

# ***LET'S GO GET A GRANT***

**A PRIMER ON WRITING GRANTS TO BENEFIT THE YOUTH OF  
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL**

**Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Grants Administration  
Miami-Dade County Public Schools**

***LET'S GO GET A GRANT!***

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
Introduction and How to use the Materials .....	p. 3
“If You Can Only Read Three Pages ....” .....	p. 5
Components of a Grant.....	p. 8
Tips	
• Federal, Florida & Foundation.....	p. 11
• Find The Funders.....	p. 15
• Feed Them: Giving Funders the Information They Want.....	p. 18
• Funding: Now that You Have Gotten It.....	p. 25
Why Proposals Get Rejected.....	p. 26
Some Useful Websites and Brief Descriptions.....	p. 27
Resources.....	p. 31
Appendix: Templates.....	p. 32
• How To Use Templates	
• General Needs Statement	
• Miami-Dade County and M-DCPS Demographics	
• Literacy Needs Statement	
• Mathematics Needs Statement	

## ***Introduction and How to Use the Materials***

*Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?'*  
*I dream things that never were and say, 'Why not?'*

- Robert F. Kennedy

The fact that you are reading this means you are interested in two things:

- Dreaming of programs to help the youth in our ever-so-stressed community
- You want to find grant money to build and realize these programs.

This is not a book on grantwriting. Many good ones exist. Rather, it is a primer for the uninitiated and a reminder for those who have written many grants.

Writing grants involves much on-the-job-training. Moreover, since there are no full-time grantwriters in the Miami-Dade County Public School District (M-DCPS), grantwriting is being learned daily – on the job. This material is intended to shorten the learning time, highlighting both what works, as well as what does not.

M-DCPS has focused almost exclusively on federal and State of Florida grants. But with tightening governmental budgets, seeking foundation money as a complement is a sound strategy. This makes all the more sense as one realizes that **foundations**, admittedly down 12% year-over-year post 9/11, still **give 25%** of their total **to education**.

Foundations have done this for twelve straight years! Indeed, some funders have increased emphasis on education:

- The Ford Foundation
- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- The David and Lucille Packard Foundation
- The Eli Lilly Foundation

Hence, this primer focuses on:

- *If You Can Only Read Three Pages...* Key things of which you should be aware.
- Components of a grant.
- Tips – The “6 F’s”
  - **Federal, Florida, and Foundation** grant differences
  - **Finding** viable grant opportunities
  - **Feeding** the funder the right quantity of the right information in the right way
  - Now that you have gotten **Funding**, what do you do? What do you do if you did not get the grant?
- Common reasons proposals are rejected.
- Some useful websites and descriptions.

*If You Can Only Read Three Pages...* is not an executive summary. It is a subset of information that appears in almost all grantwriting guides.

The *Components of a Grant* focuses on five things for which all funders ask.

1. A “Needs Statement”
2. Project goals and objectives
3. Program description
4. Evaluation
5. Budget

How these five items are arranged, and in what detail, will vary from funder to funder. The other things funders will ask for vary from funder to funder. This section highlights these items in the context of a competitive federal grant.

*Tips* highlight the differences between federal, Florida and foundation grants. We will look at how to find an appropriate funder, feeding the funder the information needed to make a decision in your favor, and what to do after a decision has been made.

*Why Grants Get Rejected* can help you avoid senseless errors. Finally, because this is not an exhaustive survey, websites and other resources that complement this material and which may be useful to you are highlighted.

The office of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Grants Administration is always willing to help you. They can be reached at 305-995-1706.

One other note: this material focuses on competitive grants. Although community block grants and formula grants may be relevant on occasion, these are not the grants that are normally sought by M-DCPS. Accordingly, they are omitted here from discussion.

Good luck, and *let's go get a grant!*

## *If You Can Only Read Three Pages...*

“There are no real secrets to proposal writing,” says Donna Fernandez in *Let’s Write a Grant*.

Grant seeking is "a negotiation in which thorough analysis, skill in problem solving, professionalism in project design, and old-fashioned effort is rewarded." If you wish to be a competitive grant writer, you must be willing to work hard and to produce a final product that describes a well-planned project that funders will see as a good investment.

As George Zocklein, (who has won \$250,000,000 + in grants – one quarter of a billion dollars) so succinctly puts it: “A grant is nothing more than a solution to a problem.”

The four basic steps to grantwriting are:

1. Develop a **clear plan**
2. **Research funders**
3. **Target proposals** to funders
4. Write a **concise proposal**

Today, funders view themselves as venture capitalists: they want to know the impact of their investment. This has several implications:

- **Grants are not free money.** Strings are attached, so be prepared. Knowing what strings funders attach helps you decide if this is a grant you want to pursue.
- **Build your project to meet identified needs.** This is the first step in convincing someone to invest in your project. As George Zocklein admonishes, find a problem and then solve it, using the grant to provide your money.
- **Plan the project and then find an appropriate funder.** Finding funders who want to solve the same problem as you is the key.
- Winning grants hinges on **matching the funder to the project.**
- **You are marketing and selling your project!**
- **Money flows to credible organizations or projects.**
- Prioritizing grants is the most important part of grantwriting. **Evaluation is the second most important.** Here you tell the funder how they will know that they have invested in a successful project.
- You may write the perfect application and still get rejected. **Do not despair!**

Grants are most often given to:

- Start **new projects**
- Make major **expansions to existing** projects
- **Replicate** successful projects
- Meet **one-time needs** (or capital needs)
- **Build the capabilities (the “capacity”) of an organization**
- **Fund partnerships**

**You are marketing** and selling your program to a funder. Governments have less money and are often consolidating their funds into a smaller number of projects that receive more money individually. Foundations have been hit hard by 9/11 and the recession. Only 1% to 10% of foundation grants get funded (Dennis P. MacInlay, *How Foundations Work*). Many foundations are re-prioritizing their giving. All of this means is that you must use tools that make it easier to sell a program.

- **Research the funder's** mission, objectives, priorities, and previous funding. This helps you determine the fit between your project and their mission.
- **You control** the funders to whom you apply, as well as how you present and organize information for them.
- **Tailor the proposal** to the funder, but *do not* change your project. Write for and to the specific funder, tailoring to their intent, funding priorities and focus areas.
- **Use the same buzzwords as the funder.** Use the words they use to describe their priorities and focus areas.
- Always **give the funder exactly what they want, how they want it.** As a representative of a federal program noted, "If you cannot follow instructions, we figure you cannot manage a project!"
- **Find partners and collaborators.** Funders just *love* to know that there is broad-based support for a project. The funder knows this is a sound investment because *all* of these other people have *also* invested resources – at least time if not money!
- Building the project with **input** and support **from the target population** is powerful. Funders love to know that those affected endorse the project.
- Each grant should have at **least three letters of support or commitment.**
- **Image counts.** Ensure that you have included everything a funder wants, that you present a no-typo effort, and that the final product builds your image and credibility.

**Know your funders.** Contact them. As the dollar value of a project increases, the likelihood that the funder will give it to someone they know increases. Why? Because they trust them and the organization, or the project already has some credibility. Contacting funders has other benefits:

- It indicates that **you want to learn what is important to them**, and that you want to work with them to maximize their investment in you.
- You will **confirm your project's fit** with their current funding priorities. Numerous **Foundations have narrowed** their **priorities** over the past year.
- If a foundation likes you, **they may help you write the grant** or they may direct you to work with them in a specific way to maximize your chance of getting money from them.
- Funders may tell you the type of **attachments that enhance your case.**
- With state and federal grants, make sure you **talk with the program officer before** grant submission. They cannot talk with you after submission.
- **Knowing the weight** given to particular sections of the grant helps focus your writing. This helps you concentrate on the sections of most importance to the funder and lets you mimic their words.

Beverly Browning, author of *Grant Writing for Dummies*, and the recipient of \$45,000,000 + in grants since 1986, has these “Ten Tips” for writing a grant.

- Create a mountain of ideas to write a molehill.
- Collect your information first and write second.
- Identify and pull attachments early on.
- Sort information by the section of the grant into which it goes.
- Determine what you have and don't have.
- Write front to back.
- Write fast at one sitting.
- Make and use templates.
- Complete each section before moving to the next.
- Save the worst for last – the forms.

Finally:

- Although many should help build the project, there should be **only one writer**.
- **Keep it simple:**
  - Eliminate or avoid jargon.
  - If you use acronyms, make sure that you define them the first time.
  - Use short words rather than long ones: e.g., *use* vs. *utilize*.
  - Make every word fight for its life. Be rigorous in your proofing. If you have the “Flesch-Kincaid” program as part of your spelling and grammar check software, use it. Target a score of 12 or less.
- **Allow time for Murphy's Law.** In the M-DCPS you are often on short deadlines, but give yourself a window so that when something blows up you can recover.
- **Proofing:**
  - **Read it aloud.** If it sounds good out loud, it will probably read well also.
  - Then **give it to the most obsessive-compulsive person** you know – who has nothing to do with education. When they find errors or tell you a section does not make sense, they have saved your proposal.
- Make sure you have all **the material the funder wants** to see in the correct order and quantity. Then submit it to the Grants Administration organization and be prepared to *go get a grant!*

## *Components of a Grant*

Regardless of the funder, the **logic of a grant application** remains much the same.

- **What is the problem?** This yields a “Needs Statement” or “Problem Statement.”
- **When done**, what will the situation be? **What are the intermediate targets?** These yield the “Goals” (the end state) and “Objectives” (intermediate targets).
- **How will you solve or mitigate the problem?** This yields a “Program Description” (which may be called “Methods” or “Strategies” by some funders).
- How will **we know we have succeeded?** This yields the “Evaluation.”
- **How much** are you spending **and for what?** This yields the “Budget.”

The most complex grant is federal. The money and the competition are typically greater than with Florida or foundation grants. We will tour a U.S. Department of Education grant awarded to M-DCPS for \$230,890.18.

**Summary Page:** This **single page** contains a variety of high-level information:

- Applicant’s name and address
- Applicant’s D-U-N-S Number and T-I-N
- The Federal Catalog number
- The project director and his/her particulars (address, phone, fax)
- Applicant information
  - Type of submission (pre-application or application)
  - Type of applicant
  - Human subject research plans
  - Whether the project is subject to review by any “Executive Order”
  - Proposed project dates and “Descriptive Title of Applicant’s Project”
- Estimated funding
- Certification and signature by the School District Superintendent

**Budget Information:** Most federal forms place budget data just after the Summary page.

- Section A – This details only the money involved (no in-kind resources) and has you place projected expenses in the following categories:
  - Personnel
  - Fringe benefits
  - Travel
  - Equipment
  - Supplies
  - Contractual (e.g., consultants, professional fees)
  - Construction
  - Other
  - Total direct costs (the sum of all the foregoing)
  - Indirect costs
  - Training stipends
  - Total Costs
- Section B is a much more detailed budget including a written description of all key line items as well as the percentage of the total which this line item represents



(personnel, fringe benefits, travel, etc.). In-kind resources (non-monetary donations) can be captured here.

**Additional Certifications and Assurances:** These are required forms indicating that M-DCPS can receive federal funds and “Assurances” that a recipient will comply with applicable laws (e.g., non-discrimination). The District Superintendent signs these.

**The Lobbying Activity Disclosure Form:** The District Superintendent signs this.

**Program Abstract:** A summary of the project or program. Although written last, the abstract is read first and needs to paint a compelling story. The abstract must include:

- The identified need
- A brief program description
- Project demographics, i.e., who the project will serve
- Project goals and objectives
- Project outcomes
- Additional project benefits

**Program Narrative:** This particular narrative was 35 pages long and included the following items.

- Needs Statement, buttressed by citations of applicable research
- Program goals
- Program team members which demonstrates support and establishes credibility
- Program objectives
- Program strategies
- Description of the community
- Description of the target population and the demographics of that population
- Capability statement, with descriptions of the project’s leaders and staff and their qualifications
- Additional program components and their role (e.g. web-sites)
- Project assessment, evaluation and documentation
- Project replication
- Project calendar/timeline with the activities detailed
- Project personnel and relevant biographical data
- Grant partners and their respective roles and contributions
- Bibliography

**Letters of support** or commitment were included from each partner or collaborator.

This M-DCPS grant is typical of federal grants. However, variances exist across federal and Florida funders. Some state grants are much less freeform than the federal grant described above.

Some grants may have size limitations, on the number of words or a physical limit to the section. There may be specific sections for the “Needs Statement,” “Project Goals and Objectives,” etc.

- You may be asked to detail how the project meets the goals of the Request for Proposal (RFP) or the enabling legislation that provides the money. If this is included and *you do not do it well, the funder may read no further.*
- Management plan – You may be asked for a “management plan,” i.e., an organizational chart and associated description. It is good practice to include an organizational chart/accountability chart anyway.
- Future funding statement – After the grant, how will the project be funded?
- Impact statement/project significance – Can the money make a difference beyond this community? Is the project replicable?
- Systematic change – How the project will make a long-term impact.
- Other documentation or appendices may be required:
  - Dissemination plan
  - Timeline and letters of support (if not already included)
  - Cooperating agency descriptions
  - Evaluation instrument(s)
  - Research basis for project proposal
  - Need statement backup (e.g., a community needs assessment)

Foundation grants are typically shorter and less complex than federal or state grants, but contain a number of the same elements, and assuredly the five key components of Needs Statement, Goals and Objectives, Program Description, Evaluation, and Budget.

Another type of application is the “letter proposal.” For small pieces of equipment or very specific expenses of less than \$2,000, a letter proposal may be appropriate. A two- to three-page letter proposal is arranged in the following way:

- Clearly state how much money you want and how you will use it.
- Describe your need (Needs statement or Problem statement).
- What will you do? (Project plan).
- Organization background: detail only that which is relevant to the project.
- Include budget data.
- Close with a request for money.
- Appendices/attachments are added as required or relevant.

Finally, foundations may require that you first submit a “letter of inquiry” to obtain their guidelines, so that you can be invited to submit a formal application. A “letter of inquiry” is arranged in the following way:

- Describe the need (Needs statement)
- What you will do (Project Plan)
- Organization background: detail only that which is relevant to the project
- Budget data
- Close with a request for the application guidelines
- Include appendices as required or relevant

## *Federal, Florida & Foundation*

### **Introduction**

First, we will look at government grants in general, for there are differences between state and federal grants, (i.e., “government” grants,) and foundation grants. Next, we will look at federal, then Florida, and finally foundation grants specifically, keying on differences in philosophy and how to approach them.

### **Government Grants – Generally**

The **most basic difference** between government and foundation grants is **the dollar amount**. Federal and Florida grants are typically larger. If one is looking for more than \$100,000, or looking for a grant period of two or more years, federal or state sources are more viable than foundations. State grants usually have less money than federal but the competition is less stiff.

A second difference is that tax dollars are involved with government grants. An important implication is that the government wants to ensure wise use of tax dollars. **Government grants** do not typically want to try new things: they **want guaranteed results** when they use taxpayer dollars. Hence “research-based” and “proven” programs are popular. Some agencies (e.g., the Florida Dept. of Juvenile Justice) will not fund a program unless it is research-based and proven.

A third difference is that **organizations** only **invite** proposals **through a Request for Proposal (RFP)**. Therefore grant seekers must obtain the RFP and explicitly follow the policies, procedures and guidelines. As one federal employee put it, “If you can’t follow instructions, you can’t manage a project.” Applications not meeting technical requirements are immediately disqualified from review. Indeed, the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) highlights two key objectives for grants:

- Get scored (don’t get thrown out)
- Score high.

Another key difference regards the freedom to make line item changes. With the government, that freedom may be limited to nonexistent, while with foundations it is typically more flexible.

Government grants typically have technical assistance (TA) sessions that precede the submission date. Attend these sessions. Key information is often given out. For example, one federal program had a stated target “cost per participant” (CPP). This was the legislatively mandated threshold. However, in the TA session, the program staff alerted participants that they were seeing actual CPP’s that were 25% - 33% lower than the mandated CPP. Accordingly, a submission with a CPP at the mandated level would have been very uncompetitive.

Meet your program officer at the technical assistance (TA) session. Make sure you understand all review criteria. If you do not understand a facet or are unclear, contact the

program staff of the funding agency. Even if you feel you understand all elements of the RFP, Beverly Browning, winner of \$45,000,000 in grants over the past 15 years, recommends that you call the program officer and ask them a question a day, just to let them know that you are actively pursuing the grant and that you are ensuring that you do everything correctly.

Remember, the program officer can only talk with you *before* the grant is submitted. Indeed, in some cases the **cut-off for discussions** with the program officer may be **before the grant submission date**. If you have questions, do not wait until the last moment to get them answered.

Writing government grants is different than writing foundation grants, with government grants being more formal, while foundation grants can be less formal. Sage counsel on writing government grants comes from Donna Fernandez:

Most state and federal agencies have very detailed application guidelines. Always follow those guidelines exactly as given, even if the order requested seems illogical to you. Do not leave any form incomplete; do not fail to respond to *all* requirements of the RFP. Failure to follow the guidelines exactly gives the funder a bad impression. It creates doubt as to your abilities to run a program and may also result in disqualification of your proposal altogether. Keep a copy of the guidelines right in front of you and refer to it often as you write. The importance of this step cannot be over-emphasized as it often means the difference between writing a fundable proposal or not.

Address the goal of the government funding in every section of the grant:

- The federal or state program goal should be your goal. Mimic and use federal or state language to your benefit.
- The Needs Statement, which can be worth 20 points out of 100, should paint a picture of gloom and doom supported by facts and figures.
- The Goals and Objectives (20 points) should reflect the wording of the federal or state grant RFP.
- The project design section (20 to 25 points) must be solid and concretely linked to objectives and goals as well as the intent of the RFP and/or the enabling legislation.
- Evaluation sections can be worth between 10 to 20 points.
- Show how the staff and volunteers have the capability and relevant experience to bring the legislation to life.
- Show how the budgeted amounts are a wise investment of taxpayer dollars.
- Explain any omissions or N/A's rather than leaving them blank.
- Use bulletins, fact sheets, reports, summaries and technical assistance meetings to find the programs and nuances that will help you score higher. For example, some federal grants give additional points to communities dubbed as Economic Empowerment Zones (like Miami!)

Determine if the funding agency has specifications for the title or summary page: it may only be 5% of the points, but it's 5% of the points!

To justify the use of taxpayer dollars, government organizations typically want more detail in the Methods section than do foundations. Particularly in this section, do not omit details in the project plan. The most untrained reader must be able to clearly understand the logic of your program and how it relates to the objectives, the goals, and the intent of the RFP or the enabling legislation.

In light of the use of tax dollars, make a reasonable funding request matching the project scope to the budget. Extravagance will make the proposal uncompetitive.

Determine if there is targeted or mandated “cost per person.” Ask your program officer.

Include collaborative partners on the title/cover page, and have as many partners as possible. Get support and commitment letters early, at the time that you build the project, not at the time you are writing the grant. Government organizations prefer to give money where there is a demonstrable groundswell of existing support.

Finally, ensure that you have met all the format and attachment requirements. After all this work, you do not want to get thrown out for a technical misstep or omission.

## **Federal**

Federal grants may require 40 to 60 hours to write, plus up to 20 hours of research time.

Always review the purpose of the grant funding and ensure that there is a one-to-one relationship between the intention of the grant, the need you are addressing, and the project you are implementing or proposing.

Federal grants often award extra points if you are part of a federally designated area such as an Empowerment Zone.

When you are writing your strategy implementation, particularly for a federal grant, omit no details. They want to see you know how to create and manage the project.

Federal agencies often like college professors who have experience with evaluations to serve as the third-party evaluators for federal grants.

## **Florida**

Sandra Roach of Florida’s Department of Juvenile Justice noted these key points about State of Florida grants:

- Most state funders have very specific criteria.
- Credibility is established through data collection and the evaluation plan.
- Funding is based on appropriations and availability.
- Government grants may require reimbursement or a cash match. Plan for this.
- Know the mission of the agency providing the funds.

- Collaborate. Written letters of collaboration are often mandated and are always a powerful tool.
- Attend any required technical assistance workshops.
- Meet all deadlines.

Sage counsel comes from the California Department of Education, which suggests the following to grant writers: “All major provisions of the plan should be directed at improving student performance and conditions at school and at home to make that improvement possible.”

## **Foundations**

Foundation grants are most often small, numerous and local, rather than few, huge and national. In 1999, some 50,000 private and corporate foundations gave away \$23,000,000,000, according to the Foundation Center. Even with the decline in the economy since 2000, we are still in the \$18,000,000,000 range.

Foundation grants typically involve less paperwork than government grants. Often you can be more creative. Moreover, local people know local people, problems, and issues, and they give to:

- Start-up or new projects
- Replication of verifiably successful projects
- Major expansions to verifiably successful projects
- Building an organization’s capacity
- Fund innovative community wide partnerships

That said, foundations are typically loath to be a project’s only funder, with some mini-grants or \$1,000 - \$5,000 grants as the exceptions. Many foundations limit the number of years of grant receipt, and often limit the number of applications over a period of time.

## *Find the Funders*

### **The Steps**

Finding funders is a process that marries a solid project with a funder sharing that project's objectives. The ideal scenario is two organizations wanting the same thing: one with money and the other with the "on-the-ground" resources to realize the project.

Finding a funder includes the following steps:

- Plan the project.
- Determine why you are uniquely able to do the project.
- Research viable funders.
- Prioritize funders by submission date.
- Contact the funders to further qualify them, matching the program to the funder.

### **Plan the Project**

**Never write a grant solely for funding.** "Money-chasing" shows! The goal is to meet the needs of your constituency. The key to meeting those needs and finding a great funder is a great project. Spend 80% of your time planning the project and 20% writing it!

Especially with government grants, start work early, before the RFP is issued.

- An RFP can be announced up to six months before it is finally issued.
- Grants Administration will be alerting you to relevant RFP's as they find them.
- After the RFP is issued, you may have four weeks or less to write the proposal. Pre-planning is the best way to save your nights and weekends, because as an M-DCPS employee, you need to allow the District time to sign the proposal.

Project planning should ideally **involve all stakeholders** in a project: clients, students, parents, educators, community members, and/or District officials. Are they supportive? Ideally, a team of five to seven participants will (a) split up the work and (b) work out project details. They can answer the questions of *Who, What, Where, How, When, and Why*.

Gather documentation in three areas: concept, program and expenses.

- Concept: Does the project fit into your mission and philosophy?
- Program
  - What is the nature of project and how it will be evaluated?
  - Project timetable?
  - Anticipated outcomes?
  - Staffing and volunteer needs?
- Expenses

To buttress the Needs Statement, start with U.S. Census data, followed by state and local agency resources. Recent data builds credibility – nothing more than five years old is always preferred. (Cite the source in the narrative!)

Consider cooperation and partnerships. Although often mandated in government grants, they typically strengthen a proposal.

In your planning efforts, be realistic about your ability to execute, and therefore your goals, and the funding necessary to meet those goals.

### **Determine why you are unique**

When your project is perceived as unique, it is much easier to sell to a funder. Your project can be unique in various ways.

- Language
- Expertise
- Geographic location
- The project is an extension of work that has previously been done
- The project will avoid mistakes or errors previously made
- The project will serve to develop stronger collaborations
- The project is original work and can be replicated

### **Research viable funders**

Researching viable funders begins with the knowledge you have of upcoming federal and Florida RFP's. This material will be forwarded to you by Grants Administration when they learn of the RFP's.

Researching foundations can start with visits to foundation websites. Some sites are included in the section entitled *Some Useful Websites and Brief Descriptions*.

Also, the Foundation Center has a marvelous CD-ROM with query capabilities. It allows searches using parameters and exclusions. For example, give me “all foundations with a geographic focus of Miami, with a focus on elementary education, excluding foundations that ‘pre-select’ or ‘do not accept applications.’” With 70,000 funders in the database, this type of query can narrow a search nicely. In South Florida, this CD-ROM is available for public use at the following two locations.

Miami-Dade County Public Library  
101 West Flagler  
Miami (Downtown)  
305-375-2665  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Social Sciences section



NOVA Southeastern University Library

3301 College Ave.

Ft. Lauderdale (The NOVA library is a new facility on the east side of the campus.)

Circulation – 954-262-4601

Research – 954-262-4613

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Research section

Other resources that are NOT available publicly, but which can be purchased are:

- Florida Information Network Database (FIND) – a Florida-focused database of foundation, state and federal funders. The search capability is less robust than the Foundation Center, but the Florida focus offsets this limitation. Published in April 2002, this can be purchased from Florida Funding Publications Inc. (305-251-2203) for \$445.
- Comprehensive Guide to Florida Foundations – a paper version of the FIND database focusing only on Florida foundations. Published in February 2002, this is also obtained from Florida Funding Publications (305-251-2203) for \$90.
- The Donors Forum, an alliance of funders in the tri-county area (Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach) publishes Profiles of South Florida Donors on a bi-annual schedule. Featuring the local organizations that know and love South Florida, this will be published again in November 2003. The current book was published in November of 2001. It can be purchased from The Donors' Forum, (150 SE 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave, Suite 700, Miami, FL 33131), 305-371-7944, for \$70.

Start with the limitations that allow you to easily eliminate a potential funder. Look for:

- Limitations (geographic focus, project focus, pre-selected organizations, etc.)
- Purpose and activities
- Funders' fields of interest
- Types of support
- Previous grants and award size (is it sufficient for you?)
- The number of awards in Florida or Miami-Dade County.

### **Prioritize Funders by Submission Date**

Now that you know the potential sources of funds – federal, Florida, and foundation – and you have an idea of their fit with your project, prioritize the funders in terms of their deadlines (i.e., required submission dates).

### **Contact the Funders to Further Qualify Them**

Contacting the funders is useful to show interest, develop a relationship, and confirm the data you have gathered and whether the agency still funds projects like yours. That said, program staff are there to help but not to assist with grant fishing expeditions.

For government grants, communicate with the program officer. Bev Browning suggests that although you cannot get too chummy, have a question a day. Call once a day until you get a return call.

After you have made the calls, you will have good idea of the fit between your project and the funder. You can then make a “go/no-go” or “write/no-write” decision.

In all events, know one person in each office from which you plan to seek money so that as questions arise during writing, you can deal with them.

## *Feed Them: Giving Funders the Information They Want*

### **What Funders Look For**

The “critique sheet” from the *We Care Foundation* sums up what you need to do. If you answer these questions better than your competition, you win!

- Credibility
  - Establishes credibility as a good investment
  - Establishes the role of the contact person
  - Establishes qualifications of agency and staff
- Need
  - States a problem of reasonable dimension
  - Supports a client need with relevant data
  - Establishes the project’s/program’s current need for funds
- Objectives
  - Describes measurable outcomes to be achieved
  - Appears feasible in light of agency resources
  - Is achievable within the time frame of the grant
- Methods
  - Describes how objectives will be achieved
  - Includes staffing, timelines, and client selection
  - Appears to be cost effective
- Evaluation
  - Tells process for evaluating the accomplishment of objectives
  - Tells process for evaluating and modifying methods
  - Tells who will be doing the evaluation
  - Tells how data will be gathered, analyzed and reported
- Future funding
  - Tells plan for solvency after grant
  - Seems probable work will continue after grant
- Budget
  - Is complete and accurate
  - Seems sufficient to cover cost of methods and objectives
  - Indicates how our funding will be used
  - Provides information on other sources of income
- Individual response - I support funding  
  
 Fully     Partially     Not at all     Not sure
- Group response
  - Amount requested
  - \$ Granted
  - Conditions?  Yes     No

From *Winning Grants Step by Step*, pages 84 – 85, Mim Carlson

## Beginning Your Writing

As you begin, consider three things:

- Organize your work to make it easier.
- Make the proposal easily readable, attractive and positively memorable.
- Avoid doing things that leave a negative impression.

## Organize Your Work

Ensure that you have the most current forms and instructions, especially for government proposals. There are minor changes yearly. Some 85% - 95% of your proposal can be written before the RFP is issued if you have the luxury of some time. **One person should write the grant** to maintain the style and flow from one section to another.

The California Department of Education suggests organizing your plan as:

- Curriculum
  - What are the students' needs and other participants' needs?
  - How does the plan help meet content standards?
  - What research-based teaching strategies will be used?
- Assessment
  - What standardized alternative assessments do you plan to use?
  - What will you do if outcomes do not meet expectations?
- Professional development
  - How does the plan support teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators?
  - How does professional development address the needs of students?
- Family and school support
  - How will you strengthen partnerships between educators and families?
  - How does the plan address the health and safety needs of the students and their families?
- Funding – How will funds be coordinated to support the plan?

Per Donna Fernandez:

A good proposal will have no inconsistencies between its goals, objectives, activities, evaluation plans, and budget. Each *must* build upon and support the other .... When you have planned well, a proposal answers the grant maker's questions while it flows smoothly from one section to the next.

**Write for the readers.** Write as if you were writing for your cousin in Detroit. If she is excited, you're in good shape. Sequence the proposal in the same order as the RFP or grant guidelines. Tired reviewers may miss information and lower your score if they cannot find something. You may have included it, but it is not located where they expect to see it.

As soon as the RFP is issued, find at least one more person – better yet two or more – to:

- Be a review team – or at least serve as a proofreader

- Coordinate the incoming letters of commitment and support

### **Make the Proposal Easily Readable, Attractive, and Positively Memorable**

#### Appearance Counts:

- Use no type smaller than 10 point, but preferably 12-point.
- Highlight key elements with bullets, italics etc. to make them stand out.
- Leave as much white space as possible.
- Insert headings and subheadings.
- Six digit numbers catch the reader’s attention: \$900,000,000 is more powerful visually than \$9 million.
- Visuals and charts, if allowed, break up the monotony for the reader.
- If possible, use color tastefully. This may be prohibited in government grants.
- Don’t use all the space if you do not need to do so.

#### Style and usage counts too!

- Use a dictionary and a style manual.
- Use short active voice sentences. Target Flesch-Kincaid scores of 12 or less.
- Use short words and single words instead of phrases: “*Use*” not “*utilize*” and “*because*” not “*due to the fact that...*”
- Be rigorous with your prose. Words should fight for life.
- Paragraphs should be no more than five sentences.
- Summarize at the beginning and the end of sections.

### **Avoid Doing Things that Leave a Negative Impression**

#### Catch negatives that give a poor impression.

- At least one uninvolved person should proof the final product for typos.
- Avoid jargon and undefined acronyms.
- Try to cite no research more than 5 years old.
- Fight redundancy. Some will always exist simply because of the way the funder structured their response guidelines.
- Avoid unsupported assumptions.

### **Needs Statement**

Now you start the heart of the grant. The “Needs Statement” sets up the problem that you will solve. It relates directly to the goals of the funder or the intent of the RFP.

Ensure that you capture the needs of a project’s participants and stakeholders. When you write the “Needs Statement,” make it grim, but not so bleak as to be a problem without a solution. Feedback from existing or potential clients is powerful, as is an independent needs survey which you can cite and then attach to the proposal as a reference.

Some 95% of your citations should be less than 5 years old, and you should target 100%.

The “Needs Statement” is also where you begin building the case for multi-year funding.

Particularly as you look at the needs of the target population(s), capture:

- Characteristics
- Numbers
- Changes in population relevant to grant funding

Tables, pie charts, or bar charts can make the demographics stand out.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Miami-Dade County</b>	<b>Florida</b>
Indicator 1		
Indicator 2		
Indicator “n”		

A well-researched and crisply articulated “Needs Statement” is the platform for the rest of your proposal.

### **Goals and Objectives**

Goals are large and essentially un-measurable. Objectives are operational.

Goals should be one sentence, clear, concise and identify the target population. For example: *“The number of elementary school children able to play the recorder will increase. Further, the array of methods to teach the recorder will be enhanced.”*

There are four types of objectives:

- *Behavioral:* A human action is the expected result. For example:

*“Fifty of sixty elementary school age participants will learn to play the recorder.”*

- *Performance:* A behavior at a specific level of proficiency will take place during a specific time frame. For example:

*“Fifty of sixty participants will be able to correctly play ‘Auld Lang Syne’ on the recorder as certified by a member of the Early Instruments Society of Florida.”*

- *Process:* The manner in which something occurs is an end in and of itself.

*“We will document the methods of teaching the recorder, identifying those methods that had the greatest success.”*

- *Product:* A tangible item results: For example:

*“A text on teaching the recorder to elementary school age children will be produced.”*

## **Program Plan/Project Plan/Methods/Strategies/Implementation Plan**

The “Methods /Strategies” section follows from the goals and objectives which tie to the needs, which tie to the funding priority of the grant-maker. Methods/Strategies explain how one will meet the objectives.

When you are writing a federal grant, omit no details in your implementation plan. They are using tax dollars and want to know that you can manage the project properly.

In describing the program, you will want to address the following areas:

- How you will meet the goals and objectives
- Sources of information used to design the program
  - Staff experience
  - Research and theory
  - Instructional models
- How parts of the program will be integrated
- How the program will meet participants’ needs
- Funding sustainability/future funding
- Staff and their qualifications, plus job descriptions of any unfilled positions
- Key personnel including résumés and job descriptions as required.

A table can crisply capture your work plan. An example follows.

Procedures/Activities	Performance Outcomes	Timelines	Responsible Persons
Procedure/Activity 1			
Procedure/Activity 2			
Procedure/Activity “n”			

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation is an increasingly important facet of the proposal. It should be considered from the start. Evaluation essentially answers the questions, “did we succeed and how well did we do?” The grantee should not be the evaluator of their project. When possible, feedback should come from both a third party and the target population.

There are two kinds of evaluation:

- Process (or Formative) evaluation – feedback during the project
- Product (or Summative) evaluation – feedback that the project is done.

Questions to be considered in building the evaluation include the following:

- Who will do the evaluation?
- Will you conduct a product evaluation or a process evaluation or both?
- Should evaluation involve cost-benefit measurement or cost effectiveness?
- What data will be collected over what timeframe?
- How will data be collected?

- How will data be analyzed?
- How will the information be reported?
- What methods are available to improve results?

## Budget

Project budgets should be realistic. Figure the timing of your expenses and reflect it. For example, if the majority of your expenses occur during the first two months of the year, alert the funder to that timing. Likewise, if you are going to spend most of the money late in the year, alert the funder to that fact.

The budget should be used to give the reader an instantaneous feel for the project while the budget narrative is to explain expenses that are unique or that a reviewer might not understand.

Including in-kind costs (even if only classroom space for meetings) and volunteer activities is always good. Presenting the budget as a three to four-column table is useful. For example:

<b>Budget Item</b>	<b>Amount Sought From This Funder</b>	<b>In-Kind and Other Contributions</b>	<b>Total</b>
Supplies	\$500	\$1,000 from Sam's Office Supply, Miami	\$1,500
Contractual services from Sam's Roofing	\$5,000	\$1,000 donated from Sam's Roofing	\$6,000
Transportation	\$0	\$2,000 provided by Mill Springs PTA	\$2,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,500</b>	<b>\$4,000</b>	<b>\$9,500</b>

Some final notes:

- Writing to compensate people who are part of the project means justifying their role and expense. Outline the percentage of time spent on project and allocate that portion of their compensation and benefits to the project (unless they are volunteering time or this is part of their job).
- Equipment must be directly related to the project. After use it will be an asset of the funding agency rather than the grant recipient.
- Depending upon the grant, money can be obtained for evaluation and/or dissemination.

## Staffing

In the staffing plan, you again build credibility by showing you have the right people for the project. Staffing includes volunteers and consultants. Volunteers are a key "plus." Do not omit them.



## Partnerships

Funders love partnerships and collaborations. Present them in a table:

Participant	Role	Contact Person/Notes
Sam's Roofing	Designing and building a playground	Sam the Sham
Mill Springs PTA	Providing transport for children who will be involved in the playground building effort	Paul Teeter Arnold

## Future Funding/Sustainability/Long-term Funding

Include at least one sentence on future funding, *even if it is not explicitly asked for*.

## Organizational Background

With organizational material, build your credibility. Insert only relevant history and accomplishments that show why this project is a good fit for your capabilities. Highlight only current programs and activities that are relevant to the proposal.

## Abstract

**It is always written last – but people read it first.** They may read *only* the abstract! It is also important for the following additional reasons:

- It may be required.
- It should frame and encapsulate your proposal.
- It is good practice in expressing your ideas succinctly.
- It should be interesting and convey in one to two pages:
  - Who the applicant is
  - Why the applicant is credible
  - One sentence stating the problem
  - One sentence stating the objectives
  - One sentence stating the methods
  - The total cost

## Letters of Support

Letters of support should address the project at hand. Never use old letters of support. Get them rewritten for the current submission.

## ***Funding: Now That You Have Gotten It ...***

While writing proposals is time consuming, the project is even more time consuming!

When you win a grant, it becomes the basis of a contract between you and the funding organization. You will have a contractual obligation to perform the services and achieve the results described in your proposal. As Donna Fernandez notes:

If you do not [meet contractual obligations] whether ... because the application was written [with] dishonest intentions or because your organization was incapable of performing the tasks for which the award is received – you could cause your organization to face difficulties in finding future grant funding, at the least. You may be required to return the funds and, in a worst-case scenario, you could be prosecuted for fraud.... Write a proposal that demonstrates ... your organization's integrity, sincerity, and competence and do not propose to perform tasks that you know the organization is incapable of successfully implementing.

Once you have been funded, you need to plan to keep funders informed of the status of the project. Create personal deadlines for required reports and find a way to say “thank you” – especially to private funders – at least *thirteen* times a year. (Thanksgiving cards are great, and they beat the holiday rush!)

If rejected for state or federal grant, get the reviewers' comments. State and federal organizations are mandated to provide you with this information. Understanding how your presentation of the project was perceived in a peer review session is a wonderful tool to help you improve your impact.

And, remember to say “thanks” to the funder *no matter what the result of your application is!*

## *Why Proposals Get Rejected*

The typical reasons for rejection include:

- The grant did not make it to “peer review” because it did not include the correct material in the correct quantity at the correct time.
- The idea is not original.
- The articulated rationale or need statement is weak.
- The writing is vague or imprecise regarding the program or project.
- The outcomes are not clearly painted or are deemed to be uncertain by the reader.
- Staff and volunteers don’t have the experience to execute the program well.
- The problem is not deemed as important as others the funder has received. This is particularly the case in a declining economy, post 9/11. The good thing is that some funders are increasing their emphasis on education, not lessening it.
- The proposal is unfocused.
- The project is too large for the resources devoted to it.
- One makes “stupid” errors, such as:
  - Assuming the funder has no changes from year to year
  - Submitting a failed application without major revisions
  - Submitting the grant late or with incomplete material
  - Including attachments that are not requested or agreed upon, i.e., audio and video materials.

## *Some Useful Websites & Brief Descriptions*

### **FEDERAL SITES**

Different federal agencies have their own unique forms. The Catalog of Federal and Domestic Assistance lists grant opportunities, as does the Federal Register.

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) - **U.S. Dept. of Education**

[www.nsf.gov](http://www.nsf.gov) - **National Science Foundation**

[www.neh.fed.gov](http://www.neh.fed.gov) - **National Endowment for the Humanities**

[www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov) - **National Endowment for the Arts**

[www.cfda.gov](http://www.cfda.gov) - **Catalog of Federal and Domestic Assistance (also contains a section entitled “Developing and Writing Grant Proposals”)**

[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) - **Federal Register** (Go to “Resources” at this site and click on *The Federal Register*. Look for *Search Federal Registers* on the next page. On the next page, click on the year you want, insert date ranges for your search, and type in “Grant” inside the *Search Terms* box. Voila!)

### **FLORIDA SITES**

[www.firn.edu/doe/doehome.htm](http://www.firn.edu/doe/doehome.htm) - Florida Dept. of Education

[www.fasa.net/faisa](http://www.fasa.net/faisa) - Florida Association of Instructional Supervisors and Administrators

[www.faw.dos.State.fl.us/index.html](http://www.faw.dos.State.fl.us/index.html) - Florida Administrative Weekly - contains Florida RFP's that will be forthcoming. Not particularly user-friendly.

### **FOUNDATIONS**

**Foundations, both private and corporate, that focus on education:**

[www.americanexpress.com](http://www.americanexpress.com) - American Express

[www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org) - American Association of University Women has “Community Action” grants ranging from \$2,000 - \$7,000 for a one-year project and \$5,000 - \$10,000 for a two-year project.

[www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org) - American Library Association

[www.barbarabushfoundation.com](http://www.barbarabushfoundation.com) - Barbara Bush Foundation has literacy grants for which RFP's are issued nationally.

[www.bellsouth.com](http://www.bellsouth.com) - BellSouth gives grants to school districts.

[www.coke.com](http://www.coke.com) - Coke has K-12 education program support grants.

[www.mhopus.com](http://www.mhopus.com) - Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation donates musical instruments ranging in price from \$500 - \$5,000.

[www.pewtrusts.com](http://www.pewtrusts.com) - Pew Charitable Trusts: policy-focused grants (average of \$85,000 per grant in 2001, for 15 grants). Also contains research reports on K-12 educational effectiveness.

[www.wesimonfoundation.org](http://www.wesimonfoundation.org) - William E. Simon Foundation – occasional grants to educational institutions in economically depressed areas (Miami has that criterion covered) to underwrite specific programs designed to encourage academic achievement.

[www.wallacefunds.org](http://www.wallacefunds.org) - Wallace Reader's Digest Funds has grants for research into school improvement strategies, seemingly more at the state level.

### **Other Sites – Providing Tips and Links**

#### *Links*

[www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org) - Foundation Center, the premier organization focused on foundations as funders.

[www.ncup.org](http://www.ncup.org) - Now the National Center for Educational Alliances, formerly the National Center Urban Partnerships, this site has links to a wealth of other sources. The focus is education.

[www.philanthropy.com](http://www.philanthropy.com) - the website of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, which has numerous links to funders and other resources.

[www.fundsnetsservices.com](http://www.fundsnetsservices.com) - A very organized website with numerous links to solid and relevant resources.

[www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org) - National Education Association (also contains tips on grantwriting)

[www.edfunders.com](http://www.edfunders.com) - Grantmakers for Education

[www.granted.org/nationwide.html](http://www.granted.org/nationwide.html) - Grant Foundation Links

[www.findit.org](http://www.findit.org) - Findit.org

[www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) - Information on 850,000 nonprofits is contained here.

[www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org) - W.K. Kellogg Foundation (also contains a grant seekers “tips” section)

## **Tips**

[www.schoolgrants.org](http://www.schoolgrants.org) - A resource for those writing education grants.

[www.learnerassociates.net](http://www.learnerassociates.net) - Includes a “Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal: Proposal Writing Hints”

[www.polarisgrants.org/glossary](http://www.polarisgrants.org/glossary) - Includes an alphabetical List of Grant Glossary Terms

[www.col-ed.org/fund/ideas.html](http://www.col-ed.org/fund/ideas.html) - A Few Ideas About Pursuing Federal Funding

[www.browncandbrown.tv/fearless.htm](http://www.browncandbrown.tv/fearless.htm) - “Habits of the Fearless Grant Seeker”

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) - “Tips for Grant Applicants” U.S. Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse

[www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/writing2.html](http://www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/writing2.html) - “Writing Effective Applications, Plans, and Proposals,” California Department of Education

[www.fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse](http://www.fdncenter.org/learn/shortcourse) - Proposal Writing Short Course: Parts 1 and 2, The Learning Lab, The Foundation Center, 2002

[www.npguides.org](http://www.npguides.org), - “10-Point Grant Writing Guide,” Grant Writing Guide, Non-Profit Guides

[www.tgci.com](http://www.tgci.com) - The Grantsmanship Center – show funded proposal abstracts

[www.jcdowning.org](http://www.jcdowning.org) - “General Guidance,” The J.C. Downing Foundation, 2001

Also, Lynn Miner has a free e-newsletter entitled “*Grantseeker Tips*.” It can be obtained by sending an e-mail to Lynn Miner: [Lynn.Miner@marquette.edu](mailto:Lynn.Miner@marquette.edu)

## Resources

*Program Planning and Proposal Writing: Introductory Version*, 1980, The Grantsmanship Center, Norman J. Kiritz

*Program Planning and Proposal Writing: Expanded Version*, 1980, The Grantsmanship Center, Norman J. Kiritz

*How to Use the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance*, Revised Edition, Dianne Krauth, 1990, The Grantsmanship Center

“Ten Grant Tips, Grant Opportunities for K-12 Schools,” Donna Fernandez, [www.schoolgrants.org](http://www.schoolgrants.org)

“Guide for Writing a Funding Proposal: Proposal Writing Hints,” [www.learnerassociates.net](http://www.learnerassociates.net)

“Top 10 Things You Should Know About Government Funding,” Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Funding Criteria and Information, Sandra Roach, 2002

“Alphabetical List of Grant Glossary Terms,” 2002, [www.polarisgrants.org/glossary](http://www.polarisgrants.org/glossary)

“A Few Ideas About Pursuing Federal Funding,” Ralph Nelson, 2001 [www.col-ed.org/fund/ideas.html](http://www.col-ed.org/fund/ideas.html)

“Assessing Your Proposal: General Style and Content,” Let’s Write a Grant,” ©, SchoolGrants.org, 2001

“Project Worksheets,” Let’s Write a Grant, ©, 2001, SchoolGrants.org, 2001

“Habits of the Fearless Grant Seeker,” Larissa Golden Brown, 1998, [www.browncandbrown.tv/fearless.htm](http://www.browncandbrown.tv/fearless.htm)

“Tips for Grant Applicants, Part II: Section III, Successful Grant Applications,” [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov) U.S. Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse

“Writing Effective Applications, Plans, and Proposals,” California Department of Education, 2001, [www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/writing2.html](http://www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/writing2.html)

“Tips for Grant Seekers,” Focal Points: Tips for Teachers from the Champions of Active Learning Programs, Public Education Network, 2000

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“General Guidance,” The J.C. Downing Foundation , 2001, [www.jcdowning.org](http://www.jcdowning.org)

Grantseeker Tips, # 87 and # 88, Lynn Miner, 2002 ([Lynn.Miner@marquette.edu](mailto:Lynn.Miner@marquette.edu))

Demystifying Grant Seeking: What You Really Need to Do To Get Grants, Larissa Golden Brown, and Martin John Brown, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2001

Winning Grants Step by Step, Mim Carlson, Support Centers of America, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995

Grant Writing For Dummies, Beverly Browning, Hungry Minds, Inc, 2001

“Proposal Checklist and Evaluation Form,” Norton J. Kiritz, The Grantsmanship Center, 1979