

Grant Writing Tips

Although these tips are more directly relevant to Program Grants, writers of Asset/Improvement Grants should also consider them. After all, the point of your Asset or Improvement is to enhance your organization's ability to provide a program and/or services to the Eau Claire community.

Grant information and forms are available on the Eau Claire Community Foundation website (ecommunityfoundation.org) on the "Apply for a Grant" page under the "Lasting Impact" tab.

In a nutshell...

Your grant proposal should clearly communicate the following information:

- Who you are
- What you want to do
- How you are going to do it
- What your intended outcomes are and how you will measure those outcomes
- How much it will cost
- How much you want the Eau Claire Community Foundation to fund (and how ECCF dollars will specifically be spent)

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- **GET STARTED EARLY!:** Make sure you allow yourself at least two weeks to work on the grant; rushed, last minute applications often have errors that cause them to be disqualified.
- **VERIFY YOUR NONPROFIT STATUS:** In order to receive an ECCF grant, your organization MUST be a 501(c)(3) or a government agency. If your organization doesn't have official IRS recognition as a nonprofit, you need to find an organization that does and that is willing to serve as your fiscal agent. Grant applications from organizations without verified tax-exempt status will NOT be considered.
- **MAKE SURE YOU'RE ELIGIBLE:** Please read the ECCF Grantmaking Guidelines and Grant Application Procedures to make sure your organization's program or asset purchase/improvement is eligible for a grant. (These documents are available for download on the ECCF website's "Apply for a Grant" page.)
- **KNOW YOUR HISTORY:** On a related note, make sure your organization hasn't received previous ECCF grants for the same program or purchase (or a similar one). Because funds are limited, the ECCF Board will not fund multiple grants that are substantially the same.

- **COLLABORATE:** Before you start a program from scratch, make sure you're not duplicating another organization's services. Some overlap isn't a deal breaker as long as you work with the other organization(s) to effectively administer those services. Showing that you cooperate with other agencies, schools, and people is very important since it enhances your program's sustainability and ensures that your application won't be disqualified for duplicating existing services.

AS YOU WRITE

- **READ THE QUESTIONS!** Make sure your responses are clear, concise, and answer the questions on the application form. If you're using snippets of previously written grants, be absolutely certain you've adjusted them to answer the questions on THIS application.
- **ESTABLISH THE NEED:** Explain WHY the program or asset purchase is needed. Use as much data as possible to prove that it addresses a strong community need. This can include quotes from articles, demographic studies, census data, and your own organization's experience. You won't have a lot of room to work with, but try to include as much specific and relevant information as you can to show how your proposal will help solve a significant community problem.
- **MAKE YOUR MISSION CLEAR:** Grant reviewers want to know what your organization's mission statement is and how your grant proposal will further that mission; your application could be endangered if your mission is missing or confusingly worded.
- **CLARIFY YOUR GOALS:** Make sure that the grant project's goals are specific- explain what will be accomplished and what impact the project will have. In particular, you **MUST** show how your program will benefit the Eau Claire area.
- **MEASURE YOUR GOALS:** You must clearly show reviewers how you'll evaluate your program's effectiveness. You should have clear and realistic methods (numbers served, surveys administered to clients, etc.) of measuring your program's success. You should also show how you'll use your measurements to continually improve your program.
- **USE CLEAR WORDING AND SPECIFIC NUMBERS:** "Our program will serve 3 meals a day to 45 clients for one year" is much more specific than "Our program will feed a lot of people." Also, avoid jargon and acronyms that might confuse someone outside your organization.
- **CHOOSE YOUR CATEGORY:** In your application, make a strong connection between your request and one of our grant categories. Remember, even if your application is relevant to more than one, you can only choose ONE category when you apply, so choose the best one. Categories are:
 - "Create Culture" (Arts and Culture)
 - "Form Futures" (Education, Training)
 - "Give Green" (Animals, Environment, Recreation)
 - "Offer Opportunities" (Social Services, Accessibility Needs, Needs of Elders)

BY THE NUMBERS

- **CHECK YOUR NUMBERS!** Final totals for the expenses and revenue sections should be equal, and your requests for ECCF grant funding in the expenses section should equal the amount of your overall grant request. Please remember that our GLM software does NOT add up the numbers for you, so you need to make sure your figures are accurate.
- **DEMONSTRATE YOUR FINANCIAL SAVVY:** Your budget should indicate that you've thought carefully about your finances. You should be able to show what specifically the dollars will be used for and how you've ensured the most bang for the donors' bucks.
- **ASK FOR WHAT YOU CAN GET:** You should ONLY ask for dollars that the granting organization is willing to fund. Many grantors, including the ECCF and Women's Giving Circle (WGC), specifically exclude certain expenses, such as those for travel and staffing. Your application could be disqualified if you request money for an excluded expense.
- **DON'T ASK FOR TOO MUCH:** Make sure your budget request does NOT exceed what the grantor is willing to fund. In particular, the WGC has a \$6000 maximum for grant requests.
- **PRIORITIZE:** Sometimes funders can't award the full amount of the grant, so if you list the priorities of your project, they may be able to at least fund the most important budget items.
- **BE SUSTAINABLE:** Funders want to know what will happen after grant funds have been used. Demonstrate how you can maintain your program after the grant dollars have been spent.

AFTER THE FIRST DRAFT IS DONE

- **PRINT A COPY** using the "Application Packet" PDF icon.
- **PROOFREAD:** Check for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation; although your content might be wonderful, typos can easily undermine your organization's credibility. In the process, check for wordy passages and try to streamline them. Then, find the biggest curmudgeon in your life (ideally one that's unfamiliar with your organization) and have him or her proofread.

IF YOUR GRANT GETS FUNDED

- **AGREE TO YOUR GRANT:** You'll receive a Grant Acceptance Agreement detailing the terms and conditions of your grant. Even though your grant will have been approved, the money can't be released until the Executive Director (or equivalent) of your organization signs it. Pay particular notice to the publicity clause toward the bottom; it requires you to acknowledge your grant in any relevant publicity materials your organization might produce.

- **SPEND THE MONEY WISELY:** Always use the funds you receive for their intended purpose. You'll need to submit a Grant Report within 30 days of the grant period's end, and you'll need to prove that you spent the money according to the budget in your grant proposal. Minor deviations – for example, if a budgeted item proves slightly less or more expensive than you'd anticipated – don't pose a significant problem. However, major deviations from your initial proposal – for example, using the grant to pay staff instead of to purchase the computer you'd requested – could result in your organization having to return the grant money.
- **KEEP YOUR RECEIPTS:** You'll need them for your Grant Report!
- **SHARE YOUR STORY:** Instead of having to pay for ads to publicize your organization's activities, try contacting local newspapers and television stations. They might do a story about you, which would create free publicity. (Don't forget to acknowledge your grant if that happens, though!) Spreading the word might generate more public awareness of – and donations to – your organization.

QUESTIONS?

- **TALK TO US!** The ECCF staff is happy to answer your questions. You can contact the Program Specialist at grants@eccfwi.org or call the ECCF at (715) 552-3801. You can also stop by our office at 306 S. Barstow St., Suite 104, during our normal business hours (Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. through 4:00 p.m.)

A helpful acronym for your grant proposal (from the Foundation Center's Proposal Writing Basics Webinar):

- *S (pecific)*
- *M (easurable)*
- *A (chievable)*
- *R (ealistic)*
- *T (ime-bound) – happens within a specific amount of time.*