

# GRANT

## GUIDE

Tips to Strengthen  
Your Proposal and  
Avoid Costly Mistakes //



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# 6 tips to strengthen your grant proposal

1

## Start With the Story

Instead of jumping straight to the numbers, start with *why it matters*. A strong proposal is grounded in a clear, emotional narrative that connects your community's needs to your vision. Why this project? Why now? Answer these questions up front and let them guide every section of your application.

2

## Connect the Engagement Dots

Rather than just saying you engaged the community, show exactly how you did. Include quotes, survey data, photos, or even screenshots to demonstrate how people were involved and what they said. Then *connect the dots*: make it easy for funders to see how that input influenced your project goals, budget, and work plan.

3

## Secure Support Early

Strong proposals are built on collaboration. Get your departments, partners, and stakeholders aligned *before* you begin the application. Council resolutions and letters of support can take time to gather, so start early, and be specific. Generic support letters won't stand out, but clear commitments will.

4

## Pre-Score Like a Reviewer

Grade yourself using the funder's scoring criteria *before* you start writing. It's the fastest way to spot gaps, strengthen weak points, clarify your strategy, and make sure your proposal speaks directly to what reviewers want to see. Don't wait until the end to realize you missed points you could have earned.

5

## Show, Don't Just Tell

Treat your visuals with the same level of care as your writing. Compelling images can and quickly communicate ideas that would take paragraphs to explain. Ditch the screenshots and PowerPoint slides. Use *high-quality, professional* looking maps, concept sketches, and graphics to elevate your narrative.

6

## Avoid Last-Minute Meltdowns

Waiting until the last minute to submit your proposal leaves no room for error. *Give yourself time* to troubleshoot technical issues, double-check attachments, and breathe before you hit send. Don't let a tech hiccup be the reason you missed the deadline and derailed months of hard work.



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# 6 mistakes that may be costing you

1

## Rushing Community Engagement

Strategic engagement *takes time* to build trust, collect meaningful input, and show a clear connection between what the community said and what you're proposing. Start early so you have the time and space to listen, adapt, and craft a proposal that genuinely reflects your community's voice.

2

## Burying the Big Idea

If a reviewer has to dig for the heart of your proposal, they won't. *Lead with your main message* and repeat it consistently. Your big idea should shine in the executive summary, echo through every section, and leave a lasting impression. Reviewers should walk away knowing exactly what you're asking for and why it matters.

3

## Copy-Paste Doesn't Cut It

Follow the exact order, format, and numbering from the grant instructions. It shows attention to detail and makes reviewers' lives easier. Resist the urge to copy-paste from past proposals. One-size-fits-all rarely fits anything well. *Customize each proposal* to match the funder's goals, language, and priorities.

4

## Mismatched Words and Numbers

Your narrative, work plan, budget, and timeline should all *tell the same story*. If they don't line up, reviewers notice, and your credibility takes a hit. Your budget isn't just math, it's part of the pitch. Use it to show how your plan delivers value to the community and supports your goals.

5

## Using Jargon Like a Secret Code

Reviewers often come from different backgrounds and may not be familiar with your jargon and acronyms. Proposals are also often reviewed in sections, so each part needs to stand alone and *tell the full story in plain, accessible language*. Clear, compelling writing gives your ideas a better shot at landing with everyone on the review panel.

6

## Skipping the Follow-Up Plan

Don't leave reviewers wondering what happens after the grant is awarded. A *clear follow-up plan* shows you've thought past the award and are ready to implement, evaluate, and sustain your project. It builds trust and sets you apart from short-sighted proposals.



# Grant Writing with *Purpose*

We're more than grant writers... we're city planners, engagement strategists, and civic storytellers who know how to craft proposals that resonate with funders and reflect your community's voice.

## How We Help You

### Connect

We help you design engagement that's meaningful, strategic, and aligned with the grant's goals so your proposal reflects real community input.

### Create

We craft clear, persuasive proposals that connect the dots between your vision, community need, scope, budget, and timeline.

### Coordinate

We help you build the right team, secure partner support early, and hit every deadline with confidence. No last-minute stress.

## Grants We've Helped Win

State of California  
Active Transportation  
Plans & Programs  
>\$10 million

State of California  
Proposition 84  
Statewide Park Program  
\$4.2 million

Texas Park and Wildlife  
Non-Urban Outdoor  
Recreation Program  
\$500,000

## Ready to Win?

We'll talk through your needs and follow up with a customized list of current grant opportunities that align with your goals.



Book a free  
strategy call



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