talk more about this concept. Strategy is the path to your vision. What is a vision? I would describe it as the picture you paint in your mind of what success looks like after you finished your project. In this case, your vision is teens with no literacy problems, and successful in life.

Elements of a Good Strategy

A well-planned strategy has all the necessary steps/methods, and resources laid out in an orderly fashion. It also has a strong research component. It has a clear vision of success.

Example: We have role model teens that like reading and find it fun and relate well to their peers. We have a mall that will let us set up a reading camp. We have a bookstore who will give us cool books; we advertise our event using posters, Facebook etc. in places where teens might see our promo stuff. We make the environment fun, non-judgmental and so on. In the end, our strategy has resources, people, materials and a high traffic attractive place, and qualified participants who take well defined actions with a key target group. Then we design our promotional

materials in such a way, that teens with low reading skills feel safe, comfortable and attracted to us. Finally we have skilled project managers and resource people who follow a method/path that encourages reading. Finally we have a clear picture of success Teens with reading problems telling us they are reading well.

This is our method/path, now we field test it to see if it works and record those results. These form part of our proposal information.

Strategy is your path to success.

Strategy builds in contingencies for dealing with possible roadblocks, failures or barriers and allows for experimentation, failure, learning and a fresh start.

In the example above, you might find the books you choose are too corny, or the teens you have as role models are not right to attract our target audience, the mall has too low a traffic flow or our website is too complicated for low level readers. As each piece is reviewed, it is an opportunity to reassess ideas/actions and try others actions.

Where do you start? Assess the situation.

What key activities/methods and tools/resources would you need to move closer to realizing those big picture goals - the vision or the ideal future state of your project?

These are the core elements in building your strategy.

- ➔ Think about what is missing. In addition to your own instinct, this is generated from solid research that identifies the need you want to overcome.
- ➔ Then, look at what obstacles, challenges and barriers that you may be facing. These may include a lack of resources, a skill in an area that is hard to find, or resistance within the target area, because of failures in the past and so on.
- ➔ To think strategically consider how things could be, and the difference you want to make. Consider innovative ideas and new ways of doing things. Get input on your ideas from as many of your strategic partners as possible, and finally test out some of your ideas to see if they have promise. These processes focus on the need, which is why you want to do this project.
- ➔ Finally, develop the individual action steps to get you to your goal.
- ➔ Actions trigger the change you want to see. The interconnection of actions creates the change cycle, triggering a new state of being, your vision.
- ➔ A final element to examine is your organization's values. Does your strategy line up with your organization's beliefs, and mission?

Funders are looking for a clear strategy to deal with their program need.

You need to help the funder fully understand how working with you will help them meet their program need. Be sure that you are clear about how you are going to be part of their successful approach. These dual elements -- your clear approach and demonstrating how you will help them succeed aligns your project for the funder's support.

All funding programs are designed to trigger a response, or create a change in a current situation that has a pressing need. For example, if the problem is "an increase in car theft by youth," how are you going to solve this?

Example: A funder may be looking to address why so many young men are unemployed in a certain area of the city. Your proposal could demonstrate how to deal with youth unemployment. You will want to ask yourself are there geographical or race issues at play here we need to address?

In some cases, funders have predetermined models/methodologies to solve a particular need. It is up to you to be sure you know if the funder has these, or if they are looking for you to demonstrate innovative new approaches.

Example: There is a great need to address homelessness. What kinds of alternatives are you presenting that could address homelessness in big urban areas? Don't be afraid to think outside the box by brainstorming with your partners!

You can gain valuable insight by talking directly to the funder. You can start by looking at their website, talking to past clients and reviewing past projects they have funded. We will talk more about funders in chapter 6 when we try to understand their program strategy.

Additional Thoughts



The key element in thinking strategically is to know what you want to ultimately achieve. Again what does success look like to you?

The key element in thinking strategically is to understand what you want to achieve ultimately- your vision. Then formulate the key actions that will trigger that result.

How to formulate the key actions that will trigger that result.

Example: Let's say you go for dinner with a friend who always leaves you with the bill. The next time you are planning to meet him for lunch you develop a strategy or plan in advance. You figure out what your meal will cost and bring only the amount of cash to cover your own meal. When the bill comes you put down your cash, and smile saying something like..."This should cover my half of the bill" and then leave.

The thing about all strategies is that you never quite know what will happen! You try to develop a plan that is so clear that you leave little room for any outcomes, other than the one you planned. In the above example, your friend will likely pick up his share of the bill – your intended outcome! However, you have to be prepared for the possibility that he didn't bring any cash and you might end up washing dishes. So where does that leave us.

Know you have only so much control over any given thing even if your strategy looks fool proof. Things can happen setting you off course. So why build a strategy because without it you are rudderless. In the spiritual world one can leave it to a higher power, in proposal writing you have to map out a strategy to get the funder's interest.



Exercises to get you going!

1. Describe the need that you are trying to address with your program. (We will talk more about need in the following chapter.)
2. Imagine what you want things to look like, when you are done with your project. In developing your vision keep your language consistent with the final picture. Try drawing a picture of your vision, including who stands to benefit from it. Answer the question - what does success look like? The more detail the better.
3. Articulate three key actions you need to take to make this vision come true.
4. What key challenges are you going to face? Try listing as many of them as you can.
5. Who can help you carry out the actions and minimize the challenges that you are facing? Politicians, school board, teachers, other professionals, and business, for example.
6. Where will this project happen?
7. What key changes (intended and unintended) will your actions trigger? Test them by sharing them with others.
8. Finally, how will you know that you have succeeded? What are your key measures of success?

Try filling in the framework below.

What did our research tells us?	What is our clearly defined need?	What key actions and resources do we need?	What change do we expect? Vison of success.