

WHAT FOUNDATIONS SEEK IN FUNDING PROPOSALS

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Think of the grantseeking process as a communications campaign, from start to finish. What messages do you want to send to the funder about your organization? Competent. Effective. Thorough. Trustworthy. Responsible.

Every interaction you have with a potential donor—whether it’s a phone call, an email, a hard copy proposal, or an electronic grant submission—is part of that communications campaign. It’s very easy to undermine your own effort. What messages do you send if you don’t proof your application, don’t apply until the last minute, don’t complete the grant application correctly, or don’t respond when the grantor asks for a grant report?

With that frame of reference in mind, here are some key factors the Foundation considers reviewing proposals:

About the specific proposal/project

1. Have they done their homework about our foundation?
 - a. Does the request fit our guidelines and our funding objective?
 - b. Is the request amount appropriate for us?
 - c. Are they asking for a type of grant that we typically fund?
 - d. Did they meet our deadline?
 - e. Did they submit the application in the manner we require?
2. Have they thought through the specific project they are asking us to fund?
 - a. Does the project budget make sense, and do the numbers add up?
 - b. Does the project seem feasible, given the agency’s expertise and experience?
3. Have they shown a genuine need driving the request?
 - a. How will clients/patrons benefit, vs. agency itself?
 - b. Have they provided any data or specifics to back up the request?
 - c. Does the item seem to be a “need” or a “want”?
4. Is the project/program duplicative of what other agencies in the area are doing?
 - a. What is unique about the organization?
 - b. Are the agency’s claims to uniqueness or differentiation accurate? (Be careful with any sentence starting, “We are the only agency that....”)

5. How can the agency demonstrate that it is defining and determining success?
 - a. Does the agency understand the difference between outputs and outcomes?
 - b. How does the agency assess whether it is meeting its mission, and doing a good job?

About the agency

6. How well is the agency managed?
 - a. How is the board structured? How well does the board function internally?
 - b. How well do the board and CEO work together?
 - c. Does the agency plan for the future and implement those plans?
7. Who is on the staff?
 - a. How long have they been there?
 - b. Are they qualified to deliver the agency's services?
 - c. Has there been staff turnover? Why?

About the agency's finances

8. Is the agency managed in a financially responsible way?
 - a. Does the management team really understand the agency's financial situation?
 - b. Are there any trouble spots, like a pattern of operating deficits?
 - c. How involved is the board in financial oversight?
9. Do they really need the money they are asking us for?
 - a. Is there a more natural constituency that could fund the project?
 - b. Do they have reserves or general operating revenue that could be used instead of a grant? If yes, why are they seeking outside funding?
10. Do they have enough money to carry this project through to completion and sustain it?
 - a. If asking us to fund a staff position, how will the agency sustain it after the grant expires?
 - b. If a capital project, has the agency planned for operating costs? How will the agency meet them?