

	SO YOU WANT TO HIRE A GRANT WRITER	<i>A position paper from TGG The Gordon Group</i>
	Target Audience:	Nonprofit Executives
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When I became a certified grant writer in 2005, my purpose was to write grants for the nonprofit for whom I worked. That is the case in over 95% of the grant writers I know: they want to raise money for their employer's cause. But there is a small fraction of us who are freelance contract grant writers.

Once you hang out your shingle, so to speak, as a freelancer, you will be very popular in many settings. "Everyone loves a grant writer" is my new saying. The trouble is that there is a large misconception of what the definition of "grant writer" actually is. I would say about 99% of everyone thinks a grant writer is a source of funds -- that they know of large buckets of free money and know the secret of getting it. I wish it were true!

The following topics will introduce you to the actual nature of fundraising through grant-seeking.

1. Grant Seeking

A grant seeker, or the act of grant seeking, is usually a nonprofit organization who needs funding for their cause or mission. Oftentimes, they are new (or relatively new) start-ups who have been told that "grants are the way to get your funding done". The main reason I am writing this article is to hopefully educate these folks as to how things really work -- a much-needed reality check.

2. Grants Research

Most grant seekers don't know where the grants are (or, more precisely, where the generous funders are). What they really need is someone who can do detailed research into all of the potential funding sources out there, the specified giving targets to which they give (cancer research, hearing-impaired children, the arts, Bibles for missionaries, etc.), and when the funder's annual giving cycles are. (The vast majority of private foundations only disburse funds once a year. But Wal-Mart lets you apply every month.) Most funders have a multi-step process to qualify and apply, all of which must be researched, filtered, and matched to the grant seeker's profile and abilities.

This research step is really the heart of the grant-seeking process. It can take many hours to locate funding sources that match well, document their requirements, and so forth. It is an area I have spent much time mastering and have even developed a simple database tool with which to manage all the data. In addition, it is extremely helpful to have access to the Foundation Directory Online database, found at www.candid.org, which is the subscription-based master-source of every funder in the USA and every grant written -- with tons of details about each one -- since about 1998. (They harvest this from all of the IRS 990 forms that foundations have to file each year, which requires full disclosure of all grants made that year.)

3. Grant Writing - Actually Applying for Free Money

Grant-writing begins when a funding opportunity has been identified and the nonprofit has determined that they qualify for all of the criteria that the funder has stated or published for prospective grantees or applicants. Smaller foundations tend to have simpler processes and fewer criteria; larger ones tend to have very high standards and lots of hoops to jump through.

It is more than just writing a letter or filling out an application form. It is usually a detailed web-page application form that has upwards of 20 or more questions about the nonprofit's (applicant's) operations and finances, plus 5-15 attachments (PDF documents) that must be uploaded as well. (The details of these two important preparation tasks are covered in the TGG position paper *How To Get Grant-Ready*.)

Thorough preparation for this process makes a huge difference, especially when tight deadlines are involved. The TGG approach uses some special forms that help focus and speed up the preparation process.

4. Different Types of Funders

Here are the different types of grant funding sources ("funders"):

- Private Foundations (small to large)
- Federal Agency Grants
- State Government Grants
- Municipal Government Grants
- Corporate Giving Programs
- Community Foundations

Each one has its own different profile, with Federal government grants being the most complex by far and small private foundations (less than \$10 million endowment) being the simplest.

CONCLUSION

Grant-getting is a slow, laborious process and, for a larger grant, can take up to six months or more from start to finish with no guarantee that you will be selected in a highly competitive process. The key is to find smaller private foundations that are approachable and build a relationship first. More on that later!

In closing, remember that you can engage the consulting services of TGG on a fractional basis as needed. Check our website often for more free position papers on non-profit success strategies.