



Grants and Grant Writing Tips

From Virginia WILD School Sites,
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from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries



Characteristics of Successful Proposals

- Cite evidence of educational need
- Demonstrate creativity
- Involve risk-taking
- Model a novel way of presenting science or other subject areas (multi-disciplinary approach)
- Promote exciting and innovative activities to motivate students
- Have focused achievable goals and expectations
- Involve students in the planning process, not just in the implementation process
- Are specific and realistic about costs and clearly state how the materials will be used
- Include all key components required in the grant guidelines
- Anticipate potential problems or drawbacks and explain how these might be addressed

{ The following text is excerpted from the University of Wisconsin web site at www.uwosh.edu/departments/grants/tips.html }

Contacting the Potential Funding Agency

"The single most important step in the grant seeking process is making contact with a funding agency before writing a full-blown grant proposal. In order to increase the likelihood that a proposal will be funded (and to eliminate wasted time and effort), it is essential that the proposed project squarely address the interests and priorities of a funding agency. A harsh reality is that some very good ideas are not fundable because perhaps they lack significance, the timing for the idea is not right (either too late or too premature) or because there is no agency interested in providing support. The "Golden Rule" very much applies to grant seeking: Those with the gold, make the rules. A smart and successful grantseeker makes sure that he/she is aware of all of the "rules" before investing too much time and effort into writing a proposal. Having previously developed a concept paper, contact with a funding agency will permit you to assess the viability of your idea and/or help you decide whether refocusing your project is feasible, or whether the idea should be abandoned.

While a personal visit with a funding agency representative is the ideal, a telephone contact is an acceptable alternative and can provide the same kind of important information as a face-to-face meeting. Virtually all federal and state agencies, and many large private foundations, have program officers who can be contacted. Smaller, private agencies may prefer that an initial inquiry be made by submitting a brief description, i.e. a concept paper.

Indeed, a growing number of agencies are strongly encouraging, or even insisting, that potential applicants contact them prior to submitting a proposal.

In addition to describing your project, you should use the opportunity to inquire about the following:

- How much money will they have for new applications? (This is especially important at the federal level as some agencies may be obligated to spend a significant percentage of their budget to support continuing projects.)

- How many new applications do they typically receive and what percentage do they fund? (A 20%-30% funding rate is good; if it's less than 20% you need to consider whether it's worth the investment of your time and effort.)
- What are the most common mistakes or flaws in proposals they receive?
- What criteria will be used in evaluating your proposal? What is the relative weight given to each criteria?
- Would they send you a list of previous recipients?
- Would they recommend a previously funded proposal for style or format? Could you obtain a copy by sending them a self-addressed stamped envelope?
- Who will be evaluating your proposal, i.e., what background will the reviewers have? Would they send you a list of current or previous reviewers? (It is important to know the audience for which you will be writing.)
- Are there any areas or topics about which they are particularly interested in receiving proposals?
- If you have a copy of last year's application guidelines, ask if they expect to make any significant changes. Can you use last year's information to get started?
- Would they be willing to review a draft of your proposal?

Printed material from an agency oftentimes describes very broad areas of interest or it, in fact, may be out of date; the agency may have new interests or priorities. Talking with a program representative will help assure you that you have a clear understanding of an agency's current funding priorities.

Investing the time and making the effort to develop a concept paper, and then following through with an agency contact, can pay huge dividends by allowing you to determine which funding agencies are most likely to be interested in supporting your project. "

GRANT WEB SITES

****** If you don't have lots of time for research, start with the sites marked with an asterisk!

How to Write a Grant

Minnesota Council on Foundations—guidelines for writing a grant + other resources www.mcf.org/mcf/grant/writing.htm

School Grants — contains Grant Writing Tips and Links, at <http://k12grants.org>

Clear Language and Design— a Canadian website containing an Online Thesaurus and a Reading Effectiveness Tool that helps evaluate the readability of your writing www.eastendliteracy.on.ca/clearlanguageanddesign/start.htm

Virginia Grant Sources

****Virginia Environmental Endowment**—offers school grants that focus specifically on EE and water quality; go to www.vee.org and click on “Virginia Mini-Grant.”

****Virginia Naturally**—a clearinghouse of Virginia's environmental education resources; on the home page click on “Grants and Funding” in the left sidebar www.vanaturally.com

****VA Assoc. of Science Teachers**—from the main page, click on “Opportunities,” then scroll to “Funding” www.vast.org

Dominion Virginia Power Educational Partnership—offers grants to encourage programs that strengthen math and science education <http://www.dom.com/about/education/grants/grants.jsp>

National Grant Sources

****EELink**—the web site of the North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE) provides invaluable links to numerous sites; click on “Jobs and Grants” in the left sidebar www.eelink.net

****EPA Environmental Education Grants**—provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Education www.epa.gov/enviroed (click on “EE Grants Program”)

The Foundation Center—a national clearinghouse that provides a grant-seeking database <http://foundationcenter.org>

Grants Alert—go to www.grantsalert.com

GreenWorks!—an initiative of Project Learning Tree—is a service-learning, community-action grant program for environmental projects that involve students from pre-school to high school www.plt.org

****KidsGardening**—the National Gardening Association offers Youth Garden Grants and supports several other grant programs, at www.kidsgardening.com (see “Grants and Resources” in left sidebar)

National 4-H Youth Grants Program—offers several categories of grants, such as tree planting and community service www.fourhcouncil.edu/GrantsProgram.aspx

Rodale Institute's Organic School Garden Awards—www.kidsregen.org/gardens/index.shtml

Toyota Tapestry Grants— www.nsta.org/programs/tapestry/program.htm

Wild Ones—Seeds for Education offers Grants for School Gardens and Community Nature Areas, for the purchase of native plants and seeds only <http://www.for-wild.org/seedmony.html> (note: ‘mony’ in the address is not a typo)