

## **GRANTWRITING TIPS**

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**Follow the instructions—exactly.** Spend time at the beginning going over the instructions in detail. Some agencies issue several documents, the program announcement for the particular grant category, and another more general set of instructions for all grant applications. These can be confusing and contradictory in their instructions. Go through them and develop an outline of everything that is required, and if there are differing instructions on where a certain item is to be included, discuss it at both places. Keep going over the instructions every day as you are writing the proposal, and then double check them again in great detail at the end. Your copy of the instructions should be raged by the time you have finished! Have someone else also become an expert in the instructions, particularly those involving required forms and budget instructions, and get that individual to carefully double-check the application as you are finishing it up. Remember, many applications get thrown out just because the instructions were not followed.

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**Set aside plenty of time.** Do not underestimate the amount of time required to write a competitive application. Plan to spend three to four weeks full time at work writing, and be able to set aside another 40-50 hours of overtime (when you have peace and quiet and can concentrate). If you will not have that much time available, do not undertake the project.

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**Make the final deadline earlier than required.** Always set your final deadline at least two days earlier than what is required so you can have enough time to send in more copies if your first mailing gets lost. (Keep the number of your parcel and call the overnight delivery service to make sure it was delivered on time). Set the deadlines for contributions from other authors very, very early so you have time to rewrite. Get the required signatures and forms done early; they don't have to be signed on the last day. Count on everything going wrong at the end, so allow time for broken printers, crashed hard disks, and directors who are out-of-town and unavailable to sign the form you overlooked. You want to spend the last couple of days polishing your proposal, rather than dealing with problems which could have been handled earlier.

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**Be a grant reviewer.** If you have the opportunity to be on a review panel, jump at the chance. Each year funding agencies ask for volunteer reviewers. It is a lot of work, but you get an insight into how the process works and also what it is like to be a reader. Once you have spent a weekend reading 15-20 proposals, you will find your own approach to grant writing will change dramatically.

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**Write a grant that is friendly to your reader.** The reviewers are reading your proposal at nights or on weekends. Some will be conscientious and will read and reread each proposal (some will even grade Section A of your application against Section A of all the other proposals). The overly conscientious reviewer will hold you to the instructions literally and may double-check your footnotes or data to try to find faults in your work. Conversely, a reader may not be very interested or committed, and he or she may give the proposal a very quick and cursory look. Thus, you need to have a good abstract and good section headings. Make sure the important points stand out at the beginning of the paragraphs. Do not assume your reader knows what every acronym and buzzword pertaining to the substance abuse field means; define each term, approach or service philosophy clearly. Explain in detail and show the reader you understand what you are talking about. If you make the reader's job easy, he or she will be your biggest advocate during the review. If you make the reader's job difficult by not following directions,

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preparing a sloppy application, or expressing an "attitude" in the proposal, the reader can be your worst enemy.

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**Have only one author--with lots of helpers.** Get others to write parts which require knowledge or expertise you don't have. But then take their work and rewrite it in your words and make sure the concepts, time frames, terminology, etc. are the same throughout. Proposals which are simply "cut and pastes" of different authors do not do well because of contradictions. Many just need a rewrite by one author to make them strong.

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**Match the budget to the grant.** The reviewer will look to see if the budget actually is carrying out what the application proposes. Set up the staffing pattern, including phasing in employees. Show the number of out-of-state trips, consultants, and special equipment needed. Then, have your fiscal person turn it into a final budget (following the instructions and budget forms). Most federal applications use the same cost principles as state agencies. Force yourself to pay attention to the budget justification, which allows you to explain again why you need a particular item and to emphasize innovative items which make your application special.

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**Write a good literature review to help build your case.** The literature review gives you a chance to educate the reader about how your approach fits in with earlier work and it demonstrates that you really know your topic. Make sure your citations are accurate, and use a style manual to make sure your footnote and reference citations are done correctly. Also, be careful not to plagiarize; use quotation marks where appropriate.

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**Spend time preparing a good needs section.** There are plenty of data available to document your need. Look at the data on the web sites shown on the GCATTC's Center for Excellence in Drug Epidemiology. There are data on arrests, DWI accidents, clients in treatment, emergency room admissions, overdose deaths, etc. Be specific and use footnotes to document the data sources. Don't use "thousands" and "lots". If analyzing data is not your strength, get someone else to help, but go over their draft and make sure it shows the need which you are trying to fill.

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**Pay attention to the goals and objectives.** Before you begin writing, set out your goals and objectives. Tie them to the program announcement, but don't just quote back the same words. Start thinking about how to quantify the goals. Keep reworking the goals and objectives as the proposal develops, and at the end, go back and revise them (and the entire application) to make sure everything is consistent. If your final goal is to treat 125, does the budget match? Does the staffing pattern match? Somewhere the proposal may still say that 143 will be treated. Double-check for consistency.

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**Fit the staffing patterns to the approach and methods.** Does the staff bring special expertise to this proposal? If so, emphasize it. Resumes are usually out-of-date and staff hate to update them. Get them revised early and make sure they highlight the expertise in the area you are addressing.

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**Only include meaningful letters of support.** Letters can help if they demonstrate a very solid commitment to and involvement in the proposed project. Letters which just say "we have a problem" or "the area needs a program" or "we support the application" can hurt more than help. A critical reviewer will see through them and conclude that your agency really has no relationship with the other agency and the letter is just a courtesy with no meaning. Don't include letters unless they really help you.

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**Pay close attention to the scoring weights.** After you have written a section, read the scoring section and make sure you have not only addressed everything that is called for, but that you have emphasized those points. If you only mentioned a topic used in the scoring, go back and expand the discussion. And after you have written the entire application, go back again and cover the weights throughout; don't just mention them in one section.

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**Write the abstract last.** Since the application is changing as you write it, don't waste time doing the abstract first. It will barely resemble the finished proposal. Some funding agencies use the abstract to determine which category is being applied for and to assign it to a review group, so make sure you are specific about what grant you are applying for. In the abstract, address each of the parts of the application: background, need, goals, approach, staffing, etc.

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**Have a critical reader review your application.** The more critical the reader and the more the application is "nitpicked," the better. Don't get your feelings hurt. This is your chance to fix unclear or contradictory areas.

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**Use the best proofer available.** While the grant reviewer can't count off for bad grammar or misspellings, she can be negatively influenced. Watch "it's" versus "its," "who's" versus "whose," "there" versus "their," etc. Pay attention to the errors the proofer caught so you don't make them again when you are writing the abstract at midnight.

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**Polish the application to make it "pretty."** One of the strongest assets is an application that looks good. Pay attention to documents that look appealing versus those that discourage your reading them because they don't look good. Use an attractive font. Have plenty of white space. Resist the temptation to use all kinds of different fonts or a confusing mix of bolds, italics, underlines, outlines, or shadows. Get someone who produces desktop-published documents to set up a style sheet and then follow it (for instance, make chapter heads 14 point bold, section heads 12 point underlined, etc.). Get their help again as you are finishing up. If some of the resumes or appendices are FAXed or are not good copies, have them retyped. Make sure the Table of Contents is correct. Also, if the funding agency allows you to send in the copies bound, make sure you have a nice cover and binding job (but don't appear extravagant). Appearance counts a lot more than you think.

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**Follow the instructions-again.** Take a final day to go over the entire application to make sure you have addressed everything that you will be scored on. Make sure you have met all the requirements. At this stage, you'll be really tired (and really tired of the proposal), so get the other expert in directions to also go over it. You will be surprised at what is still missing.

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