



Grant Writing Tips and Advice

Over the past five years, the Fund for Louisville, together with the Lift a Life Foundation, the James Graham Brown Foundation, and a Community Foundation of Louisville donor, has awarded 98 capacity building grants totaling nearly \$1.7 million. We have collected observations and recommendations gathered during the grant review process and are sharing this information with the hope that it may be helpful for grant applicants.

General Advice

- Follow directions, and provide documents (budgets, board lists) in the format requested.
- Answer the specific question asked.
- Offer numbers and percentages whenever possible, especially when describing goals.
- Use short sentences and avoid jargon, words, or acronyms that only people very familiar with your sector would know or understand.

When describing your organization

- **Describe who your organization serves:**
 - Avoid words like "stakeholders," and "clients" until you have first defined/described who those individuals are for your organization.
 - Be prepared to share: the number of people served and information about those served: zip code of residence, race/ethnicity, age, and sex.
 - Describe how often you serve individuals (i.e. do you typically serve people once in their lifetime, or once a week? Only in the summer, or year-round?).
- **Describe what your organization does:**
 - A clear/concise description of primary programs/services is better than a long list of program names.
- **Describe what your organization aspires to accomplish through its work:**
 - How do you understand the opportunity/challenge, and how does your work make a difference?
- **Describe the organization's results:**
 - What does your organization seek to accomplish each year?
 - What did your organization achieve last year?
 - How do you know your organization achieved those results?

When describing your request

- **Provide a clear description of the capacity building project**
 - Grant reviewers read many applications in one sitting. They want to quickly understand your proposed project. Specifically, they want to understand:
 - **What** you will do, **how** you will do it, and **why** you need to do it

This description is stronger...	...than this
Our donors are increasingly younger millennials and men who access our information via YouTube. In order to secure their support, we need to post more and frequent videos on YouTube. We need XYZ software and a new computer. We also need to send two staff people to a one-day training to maximize this investment. Once trained, we will save \$X each time we want to make a video, and we plan to make 8-10 videos each year.	Our organization needs video editing software to produce videos to reach potential donors
Staff currently spend approximately X hours each week tracking donor information in spreadsheets. We will purchase new donor software that will save two staff people an estimated X hours/year/person	We keep track of donor contributions using an Excel file. New donor software will increase contributions 100% <i>(Numbers and percentages make a strong case for investment, but it is best to leave the numbers out if they are not realistic)</i>
Several of our senior staff are retiring in the next few years, so we need to provide leadership training for four staff people. Once the training is complete, we hope to promote from within to fill X# of expected vacancies, thereby reducing recruitment costs for new leaders, which typically run \$X/position.	We need to provide leadership training to staff to increase their confidence and commitment to the organization.
In order to respond to the new Medicaid work requirements, our organization needs to make its volunteer program stronger. We will hire a consultant to redesign our volunteer program, including creation of a new training handbook and orientation, and develop new promotion and retention strategies. We expect these changes will allow our organization to increase the number of volunteers at our org. from X to Y each year.	We need to redesign our volunteer program.
The demand for our services has increased X% in the past X year(s). We want to become accredited by XYZ Accrediting Body, which will allow our organization to apply for funds from national and corporate foundations for the first time.	Accreditation has long been a goal of our organization.

- **Provide clear objectives**

- For the capacity building grant application, objectives should be short statements that define the goal(s) of your capacity building project.
- The objective(s) will be listed in your grant agreement, and you will report to CFL twice on progress toward those objectives in a twelve month period.
- Please identify no more than three objectives for your project.
- When possible, use numbers or percentages that define a “baseline,” or your organization’s starting point, and a goal that is achievable if the grant objectives are met. However, We understand that not all projects lend themselves to numeric measurement.
- An “ideal” objective statement says what you will do and what difference it will make for your organization. Some examples:
 - This project will improve the sales and communication skills of our staff, leading to increases (or improvement) in _.
 - With new _ software, staff will spend _hours less each week doing _.
 - With funds to develop a new approach to volunteer recruitment and retention, our organization will be able to _.