

Writing Winning Grants

Alan C. November
Copyright 2005

Writing Winning Grants

Welcome to the world of writing winning grants. For some the process can be an adventure filled with imagination, creativity, opportunities to meet new people and experiment with leading edge technologies. For others, grant writing is less exciting. Many educators feel that writing a grant proposal is a long and difficult process that, more often than not, isn't rewarded with funding.

Even if the grant is not initially funded, a well written grant can lead to support within the school system or may appeal to community support. A grant that involves the process of unifying people is "successful." The excitement of bringing people together to create coalitions, identify needs and develop solutions — steps you take when creating a grant proposal — can certainly be more important than only getting the money.

A grant that involves the process of unifying people is "successful."

This document is designed to lead you through the process of writing a grant from developing a winning attitude to fulfilling the technical requirements of the grant application.

Good luck! The money is out there and the skill is straight forward. Here's how to proceed.

Important Ideas to Keep in Mind

Here are a number of key “ideas” to keep in mind when developing your grant proposal.

Develop a Winning Attitude: Your Ideas Deserve the Money

Believe that your ideas are winners. Good ideas will be funded!!! This is no time to be shy or to hold back.

Write the Grant and Get It Out the Door

Lots of folks have good ideas. But, lots of folks may not realize how really good their ideas are. Do not worry about being rejected. In fact, look forward to it in the beginning. Good honest rejection can teach you a lot if you follow up with inquiries to the source about what you can do next time. Celebrate rejection in a professional way and you dramatically increase your chances of success next time.

Do Your Homework

Understand the audience’s point of view - the grant reader. Many grant writers find it helpful to write in the third person. In this way, you are not asking for the money for yourself but for others. Go to the library and pull the annual report of the corporation or foundation where you are applying and understand their philosophy and pattern of giving grants.

It Is Not Your Grant: The Funding Source Owns the Grant

Audience development is key to any good writing - especially grant writing. When possible attend grant writing workshops that are put on by the source and do not hesitate to call the grant source if you have questions.

Do Not Worry About Being Profound or Original

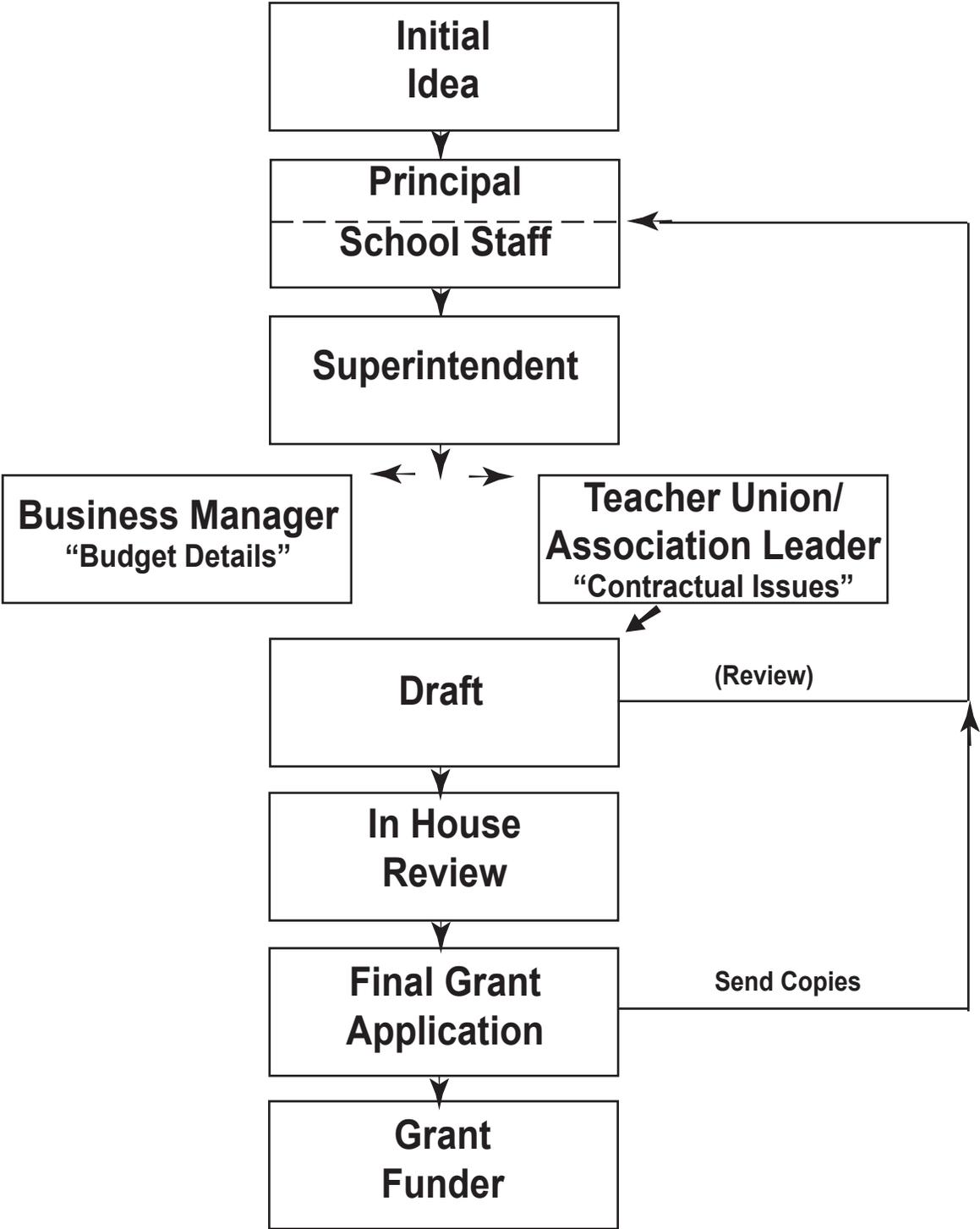
Borrow and adapt ideas early and often. Magazines, conferences, books and journals can have wonderful ideas about innovations. Some of the best sources of ideas are often found in journals and magazines outside of your field. For example, educators can often find powerful ideas about learning technologies by reading business magazines. What is unique about your grant may not be the core idea but how you are applying the idea.

Safe Assumptions to Make about Your Grant Readers:

- 1. They do not know who your students are.**
- 2. They do not know who you are.**
- 3. They probably do not know the content of the proposal.**

— **Super Tip: Ask for last year’s winning grants** —

Do not surprise anyone in your district. Inform major stakeholders in the school system of the grant, and include them in the process.



Develop an In-house Review Process Before You Send the Grant for Official Review

Many people are so passionate about their ideas that they leave out essential details or skip the most obvious direction, such as sending enough copies or signing the document. **Do not assume that you can edit your own work.** Ask friends and business associates to help review your proposal to make sure that you have followed the directions and that your budget adds up correctly. A good internal measure: if the grandmother down the street does not understand your grant - simplify it.

Warning: up to one third of all grants do not follow the directions and can be thrown out.

Know When Process Is More Important than Product

Decide at the very beginning who should be involved in the grant writing process. It can be critical to keep people across the organization informed about the development of the grant. The last thing you want to have happen is to receive a grant that causes disruption to an organization. For example, if there are contractual issues involved such as salaries, make sure that you have included health benefits and retirement costs, and that you have checked with the teachers' association about salary scales.

The Grant Format

Depending upon your grant source, there may be an RFP (request for proposal) with a clear outline of how the funder wants the grant written. Some funders, however, will indicate that they want you to develop the outline and there is no form to fill out. Whether or not there is a form, develop a logical approach to writing your grant and then worry about the format at the end.

Turn Failure Into Success

Resubmit a losing grant in the next cycle. Try to learn why your grant was not accepted. Make the edits and resubmit! You have nothing else to lose.

A Logical Approach to Grant Writing

The following elements are critical to a well crafted grant proposal.

Identify the Need – Develop a core need statement. This tells the reader the problem that you are trying to solve. All other sections of the grant develop from this statement.

State the Goal – Provide a clear outcome of your project.

Describe the Objectives – Identify major headings for natural groups of activities. This is how the project moves from the “need” to the “goal.”

List the Activities – Provide the readers with a clear picture about what the participants will be doing to develop the skills to achieve the goal.

Be clear — don't make the funding agency guess at what you are trying to say.

Prepare the Evaluation – Specify measures and/or procedures for gathering data to evaluate the success of the project.

Build the Budget – Describe what financial resources are needed to achieve the goal.

Consider Dissemination – Include a dissemination section. This can make your grant more competitive.

Write the Narrative – Link all of the main concepts of your project into an overview.

Identify the Need

Begin at the beginning. The “Need Statement,” also called “Problem Statement,” can provide direction for every other section of the grant. Spend extra time crafting this section into clear and simple writing. A good Need Statement should give the reader a clear picture of **who** has the need and **what** need they have.

Need Statement — Example:

Rural middle school students need to develop local and global information processing skills, including:

- Accessing information across global networks,
- Surveying local government programs and regulation,
- Creating information products that can be used by “clients” in different communities.

One of the most common errors with a Need Statement is to confuse a solution with a need. For example, the Need Statement should not say “students need a computer lab” or “students need a network.” The fundamental need is not technology but the acquisition of information skills. Technology is an enabler of these skills not the core need. Keep in mind that solutions are described later in the proposal within the Objectives Section.

If necessary, add paragraphs to describe how you determined your need or why your need is critical. Accentuate the positive, emphasize “opportunities” rather than just the “needs.” Grant donors want to know what you’re going to do, not just what you “need.”

Need Statement — Example:

If we expect students from remote rural areas to be able to be productive in both work skills and citizenship skills in the global economy, it is essential that they have excellent information processing skills. These skills will help them make more informed decisions about solving problems and seeking opportunities. As electronic communication technologies become the standard tools in decision making, we must provide our students with the skills to compete and work with people around the world.

Developing the Need Statement

The Need Statement serves as the foundation for your entire proposal.

State your Need	Our students need computers.
Ask Why? Restate the Need	Our students need computers because they need to learn word processing.
Ask Why? Restate the Need	Our students need to be able to edit and revise their work.
Ask Why? Restate the Need	Our students need to be able to communicate clearly.
Continue until you reach your fundamental need.	

Hint: If there is a “thing” in your Need Statement, you are probably not there. If you reach a need that is “too fundamental,” you can back up a level.

Write Your “Need Statement”

Ask, “What problem is being solved?”

Now that the need is established, let’s write the goal.

State the Goal

While the need establishes the problem that the grant is trying to solve, the goals describe the outcomes of the project. Very often this section simply takes the Need Statement and rewrites it into specific and measurable outcomes.

Goal Statement — Example

All middle school students will demonstrate the following skills:

- Access sources about environmental conditions across electronic networks,
- Survey local, state, and federal government programs and regulations about environmental quality,
- Design a World Wide Web Homepage that provides information about “101” environmental activities for children and families.

The three major items in the need section are now described as specific measurable outcomes.

Depending upon your proposal, you may wish to describe the goals as percentages of achievement by the population. For example, you may wish to state that all students will develop the easiest skills — accessing information, and only 80% will develop the more difficult skills — publishing on a Web site.

What is important is not to promise the world in your goal section. This is the section that will hold the project accountable for what it says it can achieve. Be realistic. Remember, many grant givers are very sophisticated. Their full time job is to research innovations and give money to groups like yours. If a proposal promises too much, then it runs the risk of appearing to be naive and unattainable. Of course, once funded, a project can achieve more than what is stated in the goal. The key to writing a fundable goal is to understand the expectation of the grant readers and to make the goals seem ambitious but attainable.

There can be a fine line between having a goal that is too ambitious and one that appears to be attainable. The general rule is to lean toward being ambitious as long as you have high confidence that you will be able to demonstrate success, especially if you have already run a pilot program with good results. The evaluation section, which is discussed later in more detail, will need to be fully integrated with your goals.

Write Your Goal Statement

Rewrite your need statement as an outcome.

Now that the need and the goal are written, the proposal has a clear beginning and end point. The rest of the grant describes how the project develops from the need to the goal. Now it is time to convince the funders that the project can achieve its goal.

Describe the Objectives

Objectives are written by taking each of the goal sections and listing them as major headings for activities. Since this proposal example has three needs that led to three goals, it will also have three objectives. Essentially, each of the goal statements is rewritten as an action heading or an objective.

Objectives — Example

- Students will learn how to access the Internet and develop search strategies for environmental information
- Students will learn how to gain access to local, state and federal government programs and regulations about the environment
- Students will learn how to design a Web page, including hot links, graphics, and clickable images.

It may make sense to subdivide a complex goal into two or more objectives. For example, the second goal can be divided into one objective that deals with information access on CD-ROM and another objective that describes activities that lead to information production. The important point is to include every aspect of the needs and goals into the objectives.

State the Objectives for Each Goal

Each goal becomes an objective.

Now is the time to list activities that support each objective.

List the Activities

Depending upon the format, each activity can be described within a timeline. It is possible that one activity will support more than one objective. Activities should be organized to build on prior skills and knowledge.

Activity — Example

Objective:

Students will learn how to access the Internet

Activities:

September: Students will learn how to log onto the Internet. Students will learn how to navigate across the Internet to access environmental information from around the world. Students will compare environmental regulations in different countries such as the U.S., Canada, India, and Israel.

October: Students will be assigned to design activities that families can undertake at home to lead to an environmentally responsible lifestyle.

List the Activities for Each Objective

Include a timeline and assignment of responsibility

After all of the activities for each objective are written, it should be clear that the proposal supports the goals. But, how will everyone know if the activities achieved the goals? Time to describe the evaluation.

Prepare the Evaluation

The evaluation section provides information that measures whether the goals of the project are met. A well designed evaluation section can make your grant more competitive and provide valuable information to improve on the design of the project. There are two general ways to organize the evaluation section:

Summative evaluation – measures how well the population achieved the goals and is typically administered at the end of the project;

Formative evaluation – provides data during the course of the project that can be used to improve the design of the project. An important trend in grant writing is to include a formative evaluation component.

Summative evaluations include:

- nationally validated assessments in subject areas such as math, reading, and writing;
- authentic assessments that include the solutions to real problems in the community;
- attainment of benchmarks such as attendance rates or jobs created;
- portfolio assessments that demonstrate information products such as multimedia presentations.

Formative evaluations include:

- attitude surveys about the project;
- review of daily or weekly journals by staff and participants;
- real time feedback data from class discussions;
- review of audio and video tapes of learning activities.

Depending upon the policies of the granting agency, an RFP may require that either an outside evaluator be hired or that the funder will conduct the evaluation. When an outside evaluator is part of the project, it is standard business practice to ask a professional evaluator to write the evaluation section of the proposal. If the grant is funded, then the evaluator is hired.

When the evaluation is internal, an evaluation process is described and managed by the project director or assigned to another member of the team. To make your grant as competitive as possible, make sure that the criteria of success is clearly understood and measurable. Whenever possible, use standard, nationally validated assessment tools or absolute measures of success, such as the number or jobs created in the community. Subjective evaluation designs that, for example, ask for participants' opinions about how they feel about the project do not often stir confidence in the hearts of funders.

Evaluation — Example

Summative Evaluation:

All students participate in a variety of evaluation activities including: creating portfolios, standard national reading assessments, and authentic presentations. The project will be able to describe how the innovation impacts current basic skills in writing and new global information processing skills where there are no nationally validated measures.

- All students will take the CAT reading tests at their grade levels;
- All students will develop an environmental portfolio including information that they have captured on the Internet, CD-ROM, and their own writing. The Grady Portfolio Assessment Tool will be used to describe the quality of the work;
- All students will work in teams to design a Web page that will be reviewed by students and parents and community members.

Evaluation — Example

Formative Evaluation:

All students will be asked to maintain a Global Information Log that includes notations about environmental regulations and programs. Each day, teachers will sample 6 - 12 logs to track the quality of student writing and the quality of information recorded. This sampling will provide ongoing feedback to the project team that will lead them to make adjustments in the design of the project.

Build the Budget

There are two basic approaches to the budget. Design your program to match what one grant source has available (work from the money backwards). Or, design your program for the ideal world and then go after all that you need with multiple grant sources (work from ideas toward the money). Obviously, if you go after more than one grant source, there is a need to design the proposal in a modular way so that partial funding can lead to a limited but successful program.

- Do not obligate your organization to spend money in order to accept a grant. For example, if salaries are included in the proposal, make sure that you include health benefits and unemployment insurance.
- Work with your business manager to set up accounts that are separate from the regular budget. In this way, there will not be any confusion about the ongoing balance of the grant money.
- When allowed by the funder, write your budget in a generic way. For example, rather than describing a brand of computer with specific components, list “computer workstation” on the budget.
- Do not hesitate to renegotiate your budget after you receive the grant. From the time that you submit your grant to the award announcement, things change. For example, you may have received more than one grant, the project was only funded at 80%, or new technologies encouraged you to design new activities. Simply ask for permission to write a revised budget and hope that the funder agrees.
- When the rules allow, include a budget narrative. This only needs to be one or two paragraphs that describe how the expenses support the project. What may seem obvious to you when you read your budget may not be clear at all to the funder.
- As a general rule, show financial support from the organization requesting the grant and/or other sources. Besides the grant request your budget can show **in-kind dollars**. These are funds that the requesting organization will commit to the project. These funds can include ongoing expenses such as a percentage of salaries. Or, these funds can be one time expense items that the organization is willing to commit for the project such as computers, phone lines, or supplies.

Matching funds can also strengthen your grant by showing that other funders have made an investment in your project. Matching funds can include monies from another grant or contributions from a corporation. Some grants require matching funds.

Project Budget — Example

	A	B	C	D	E
	Project Budget Total \$79250.00				
	Requested	Quantity	Item	Unit Price	Cost
4	\$28350.00	10	Reference CD	45	\$450.00
5		1	Internet Web Server	5000	\$5000.00
6		10	Computer	2000	\$20000.00
7		12	Phone service	100	\$1200.00
8		12	Internet connection	100	\$1200.00
9		10	Software	50	\$500.00
10					
11					
12	In Kind				
13	\$47900.00				
14		25%	Project Director		\$10000.00
15		10	Teachers	3790	\$37900.00
16					
17	Matching				
18	\$3000.00				
19			Internet Training		\$2000.00
20			Community Access		\$1000.00

Budget Narrative — Example

Requested: \$28,350

The requested section of the budget will provide 300 students with access to the Internet and the tools to design Web pages. The ten computers will be located in ten different classrooms and linked together across a network to the Internet server. This will provide access to the Internet from all the classrooms. Internet activities will include access to local and global environmental data and government regulations.

In-kind: \$47,900

In-kind funds will provide for curriculum training for the teachers and will fund the project director, a 25% position.

Matching: \$3,000

Matching funds will be provided by the Regional Library Consortium to provide Internet training for the teachers and community access to the Internet so that students will be able to use the town library to gain access to information resources in the evenings and weekends.

Write the Narrative

Due to the fact that many grant applications request the narrative as the first section, many novice grant writers put this section in first. But it is much easier to write the narrative after each section of the grant is written. At this point all that is needed is to tie together the need, goals, objectives, and evaluation sections with the budget, and your narrative statement is drafted. Note, that the beginning sentence of the narrative establishes that there is a solid history of the team working on this problem for the past three years.

Leverage your grant:

If you plan in advance, you can probably use the first grant to get a second grant — possibly a grant that requires matching funds. Money tends to follow money.

Narrative — Example

During the past three years a team of teachers, the librarian, students, and community members has worked to identify the following skills as essential for all of our students: access to global information and creating information products that can be used by others in the local community and across the global networks. This research is based on work such as the SCANS report by the U.S. Department of Labor and by working with local employers who are demanding more information processing skills from their employees.

Now that the price and ease of use of the technology has become manageable, we are confident that our request of \$25,800 for hardware, software, and telecommunications will provide access and publishing opportunities for our 300 students to global information. The in-kind contribution of \$49,900 will be used to complete a three year plan to prepare our teachers with global information processing skills; especially creating information products, such as environmental maps and databases for local clients.

Given the success of our pilot work during these past three years with a groups of 75 students, we are confident that we have the grounding in staff development and technical skills to provide all of our students with the opportunity to develop essential information processing skills. We fully expect all of our students to demonstrate their skills by producing information products for clients in the local or global community. We will also maintain our standard evaluation methods, including the California Achievement Tests in order to measure our students' basic skills.

Selection Trends

Here is an offering of some general trends across the country. However, one of the best ways to check the selection criteria of the sources where you are applying is to ask for winning grants from the previous cycle. This can be done by contacting previous winners and/or the granting agency. Of course, this information is not always available, and be sure to check to see if the granting agency has changed its priorities from year to year.

- **Coalitions** - When organizations share your vision and participate in your plan, they can have a significant impact on winning the grant. More and more grants require that a coalition of organizations support the project. Coalition members can include: hospitals, utilities, professional organizations, regional service centers, schools, family service organizations, military installations, service clubs, industry, government agencies and officers, and the media.
- **Institutionalize** - Depending upon the philosophy of the grant source, your project may need to demonstrate how it plans to function after the grant investment ends. Some funders will shy away from terrific projects if they do not believe that the program is sustainable beyond the grant.
- **Systemic** - More and more funders are looking for sustainable long term systemic change in the basic way that business is accomplished. For example, adding technology to the existing program would compare less favorably than using technical capacity to re-engineer the job descriptions of people in the organization and adding a quality of service that was never there before. Systemic change can also mean that the core concept of the project must have the potential to be replicated to other sites around the region or country. This means that projects that are based on unique circumstances with a solution that will only work in one place can be more difficult to fund.
- **Long term** - Two, three, and even ten year grants are becoming more available as foundations, corporations, and government sources realize systemic change often requires multiple years of funding.
- **Matching funds** - Receiving your first grant can be an immediate signal to apply for additional funds from other sources. If you are able to show that the project has already attracted grants, then a potential new funder may be even more willing to make further investments. Some grants require matching funds. When you do your funding research, keep special track of grants that require matching funds. In this way, you are ready to send additional grants out as soon as you are notified that the first check is in the mail.
- **Co-development with the granting agency** - More and more funders are seeking projects that are willing to work in partnership to develop the project. Many funding agencies have acquired technical expertise in designing and supporting projects and want to make sure that their knowledge is applied to make the best use of their investment.

Alan C. November
12 Hathaway Road, Marblehead, MA 01945
781-631-4333 / Fax: 781-631-1808 www.novemberlearning.com
Copyright 2005