

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR GRANT SUCCESS



INTRODUCTION

Grants can be transformative for non-profit organizations (NFPs), but applying for and securing them requires strategy, clarity, and preparation. This guide is structured to help organizations develop a focused approach to grant seeking by defining their unique value, understanding funder expectations, and preparing strong, impactful applications.

It's critical to remember that most grants are project-based. It's fair to include a direct portion of administrative and overhead costs in a proposal, however, funders for the most part are interested in project funding. Organizational sustainability after the grant is done is important to know in advance. If your organization is absolutely needing a grant to cover operations, a conversation about sustainability is needed before burn-out of staff and volunteers starts to become a reality.

Keeping visionary project-based funding in mind, this guide integrates practical advice and essential steps for effective grant-seeking based on best practices and insights from the Fall 2024 Cultural Round Table workshops. The focus of this guide is on aligning organizational mission and values with the goals of potential funders to build lasting partnerships rather than engaging in reactive, often inefficient, grant-chasing.

For independent artists to benefit from this guide, you'll need to step back and consider your art practice as an entity unto itself. It can be challenging, so including trusted advisors will help draw out the essential key elements. It is not bragging to talk about the value you bring!



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ORGANIZATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

A successful grant application begins with a solid understanding of your organization's core elements: its Mission, Vision, and Values.

Mission: This is your organization's overarching purpose, the reason it exists. It should answer the question of what societal or community needs you serve. Before asking others to support you, articulate your organization's purpose, its reason for existing, and how it serves the community. This should be an enduring statement that underpins all your initiatives. *Example:* "Our mission is to increase community access to the arts and provide a platform for local emerging artists."

Vision: This describes the future your organization aims to create. It is aspirational and should illustrate what success looks like. Define your vision by describing the impact or change you hope to achieve. A well-defined vision can inspire both internal teams and potential funders. *Example:* "Our vision is to create an opportunity for local emerging visual artists by developing a thriving annual arts festival." For every project there is a vision statement.

Values: These are the guiding principles that drive decision-making and operations. They provide a moral framework and should remain consistent over time. Examples might include accessibility, sustainability, or youth empowerment. Identifying the core principles guiding your organization ensures decision-making, programming, and partnerships are aligned. Clear values provide consistency in messaging and attract funders with similar goals.



PRACTICE TIP

List a few recent projects and consider what specifically enabled your organization to deliver these successfully. Reflect on what sets your team apart. Consider your specialized expertise, innovative approaches, or a strong community network. Explain your unique approach, mission, or artistic focus that differentiates you from similar organizations.

CRAFTING A VALUE PROPOSITION

Your value proposition is what sets you apart. It articulates how your services or projects uniquely solve a specific problem and realize benefits. Your value proposition positions your organization as the best choice to meet a funder's objectives by emphasizing expertise, unique methods, and proven success. For example, if your organization supports youth through arts education, highlight unique outcomes, such as building resilience and confidence among participants. Verify your proposition with testimonials and impact data.

Creating a statement that outlines how your organization uniquely solves problems or provides value will show how you differentiate from others. A strong value proposition:

- Demonstrates the benefits of your work.
- Emphasizes what sets your organization apart, making it the best choice to lead your project.
- Aligns closely with the needs of potential funders

TARGET THOUGHTFULLY

Avoiding the “Tail Wagging the Dog” Trap

It's crucial to find funders whose goals naturally align with your organization's objectives. Avoid reshaping your project to fit a particular grant. Seek to develop partners rather than just funding sources and ensure there is mutual benefit. Apply for grants that align closely with your mission and vision, rather than adjusting your organization's focus to fit funding criteria. Pursuing grants that don't fit your vision can waste time and dilute your mission

Being Proactive

Building strong relationships with funders through proactive engagement and shared vision can yield long-term support. Regularly attend workshops, webinars, or info sessions offered by funders, even if you're not sure you will be applying. This proactive approach demonstrates interest and commitment to learning more, often resulting in more successful partnerships down the road. Sometimes learning about one granting project will lead to insights into another more suitable grant. Talk to other groups about their granting experience.

Identifying Your Target Audience - Don't Say Everyone!

Knowing who is positively benefiting from your services helps clarify which funders, or other partners, might be interested in supporting your work. Funders are often more receptive when they understand how their support aligns with their own impact goals and target audiences. Define your primary audiences with specificity - consider demographics, geographic location, and particular needs.

DIFFERENTIATING OUTPUTS FROM OUTCOMES

Distinguish between outputs (quantifiable activities, like attendance numbers) and outcomes (the transformative impact of these activities). Funders prioritize outcomes that show community or social benefit over time. Both metrics are essential, but outcomes carry more weight in demonstrating your organization's broader impact

PRACTICE TIP

You can practice the A.I.D.A. framework anytime you are asked to introduce yourself. The Action step will sound different depending on the context - it may just be an invitation to connect on LinkedIn or to visit your website. However, the more comfortable you get introducing, succinctly, your organization or practice, the more clarity you will have on your value proposition.

USING THE A.I.D.A. FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT

The AIDA model - **AWARENESS, INTEREST, DESIRE, ACTION** is a way to think about everyone's journey when they decide to partner or participate in your product or service:

- **Awareness:** Start by introducing your organization and mission briefly but impactfully.
- **Interest:** Illustrate your organization's value and relevance.
- **Desire:** Share compelling stories or case studies showing the difference your organization makes. This may spark the desire to get more involved.
- **Action:** Clearly state the next steps for collaboration, whether it's setting up a follow-up meeting or discussing specific funding.

Not everyone will be interested or desire to learn more and join you. That's ok, because others will.

PRACTICE TIP

Review some recent projects and identify the outputs and outcomes. For example, instead of just stating that 200 people attended your event (output) also explain what that meant (outcomes) such as the event fostered community connection or inspired collaboration among local artists.

TOP 10 GRANT APPLICATION TIPS

- 1. Understand the Grant Criteria:** Thoroughly read and understand the grant guidelines before applying. Each grant has specific eligibility criteria, priorities, and goals. Tailor your application to align with these criteria.
- 2. Showcase Your Impact:** Clearly demonstrate the impact of your project/organization on the community, audience, and arts sector. Use data, testimonials, and case studies to show how your work benefits the public and contributes to the cultural landscape. Outcomes and Outputs are both important.
- 3. Detail a Realistic Budget:** Provide a detailed and realistic budget that aligns with the scope of your project. Ensure all costs are accounted for including administration time. Be transparent about how the grant funds will be used and how they fit into your overall financial plan. *Use the budget template if provided!*
- 4. Highlight Organizational Capacity:** Show that your organization has the capacity to successfully execute the project. This includes highlighting the skills and experience of your team, as well as past successes in similar projects.
- 5. Follow Application Instructions:** Pay close attention to the application instructions and deadlines. Incomplete or late applications are often disqualified. Double-check that all required documents are included and that the format and length adhere to the guidelines. See also #3.
- 6. Build Relationships with Funders:** Build relationships with potential funders before applying. Attend workshops, webinars, or info sessions offered by the grantor, and reach out with questions or for feedback on your project idea. Funders often appreciate applicants who are proactive and engaged.
- 7. Provide Strong Support Material:** Include strong support material such as work samples, letters of support, or media coverage that reinforces the quality and relevance of your work. Ensure these materials are relevant and up to date. See also #2.
- 8. Demonstrate Sustainability:** Articulate how the project or your organization will be sustainable after the grant period ends. Funders like to see that their investment will have a lasting impact, so outline plans for future funding, partnerships, or continued programming. Include links to your website/strategic plan/list of staff or board profiles.
- 9. Articulate Clear Objectives:** Clearly define the goals and objectives of your project. Funders want to know exactly what you plan to achieve and how you will measure success. Use specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives.
- 10. Seek Feedback on Your Application:** Before submitting, seek feedback from peers, mentors, or colleagues. They will likely catch errors or suggest improvements. Some grantors also offer a review of drafts or provide feedback on unsuccessful applications, which can be invaluable for future submissions. Funders will often offer grant workshops see also #6.





Visit Abbotsford's Online Arts and Events Organizer Guide!

A free online guide with all the information you need to help plan your next event or activity.

You'll find the tools for planning community events and programs, marketing information, networking opportunities, funding sources and more!

Check out **Go! Abbotsford** for local events and activities!

From Performing Arts to Agriculture Experiences and everything in between.

Be sure to register your events and activities and visit the website to learn what's going on in the community!



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