GRANT WRITING

STRATEGIES, SKILLS AND SUCCESS



ANGELA AJODO-ADEBANJOKO

GRANT WRITING

STRATEGIES, SKILLS AND SUCCESS

ANGELA
AJODO-ADEBANJOKO

ADELA PUBLISHING

Grant Writing: Strategies, Skills and Success

Copyright © 2025 Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko
All rights reserved.

Published in the United States of America by Adela Publishing, an imprint of Angela Marketing LLC.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Disclaimer. This book is intended for educational and informational purposes. Funders' priorities, rules, deadlines, and submission systems change, and the examples in this book are offered to illustrate principles rather than to guarantee any outcome. Readers should always consult each funder's current guidelines and, where appropriate, seek professional advice before applying.

For permissions or inquiries, contact: angelaigo@yahoo.com
Website: adelabooks.com

Contents

Introduction 1
1. Grant Writing as a Science and an Art 5
2. Understanding the Grant Landscape 11
3. Identifying the Right Grant 18
4. Developing a Compelling Proposal Idea 26
5. Writing the Proposal Step-by-Step 33
6. Budgeting for Success 55
7. Strengthening Your Proposal with Supporting Documents 62
8. Navigating the Submission Process 68
9. Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them 74
10. After Submission: Follow-Up and Feedback 81
11. Sustaining Success: Building a Grant-Winning Reputation 88
12. Case Studies and Practical Exercises 94
13. Conclusion: Turning Proposals into Purpose 100
Appendix A: Quick-Reference Checklists 104
Appendix B: Planning Templates 108
Appendix C: Answer Guide to the Chapter Quizzes 112
Glossary of Grant-Writing Terms 116
References 118
About the Author 119

Introduction

In today's knowledge economy, grants have become the quiet engine behind a remarkable share of the progress we take for granted. The laboratory that identifies a new treatment, the village cooperative that digs its first reliable well, the university department that trains the next generation of scholars, and the youth organization that keeps a hundred teenagers in school are all carried forward, in one way or another, by funding that someone had to ask for and someone else had to be persuaded to give. Across disciplines and sectors, from scientific research to grassroots community development, grants provide the financial backbone that turns an idea into an outcome other people can see, measure, and benefit from. For academics, researchers, nonprofit leaders, educators, and development practitioners, the ability to write an effective grant proposal is therefore far more than a clerical skill. It shapes professional advancement, it decides whether a promising program survives its first difficult year, and it often determines whether good work is done at all.

Yet despite the billions of dollars in grant funding available around the world, a surprising number of worthy projects remain unfunded, and in most cases the reason is not that the idea was weak. The proposal describing it was poorly written, carelessly matched to the funder's priorities, or undone by something as ordinary as a formatting error or a missing attachment. Promising ideas fall flat when they are stated vaguely, when the writer has not understood what the funder expects, or when the document reaches a tired reviewer in a form that makes the argument hard to follow. That reality calls for a systematic, step-by-step approach to

proposal writing, one that blends clarity, strategy, and persuasion, and it is exactly what this guide sets out to provide.

Drawing on decades of experience in academia and research, including proposals funded by national, continental, and international donors, this book offers a practical roadmap for the entire grant-writing journey. It begins with identifying the right funding opportunity and shaping a fundable idea, moves through drafting a compelling narrative, preparing an accurate budget, and assembling the supporting documents that give your claims weight, and then follows the proposal through submission, follow-up, and feedback. It closes with the longer game of building a reputation that makes each new application easier than the last. Every chapter provides detailed explanation, real-world examples, and actionable tips, so that you can move from reading to doing without having to guess what comes next.

Grant writing has a technical side and a human side, and this guide gives both their due. It explores how to tell a compelling story using data and evidence, how to align your proposal with a funder's mission without losing your own voice, and how to build long-term credibility as a grant-winning professional. It reflects lessons learned not only from personal successes but also from observing peers, mentoring young researchers, and serving on review panels, where the difference between a funded proposal and a declined one is so often visible within the first few pages. Successful grant seekers are not simply good writers; they are strategic thinkers who understand what funders value and how to communicate effectively.

Whether you are an early-career academic, a seasoned researcher, a nonprofit professional, or someone completely new to the field, this book is designed to equip you with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to turn your vision into a fundable project. It applies equally whether you are preparing a research grant for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a project grant for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, a capacity-building grant from a local donor, or a postdoctoral research grant, and it will help you stand out in a competitive pool. Ultimately, this is more than a guide to winning individual grants. It is a blueprint for building a sustainable career,

or a sustainable organization, fueled by impact-driven funding for research, innovation, and social development.

How This Book Is Organized

The book blends the depth of a traditional text with the practicality of a short course, and it is arranged so that each chapter builds on the one before it. The early chapters deal with the thinking that must happen before any writing begins: what grant writing is, how the funding landscape is structured, how to find a grant that genuinely fits, and how to shape an idea that a funder will want to support. The middle chapters take you through the proposal itself, section by section, and then through the budget and the supporting documents that surround it. The later chapters follow your application through the submission process, show you how to avoid the pitfalls that sink otherwise strong proposals, explain what to do once a decision arrives, and describe how to sustain your success over a career. A chapter of case studies and a closing reflection bring the threads together.

Throughout, you will find step-by-step guidance on key concepts, practical exercises and self-assessment quizzes to reinforce what you have read, and real-world examples that show each principle at work. The progression runs from foundational knowledge to more advanced skills, much as it would in a structured class, and the result is self-paced learning with the benefit of structured instruction.

A Note on Examples

The examples, case studies, sample budgets, and testimonials in this book are illustrative. Some are composites and others are invented to show how a principle works in practice, so the names, figures, and quotations they contain, including the statistics and sources that appear inside sample proposal text, are placeholders and should not be read as verified facts about real organizations or events. Where a real funder or program is named, it is named only to show the

kind of work such funders support. When you write your own proposals, replace every placeholder with real, verifiable data and cite your own sources.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

Read the chapters in order the first time through, because later ideas assume the earlier ones. Keep a notebook or a file open beside you and complete the exercises as you go, ideally using a real project of your own. By the time you reach the budget chapter you will have the raw material of an actual proposal, and the later chapters will then help you refine and submit it.

CHAPTER 1

Grant Writing as a Science and an Art

Grant writing is the process of preparing and submitting a proposal to secure funding from a government agency, foundation, corporation, or other funding body. It is a critical skill for nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, researchers, community groups, and individuals working to bring social, scientific, educational, or artistic projects to life. At its core, grant writing involves articulating a clear need, presenting a compelling solution, and justifying the request with evidence and a sound plan, and it asks the writer to do all of this in a form that a busy reviewer can understand, trust, and remember. Grant writing is a science, disciplined, strategic, and evidence-based. But it is also an art, crafted with clarity, empathy, and persuasion.

> *"Facts tell, but stories sell, and funders respond to both."*
> *Anon*

Definition

Grant writing is the process of crafting a structured request for funding from a donor or granting organization. It includes identifying a need, proposing a solution, outlining the activities that will deliver that solution, and showing how success will be measured. A well-written grant proposal communicates urgency, impact, and alignment with a funder's priorities, and it does so in a way that makes the reviewer's decision to say yes feel both reasonable and exciting.

It helps to remember that a grant is not a gift in the ordinary sense. It is an agreement in which the funder invests in a result it cares about and the grantee commits to delivering that result responsibly, and the proposal is the document in which that agreement first takes shape. Seen this way, the writer's task is less about asking for help and more about showing a funder why supporting this particular project is the best way for it to advance its own mission.

Grant Writing as a Science and an Art

Professionals who work in grant writing need to master both the art and the science of the process. They must be able to analyze calls for proposals (CFPs), develop partnerships, write clearly and persuasively, and demonstrate accountability at every stage. Whether the work lies in international development, public health, education, arts and culture, or environmental conservation, effective grant writing is indispensable, because in each of these fields the ideas that reach the public are usually the ones that first found a way to pay for themselves.

Few people are born equally strong in both halves of the craft. Researchers often find the science comes naturally and the storytelling feels awkward, while community organizers frequently tell moving stories but struggle with logic models and budgets. The encouraging news is that both skills can be learned, and that a proposal is strongest when the weaker half has been deliberately strengthened rather than ignored.

The Science of Grant Writing

The scientific side of grant writing involves logic, structure, and adherence to strict guidelines. Funders often require specific formats, timelines, evaluation methods, measurable objectives, and detailed budgets, and they expect applicants to follow those requirements exactly. Scientific grant writing demands precision, evidence-based reasoning, and alignment with funder goals, and it is what allows a reviewer to confirm quickly that a project is eligible, feasible, and accountable. It includes:

- Conducting thorough research to identify appropriate funding sources
- Analyzing calls for proposals (CFPs) and meeting eligibility requirements
- Using data to support the identified problem and proposed solution
- Following standardized formats, such as logic models, work plans, and SMART objectives
- Planning monitoring and evaluation methods to track impact

This part of grant writing is methodical and rules-driven, grounded in policies, statistics, and verifiable outcomes. It is rarely glamorous, but it is where credibility is built, since a reviewer who finds the logic sound and the numbers consistent begins to trust everything else the proposal says.

The Art of Grant Writing

The art of grant writing lies in persuasive communication, storytelling, and emotional appeal. A successful grant writer does not just present facts; he or she inspires confidence and passion in the project, so that the reviewer finishes the proposal feeling that this is work worth doing and that these are the right people to do it. The artistic side includes:

- Crafting a compelling narrative that captures the funder's attention
- Telling the story of the community or issue being addressed in a human-centered way
- Using persuasive language to show urgency, relevance, and impact
- Highlighting the uniqueness and value of the proposed solution
- Building trust and demonstrating credibility through tone and presentation

This creative dimension transforms a technical proposal into a meaningful appeal that connects with reviewers on both rational and emotional levels. A reviewer may read dozens of proposals in a single week, and the ones that are remembered are almost always

those that put a face, a place, or a moment of real life behind the numbers.

In essence, grant writing as a science ensures compliance and credibility, while its art moves the reader to act. Mastering both elements is the key to writing proposals that are not only eligible but irresistible.

Types of Grants

Grants differ in what they pay for, how long they last, and what the funder expects in return, and knowing the main types will help you decide early which one you are really applying for.

- **Program Grants** support specific ongoing programs, such as youth development or literacy programs, and usually aim to sustain or strengthen work that is already under way.
- **Project Grants** fund time-limited activities with defined outcomes, such as a water access project, and are typically judged by whether the stated results were delivered within the stated period.
- **Capacity-Building Grants** help strengthen organizational infrastructure, such as upgrading IT systems or training staff, and are meant to leave the organization better equipped to do all of its future work.
- **Research Grants** provide support for academic or field research and are common among graduate students and postdoctoral researchers, who typically must show both scholarly rigor and a credible plan for sharing their findings.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> In Ghana, a youth-led organization received a project grant from the United Nations Democracy Fund to promote civic education through school clubs. In the UK, a postdoctoral researcher received a Wellcome Trust grant to explore community mental health resilience.

The Importance of Grant Writing

It also helps to look at the process from the other side of the desk. A funder, whether a government ministry, a family foundation, or a corporate giving program, exists to accomplish something in the world, and it cannot accomplish that something alone. It depends on applicants who can turn its broad purposes into specific projects, and it depends on proposals to tell it which projects are worth backing. Every funding decision is therefore an act of trust, made on the strength of a document, and the person who prepared that document is in effect asking a stranger to believe in work they have never seen. The better you understand this, the more naturally you will write for the reader rather than for yourself.

In today's competitive funding environment, the ability to write a successful grant proposal can determine whether an innovative project secures the resources it needs to succeed. A well-written proposal clearly communicates the problem being addressed, outlines specific goals and measurable objectives, describes the methods or activities to be undertaken, and presents a realistic budget. It also demonstrates the applicant's credibility and capacity to manage the funds effectively, which is often what separates two otherwise equal proposals in the final round of review.

Grant writing is more than just good writing; it requires research, strategic thinking, attention to detail, and an understanding of the funder's priorities. Each proposal must be tailored to align with the mission and guidelines of the funding organization, and that tailoring cannot be done at the last minute. Moreover, the work involves both technical components, such as logic models, evaluation plans, and budgets, and storytelling, where the writer must connect emotionally with the reviewer through a compelling narrative. The importance of grant writing can be summarized as follows:

- It secures funding for nonprofit, educational, or research activities.
- It builds organizational or academic credibility.
- It encourages careful planning and goal-setting.
- It helps give you access to resources for innovation and learning.

There is a further benefit that is easy to overlook. The discipline of writing a proposal forces you to define your problem, your method, and your measures of success before you spend a single dollar, and many applicants discover that a project is clearer, tighter, and more realistic after the proposal has been written, whether or not the grant is awarded.

EXERCISE

Write a 300-word statement describing your organization's (or your research project's) mission, the problem it addresses, and why you need funding. Highlight who will benefit and how.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is grant writing?
2. Name two types of grants.

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Grant writing is the craft of securing funding by presenting a clear need, a credible solution, and a sound plan.
- The *science* supplies structure, evidence, and compliance; the *art* supplies narrative, empathy, and persuasion.
- Grants come in several types, including program, project, capacity-building, and research grants.
- Writing a proposal sharpens your own thinking, whatever the funding outcome.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding the Grant Landscape

The first step to success in grant writing is understanding the different types of grants and funding organizations, and this understanding is the first crucial step on the road to a funded proposal. It involves knowing who the funders are, what they fund, why they fund it, and how they go about funding it. The grant landscape includes a wide range of funding sources, among them government agencies, private foundations, corporations, and international organizations, each with its own priorities, eligibility criteria, and application processes. To navigate this landscape effectively, grant seekers must research and identify opportunities that align with their mission, goals, and capacity. That means understanding the funding trends in your sector, recognizing what types of projects are most likely to be funded, and staying up to date on calls for proposals (CFPs).

A clear grasp of the landscape empowers you to target the right funders, tailor your proposals strategically, and increase your chances of securing funding. It is not just about finding money; it is about building partnerships with funders who share your vision, and a partnership of that kind is far more likely to survive the first grant and lead to a second.

Categories of Grants

Broadly, grants can be sorted into the following categories, and each one rewards a slightly different approach.

Government Grants are often large in scale and technical in nature, and they require detailed reporting. Examples include the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the European Union's Horizon Europe program. The NSF, for instance, funds basic scientific research and expects strong theoretical grounding, so a project on renewable energy innovation must show how it contributes to science and also how it addresses real-world applications. Government funders tend to prioritize large-scale, policy-relevant work, and they are usually the most demanding when it comes to compliance and documentation.

Foundation Grants come from private philanthropic institutions that fund causes aligned with their own missions, such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation, for example, supports human rights and social justice, and it emphasizes social justice in its priorities. If your project involves enhancing access to education for marginalized groups, your proposal should therefore emphasize systemic inequities and explain how your intervention addresses them.

Corporate Grants are provided through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. The Coca-Cola Foundation, for example, funds women's economic empowerment and environmental projects. A CSR grant from a technology company such as Google might favor proposals involving digital literacy or AI ethics in underserved communities, which shows how closely corporate funders tend to follow the interests of their own industries.

Local and Community Grants are generally smaller, easier to access, and more flexible, which makes them suitable for grassroots organizations. Community foundations, for instance, often fund grassroots programs in their own regions, and they can be an excellent place to build the track record that larger funders will later want to see.

University and Institutional Grants are internal awards made by universities and other institutions to their own students and staff. They are usually less competitive than external awards, and they are a sensible starting point for students and early-career researchers.

TIP

Before you begin writing, study the funder's recent calls, strategic plan, and previously funded projects. Understanding their language, values, and metrics will help you align your proposal effectively.

According to Gitlin and Lyons (2013), identifying the right category of grant helps reduce the risk of rejection due to misalignment. Each funder has a distinct mission, and aligning your proposal to their goals is essential. Government agencies often prioritize large-scale, policy-relevant research, while foundations may focus on innovation, equity, or social justice (Geever, 2012).

A LANDSCAPE THAT KEEPS CHANGING

Funding landscapes shift, sometimes quickly. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for many years one of the largest sources of international development funding, was officially wound down in 2025, with responsibility for much of its remaining foreign assistance moving to the U.S. Department of State. Examples in this book that mention USAID describe awards made before that change, and the lessons they illustrate about evidence, partnership, and planning remain fully valid. The practical point is that you should always confirm a funder's current status, priorities, and open calls on its official website before you invest time in an application.

Trends in Funding

Funders' interests move with the concerns of the world around them, and a grant seeker who understands the direction of travel can position a project where the energy already is. Several trends have been especially visible in recent years:

- **Climate Action:** emphasis on green technology and sustainable development.
- **Gender and Inclusion:** prioritizing programs for women, girls, and marginalized communities.
- **Innovation:** technology-driven, scalable solutions for health, education, and social impact.
- **Evidence-Based Programs:** a strong focus on measurable results and evaluation.

None of this means you should reshape your work to chase fashion. It means you should be able to explain, in the funder's own vocabulary, how what you already do contributes to the concerns that funder is trying to address.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A Colombian research team secured a grant from the Inter-American Development Bank to assess the impact of mobile learning for rural students. Meanwhile, a Nigerian postgraduate student won a Chevening Scholarship by aligning her proposed thesis with UK foreign policy priorities.

Understanding Grant Guidelines and RFPs

What Is an RFP?

An RFP (Request for Proposals) is a formal invitation issued by a funder to invite applications for a specific program. It details what the funder wants to support, who can apply, and how to submit. You may also meet the same idea under other names, such as a call for

proposals (CFP), a call for applications, or a funding announcement, and while the terminology varies, the function is the same: it is the funder's own statement of what a winning application looks like.

Components of an RFP

Most RFPs contain the following elements, and you should be able to locate every one of them before you begin writing:

i. The funder's objectives and goals
ii. The budget range
iii. The geographic focus
iv. The eligibility conditions
v. The formatting and deadline requirements

Reading Between the Lines

Funders use specific language to highlight priorities. Words like "must" or "required" signal mandatory elements, while "preferred" or "encouraged" imply bonus points. It is therefore imperative that you read between the lines, so that you do not miss requirements, or opportunities to score extra credit, that are buried in the wording of the call. A useful habit is to read the RFP three times: once for general understanding, once with a highlighter for every mandatory element, and once with a different color for everything that is merely encouraged.

> **CASE STUDY**
>
> A university in South Africa successfully won a UNESCO education grant after thoroughly analyzing the RFP and highlighting how its project aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

Donors and Priority Areas

The table below gives a small sample of how different donors combine thematic priorities, regional focus, and past investments. The entries are illustrative, and your own research should always go to the funder's current materials.

Donor	Priority Area	Region	Past Funded Project
Ford Foundation	Social justice	Global	Women's leadership in civic spaces (Kenya)
Gates Foundation	Global health	Sub-Saharan Africa	Malaria vaccine trials (Uganda)
DAAD (Germany)	Academic mobility	Africa, Asia	PhD scholarships in public policy (Nigeria)
Tata Trusts	Rural development	India	Clean water in tribal areas (Odisha)
USAID (before 2025)	Democracy and health	Global	Media literacy for youth (Ukraine)

Notice how each row tells you three things at once: what the donor cares about, where it works, and what it has actually paid for. The last column matters most, because a funder's past awards are the clearest evidence of what it is likely to fund again.

EXERCISES

Exercise 1: Download a real RFP and create a list of the top five mandatory requirements.

Exercise 2: Create your own table with five different donors. Include their areas of interest, regions of focus, and at least two previous projects they have funded.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Define "funding landscape."
2. Name one trend in global funding.
3. List two types of funding organizations.
4. What does RFP stand for?
5. Why is it important to follow formatting instructions exactly?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- The grant landscape consists of government agencies, foundations, corporations, community funders, and institutions, each with distinct priorities and rules.
- Funding trends such as climate action, gender and inclusion, innovation, and evidence-based programming shape what gets funded.
- An RFP is the funder's own description of a winning application; read it line by line and note what is mandatory and what is merely encouraged.
- Landscapes change, so always verify a funder's current status and priorities.

CHAPTER 3

Identifying the Right Grant

Writing a successful grant proposal begins long before the first word is typed. The most critical, yet often overlooked, step in grant writing is identifying the right funding opportunity, and without proper alignment between your project and the funder's priorities, even the most beautifully written proposal is likely to be rejected. Many applicants lose months pursuing grants that were never a good match, and the painful part is that the rejection often has nothing to do with the quality of their work. This chapter provides a detailed roadmap for finding and selecting grants that match your objectives, your organization, and your capacity.

How to Identify the Right Grant for Your Project

1. Understand Your Project or Program Goals

Before you begin searching for grants, define clearly:

- What you want to achieve (objectives and outcomes, SMART goals)
- Who your beneficiaries are
- How long the work will take
- What resources you will need (budget, timeline, expertise)

This clarity will guide your search and help you identify grants that align with your vision. A search that starts from a vague idea produces a vague list of opportunities, whereas a search that starts from a precise description of the work quickly filters out most of the noise.

EXAMPLES

An NGO aiming to provide clean water in arid communities in Kenya should look for funders supporting WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) programs in East Africa, rather than general poverty alleviation grants.

An individual aiming to reduce youth unemployment in a rural area through vocational training should target grants that support youth empowerment, education, and rural development.

> *"Clarity in your project is the compass that points you toward the right funding path."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

2. Use Grant Databases and Directories

Finding the right grant opportunity is as critical as writing a great proposal, and databases and search platforms let you survey far more opportunities than you could ever find by chance. Useful tools include:

- **GrantWatch:** lists grants across sectors and countries.
- **FundsforNGOs.org:** offers funding alerts and proposal tips.
- **Devex:** covers development-sector opportunities and news.
- **Research Professional:** serves scholars and academic grant seekers.
- **Candid's Foundation Directory** (long known as Foundation Directory Online): primarily covers US-based foundations.

Use these databases to set up alerts and filters (by sector, geography, and deadline), to subscribe to the newsletters of funding agencies, to attend webinars and information sessions held by grant makers, and to build networks with colleagues who have received similar grants. Some of these services are free and some require a paid subscription, so check whether your library, university, or professional association already provides access.

EXAMPLE

A doctoral student in South Africa used Research Professional to find and apply for an International Foundation for Science (IFS) grant to study sustainable agriculture. An NGO in Bangladesh found a match with the Global Fund for Children to support refugee education through FundsforNGOs.

3. Check Funder Priorities and Eligibility

Search strategically by reviewing each funder's:

- Mission and goals
- Geographic focus
- Target beneficiaries
- Past funded projects
- Eligibility criteria
- Application deadlines and processes
- Funding range and duration

Applying to a funder whose priorities do not align with your project is a common mistake, and effective grant seekers understand the value of a targeted approach. Miner and Miner (2008) make the same point: the most successful proposals are those that match the funder's priorities as closely as possible.

TIP

Read the funder's strategic plan or recent reports. These often reveal its thematic and geographic priorities in plain language.

A winning proposal, in other words, is one that fits the funder's agenda so closely that it could have been drawn from the funder's own brochure.

As Browning (2015) notes, tailoring your proposal to a funder's specific focus areas increases your chances of success exponentially. The logic is simple: a reviewer who can see at a glance that your

project belongs in the funder's portfolio does not have to be persuaded of its relevance and can spend that attention on its merits.

EXAMPLES

A funder interested in environmental conservation will not likely support a tech startup project unless there is a clear environmental angle.

A researcher in public health might explore funding from the Wellcome Trust or the World Health Organization (WHO), while a grassroots community organizer could benefit more from the Open Society Foundations.

An organization working on education for displaced persons can subscribe to newsletters from Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and to UNICEF grant alerts.

TIP

Always match the scope, timeline, and geographical focus of your project to that of the grant call.

> *"Don't chase the money, chase alignment. The right grant is one that fits your mission like a glove."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

4. Evaluate Fit and Feasibility

Once you have a shortlist, ask yourself some honest questions:

- Am I, or is my organization, eligible?
- Do I or we have the capacity to meet reporting and compliance requirements?
- Can I or we realistically meet the timelines?
- Are the funding amounts suitable for my or our project?

It is tempting to apply for the largest award on the list, but a grant that exceeds your capacity can damage a young organization's reputation if it cannot deliver. A smaller award that you manage superbly is a far better foundation for the next application.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A startup NGO or researcher may not be ready to apply for a $500,000 government grant requiring annual audits, but might well qualify for a $25,000 grant from a local foundation.

> **TIP**
>
> Keep a checklist for every potential grant, so that you can evaluate feasibility objectively rather than by instinct.

5. Network with Grantmakers and Previous Grantees

Sometimes the best insights come from conversations. This approach worked well for me and helped me secure a postdoctoral research fellowship recently. Reach out to:

- Program officers at foundations
- Organizations that have previously received the grant
- Professional networks and LinkedIn groups
- Sector peers
- Grantees whose profile pages invite contact

These connections can help you understand what funders are really looking for, and previous grantees are often generous with advice about what the process was like in practice.

EXAMPLE

A scholar looking to apply to the Harvard Radcliffe postdoctoral fellowship in the US can learn a great deal by reviewing past grantees' projects listed on the foundation's website.

> *"Funding success isn't just about your idea; it's about your fit in the funder's worldview."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

6. Avoid Common Pitfalls

Some habits quietly reduce your chances of success, and others strengthen them.

DON'TS

- Apply to every open grant call.
- Recycle the same proposal without customization (the "one-size-fits-all" approach).
- Ignore the fine print.

DOS

- ☐ Focus on quality over quantity.
- ☐ Customize each proposal to the funder.
- ☐ Track all applications and feedback.

Each grantor has specific interests and requirements. Avoid reusing the same proposal for different grants without customiza-

tion, and tailor your language, goals, and outcomes to match the grantor's unique interests.

Summary Checklist: Is This the Right Grant?

When you have several candidates and cannot decide among them, a simple scorecard can bring discipline to the choice. List the grants down the side of a page and the criteria across the top, namely alignment with your mission, eligibility, fit of the funding amount, your capacity to deliver and report, the realism of the deadline, and the funder's record of supporting similar work. Score each grant from one to five on each criterion, add the scores, and look at the totals. The numbers are not magic, and you should never apply to a grant merely because it scored well on paper, but the exercise has a way of surfacing doubts you had not admitted to yourself, and it gives you a reasoned answer when a colleague or board member asks why you chose one opportunity over another.

IS THIS THE RIGHT GRANT?

- ☐ It aligns with your mission and project.
- ☐ You meet all eligibility requirements.
- ☐ The funding amount and duration are appropriate.
- ☐ You have the capacity to deliver and report.
- ☐ The deadline is realistic.
- ☐ The funder has funded similar work before.
- ☐ You have sufficient internal capacity to implement and report.

Karsh and Fox (2014) argue that identifying the appropriate funding source is often more important than how well the proposal is written, because relevance determines a funder's initial interest.

EXERCISE

Search a grant database for three funding opportunities that relate to your current work or research. Write a short summary (100 to 150 words each) explaining who is offering the grant, what they are funding, and how your project fits their interests.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. List two tools for finding grants.
2. What should be considered when matching a grant?
3. Identify and list two grants for your project.

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Start your search from a precise description of your project, not from a list of funders.
- Use databases, alerts, newsletters, and personal networks to find opportunities.
- Check mission, geography, beneficiaries, eligibility, and past awards before investing time.
- Test feasibility honestly, and choose quality and fit over quantity.

CHAPTER 4

Developing a Compelling Proposal Idea

A strong proposal begins with a clear, innovative, and fundable idea. Funders look for ideas that address pressing problems with feasible and measurable interventions, and a compelling proposal addresses a real-world problem, offers an innovative solution, and promises measurable outcomes. Funders do not simply fund individuals or organizations; they fund well-defined solutions to urgent problems that align with their mission. A compelling proposal idea is one that solves a real need, rests on evidence, and demonstrates both impact and sustainability, a point Clarke (2009) makes in arguing that funders do not fund need so much as they fund solutions.

It is worth pausing on that distinction, because it is where many first-time applicants go wrong. Almost every community has real and urgent needs, and almost every applicant can describe theirs movingly, but a funder reading fifty proposals about fifty urgent needs is looking for the one that comes with a credible, specific, and affordable answer. The need opens the door; the solution is what gets you through it.

Key Elements of a Compelling Idea

- **Problem Statement:** clearly define the issue, supported by evidence.
- **Objectives:** state what you plan to achieve.
- **Innovation or Value:** explain what sets your approach apart and what you intend to add.

- **Alignment with Funder Priorities:** show that the idea is in line with the funder's mission, goals, and priorities.

1. Start with the Problem, Not the Project

Many unsuccessful proposals jump straight into describing a project without showing a clear understanding of the problem it is meant to solve. A compelling idea must first identify a specific, urgent problem backed by data, research, or community input. Effective grant proposals do more than answer application questions; they tell a compelling story, backed by evidence, logic, and passion. A successful grant proposal must integrate technical rigor with persuasive communication.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> Instead of saying, "We want to build a youth center," describe the problem: "In [State], 65% of youth aged 14 to 24 are unemployed, leading to increased crime and drug use. There are no youth development programs within a 20-mile radius (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023)."

Notice what the second version does. It names a place, quantifies the problem, links it to consequences a funder cares about, and shows that existing services have not filled the gap, so the youth center that follows is no longer a wish but a logical response.

> *"A problem well-stated is a problem half-solved."*
> *Charles Kettering*

Clarke (2009) emphasizes that describing the problem with precision is essential for justifying the need for intervention.

Use Evidence to Support Your Idea

Once the problem is defined, support your idea with evidence. Funders want proof that:

- The problem is real.
- Your solution is effective.
- You can achieve measurable results.

Draw on data, research studies, pilot projects, surveys, and community needs assessments, and wherever possible cite the source so that a reviewer can check it.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> "Our pilot project in Ogun State reduced school dropout by 40% among 12- to 16-year-olds through weekend mentorship programs (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022)."

Gitlin and Lyons (2013) argue that using empirical evidence increases the credibility of the proposal and helps funders make data-driven decisions. A small pilot, even one run on a modest budget with a handful of participants, is often the most persuasive evidence of all, because it shows that you can already do what you are asking to be paid to do at scale.

2. Be Clear About Objectives, Outcomes, and Impact

A compelling idea goes beyond activities. Funders want to know what will change because of the project, and they are far less interested in how busy you will be than in how different things will be when you are done. Compare these two statements:

- **Weak:** We will train 50 teachers.
- **Strong:** We will increase student reading levels by 25% in one year by training 50 teachers in phonics-based instruction.

The first describes an activity; the second describes a change, gives it a number and a time frame, and names the method by which it will happen. When you frame an idea, include:

- Short-term outcomes (for example, skills gained)
- Long-term impact (for example, poverty reduction or improved livelihoods)

- Indicators (how you will measure success)

> *"Great ideas become fundable when they promise change that can be measured and sustained."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

Use the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to structure your objectives effectively. If an objective cannot pass all five tests, it is almost certainly not ready to appear in a proposal.

3. Innovate but Stay Practical

Funders value innovation, but not at the expense of feasibility. Your idea must be realistic, scalable, and based on your organization's capacity, and a reviewer who suspects that you have promised more than you can deliver will tend to discount everything else in the proposal.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A nonprofit with three staff members and $10,000 in annual revenue may not realistically execute a $1 million Pan-African program.

Karsh and Fox (2014) make the point that the best proposals balance big dreams with grounded realities. It is also good practice to collaborate and co-create by engaging the target community or beneficiaries in the development of your idea. This leads to proposals that are more inclusive, more appropriate to their context, and more fundable, since funders are increasingly valuing participatory approaches.

> **EXAMPLE**

> Instead of assuming what women farmers need, you might conduct focus groups to co-design an agribusiness training tailored to their needs.

Browning (2015) notes that funders are more likely to fund ideas that are community-driven and locally informed.

4. Ensure the Idea Aligns with Funder Priorities

The best ideas are not only innovative but also match the mission, values, and goals of the funding organization. Review the funder's website, previous grants awarded, and annual reports to understand what it supports.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> If a foundation supports climate resilience in Africa, a project on sustainable agriculture using drought-resistant seeds in northern Kenya is a good fit. A mobile app for urban food delivery in Nairobi is not.

> **TIP**
>
> Use language in your proposal that reflects the funder's own terminology. This shows alignment and understanding, and it makes the reviewer's job easier.

Package Your Idea in a Winning Structure

A compelling idea must also be clearly organized in your proposal. Make sure it includes:

- The need or problem
- The proposed solution

- The target population
- The expected outcomes
- The implementation plan
- Sustainability

Create an internal concept note, or one-page summary, to refine the idea before writing the full proposal. If you cannot explain the idea persuasively in a single page, a longer document is unlikely to rescue it. A template for such a note appears in Appendix B.

An Example in Practice: A Fundable Proposal Idea

> **EMPOWER HER: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**
>
> **Problem:** 70% of adolescent girls in rural Kano lack access to secondary education and vocational training, leading to early marriage and poverty (World Bank, 2023).
>
> **Solution:** Provide after-school literacy and vocational training in tailoring and digital skills to 500 girls over two years.
>
> **Outcomes:**
>
> - 500 girls gain basic literacy and vocational skills.
> - 60% of participants start small businesses or gain apprenticeships within six months.
>
> **Impact:** Reduction in early marriage and an increase in household income among participants.

This concept note works because each element leads naturally to the next. The problem is specific and quantified, the solution is concrete and sized to the problem, the outcomes are measurable, and the impact is the long-term change that a funder in this field would hope to see.

EXERCISE

Write a SMART objective for your proposed project.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What does SMART stand for?
2. Mention three key elements of a grant proposal.

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Funders fund solutions, not needs; the need opens the door but the solution wins the grant.
- Begin with a precisely stated, evidence-backed problem rather than with the project.
- Promise measurable change (outcomes and impact), not just activities.
- Balance innovation with feasibility, and involve the community in shaping the idea.
- Refine the idea in a one-page concept note before you start the full proposal.

CHAPTER 5

Writing the Proposal Step-by-Step

Writing a grant proposal can seem daunting, especially when funding decisions depend on getting it right. Whether you are a student seeking a research fellowship, a scholar pursuing academic funding, or an NGO applying for program support, this step-by-step guide will walk you through the essential elements of crafting a strong proposal that resonates with funders. This chapter breaks the proposal down into its main components, explains what each one is for, and shows how the sections work together to form a single, coherent argument.

Main Components of a Grant Proposal

Although every funder has its own template, most proposals, whether for research or for programs, are built from the same ten components:

1. Executive Summary or Cover Letter: a concise overview
2. Introduction and Background: context and relevance
3. Problem Statement: data-driven justification
4. Project Description
5. Project Objectives
6. Methodology (called Measurement and Evaluation for NGOs): the action plan
7. Expected Results and Evaluation: outcomes and metrics
8. Budget and Justification
9. Sustainability Plan
10. Appendices

Treat this list as a skeleton rather than a straitjacket. When a funder supplies its own headings, use them exactly, and fit these components into that structure. When it does not, this order will serve you well, because it follows the natural logic of a reviewer's questions: Who are you, and what are you asking for? Why does it matter? What is wrong, and for whom? What will you do about it? How will you do it, and how will we know it worked? What will it cost, and what happens afterward?

Step 1: Executive Summary or Cover Letter

This section provides a snapshot of your proposal. Though it is written last, it appears first, and it is often the only part some funders read in full. Many reviewers use it to decide whether the rest of the proposal deserves their closest attention, and others use it later to remind themselves what each proposal was about when they compare finalists.

What to include:

- Who you are
- What you are proposing
- Why it matters
- How much you are requesting

> **EXAMPLE (NGO IN INDIA)**
>
> "We are a community-based organization in Rajasthan empowering rural girls through mobile classrooms. We seek $50,000 to expand to three additional districts, reaching 1,500 out-of-school girls."

> **TIP**
>
> Keep the summary to one page. Be clear, compelling, and concise, and write it only after the rest of the proposal is finished, so that it reflects what the document actually says.

Step 2: Introduction and Background (Context and Relevance)

The Introduction or Background section of a grant proposal lays the foundation for the entire document. It provides the context, explains the relevance, and sets the tone for everything that follows. A well-written background convinces the funder that the problem is significant, that the applicant is well informed, and that the proposed solution is timely and necessary.

> *"If you don't convincingly define the problem and context, your solution will lack purpose."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

I. What Is the Background Section?

This section introduces the project environment, the target population, and the nature and scope of the problem. It often includes:

- A brief history of the issue
- The socioeconomic, political, or environmental context
- Geographic relevance
- Data and research evidence
- Relevance to the funder's goals

According to Miner and Miner (2008), the background section should draw the funder into the applicant's world by offering context that justifies the project.

II. Why It Matters

Funders receive hundreds of proposals, and a compelling background section shows that:

- The issue is urgent and well researched.
- The applicant understands the local and global dynamics of the problem.
- The proposed intervention is relevant to the funder's mission.

> **EXAMPLE (NGO IN NEPAL)**
>
> "Despite national gains in literacy, rural women in Province 2 remain at 47% literacy (Nepal Education Ministry, 2022). In this region, early marriage and limited access to education persist as cultural and systemic challenges."

This example sets the stage for proposing an adult education program, and it does so in two sentences, one that acknowledges national progress and one that identifies the gap that remains.

III. Global Relevance: A Key to Attracting International Donors

For international donors, local problems must be connected to broader global development goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Grant writers should highlight how the problem aligns with international frameworks, because doing so shows the donor that its investment in one community contributes to something larger.

> **EXAMPLE (STUDENT RESEARCH IN UGANDA)**
>
> "This project explores the impact of mobile banking on women-led microenterprises in Kampala, contributing to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)."

Karsh and Fox (2014) observe that funders do not simply back projects; they back progress toward shared global goals.

IV. How to Structure the Background Section

A simple structure with guiding questions will keep your background focused.

a. Contextual Overview. What is the local, national, or global context? What trends or statistics support the need?

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> "Globally, 1 in 3 women experience gender-based violence, but response systems are weakest in post-conflict settings like South Sudan (UN Women, 2023)."

b. Target Population. Who is affected, and how many? What are their characteristics and vulnerabilities?

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> "The majority of affected youth in eastern Indonesia are school dropouts aged 14 to 18, lacking access to vocational skills."

c. Problem Definition. What is the specific issue this project addresses, and why is it urgent now? Gitlin and Lyons (2013) emphasize the importance of stating the problem clearly and early to maintain the reader's attention.

d. Individual or Organizational Connection. Why are you or your organization equipped to respond, and what past work supports your credibility?

> **EXAMPLE (SCHOLAR IN COLOMBIA)**
>
> "Our university has led three longitudinal studies on deforestation in the Amazon, funded by the Global Research Council, building a robust baseline for this proposal."

V. Tips for Writing a Strong Background Section

- Use credible sources, such as the UN, the World Bank, and peer-reviewed studies.
- Avoid jargon, and write for a general reader.
- Include recent statistics.
- Connect local issues to global priorities.
- Make the need visible and urgent.

Clarke (2009) argues that the most compelling proposals open with a background vivid enough to make funders feel the urgency to act.

VI. Example of a Strong Background Section (NGO in Ghana)

> **IMPROVING MENSTRUAL HEALTH FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN NORTHERN GHANA**
>
> Menstrual health management (MHM) is a significant barrier to education for adolescent girls in Ghana. According to UNICEF (2022), 28% of schoolgirls in the Northern Region miss at least one week of school each month due to inadequate MHM infrastructure and stigma. This absence contributes to high dropout rates and limits future opportunities. The proposed project aims to reduce school absenteeism by providing reusable sanitary products, education, and school-based support services.

This paragraph introduces a clear problem, uses credible data, establishes urgency and relevance, and sets up the rest of the proposal. Few background sections need to be much longer than this to do their job well.

Step 3: Problem Statement

If the background is the setting, the problem statement is the *why* of your proposal. You must demonstrate that there is a real, evidence-based need for the proposed intervention, and that the need is specific enough to be addressed within the scope of your project. Include:

- A clear description of the problem
- Who is affected and how
- Evidence, such as data, research, and testimonies

EXAMPLE (STUDENT RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA)

"South Africa has the highest youth unemployment rate globally (World Bank, 2023). Yet little research explores how vocational education impacts long-term employment outcomes among Black South African youth. This study aims to fill that gap."

Effective grant proposals do more than answer application questions; they tell a compelling story, backed by evidence, logic, and passion. Gitlin and Lyons (2013) stress that the problem statement should engage both the heart and the mind of the funder. A statement that offers only statistics may satisfy the mind and leave the heart untouched, while one that offers only anecdote may do the reverse, and the strongest problem statements pair a number with a human story.

> *"A grant proposal is not a plea for charity; it is a persuasive argument for investment in a solution."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

Step 4: Project Description (Program Narrative)

This is the core of the proposal. Here you explain your project and how it solves the problem you have just identified, in enough detail that a reviewer can picture the work being done. The key components are:

- Goals and objectives (use the SMART format)
- Activities and timelines
- Target population
- Geographic area
- Methodology (for research proposals)

> **EXAMPLE (NGO IN KENYA)**
>
> **Goal:** Improve maternal health outcomes in rural Kajiado County.
>
> **Objective:** Train 100 community health workers within 12 months to deliver prenatal care.
>
> **Activities:** Workshops, field visits, and mobile health clinics.

Browning (2015) advises making the project so clear that even a reader with no background can understand its value. A useful test is to hand this section to a colleague outside your field and ask them to explain back to you what you will do, for whom, and by when.

Step 5: Project Objectives

Clearly distinguish between three terms that applicants often blur together:

- **Goals:** broad aspirations
- **Objectives:** specific, measurable achievements
- **Outcomes:** changes or benefits resulting from the project

> **EXAMPLE (SCHOLAR IN BRAZIL)**
>
> **Goal:** Advance climate science in the Amazon Basin.
>
> **Objective:** Collect satellite and field data on forest loss over 18 months.
>
> **Expected Outcome:** Publish a peer-reviewed paper and influence local conservation policies.

Goals tell the reviewer where you are headed, objectives tell them what you will accomplish along the way, and outcomes tell them what will be different because you did. A proposal that contains all three, each in its proper place, reads as the work of someone who has thought the project through.

Step 6: Methodology and Action Plan

The methodology, or action plan, is the heart of your grant proposal. It explains how you will achieve your goals and what steps you will take to deliver results. Funders want to know how success will be measured, which indicators will be tracked, which tools and methods will be used for data collection, and who will evaluate and when. For both individual and organizational applicants, this section must present a clear, logical, and feasible path from problem to solution.

> *"A goal without a plan is just a wish. Funders want a blueprint, not just a dream."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

I. What Is a Methodology or Action Plan?

The methodology is a step-by-step outline of your activities, strategies, and timelines. It should answer four questions:

- What will you do?
- How will you do it?
- When and where will it happen?
- Who will be responsible?

According to Miner and Miner (2008), the methodology should demonstrate the link between the project's activities and its anticipated outcomes.

II. Key Components of an Effective Action Plan

Whether you are an individual or an organization, your methodology should include the following components:

Component	Description
Activities	Specific tasks or interventions you will carry out
Timeline	When each activity will take place (often shown as a Gantt chart)

Component	Description
Roles and Responsibilities	Who is responsible for each task
Location	Where the activities will occur
Resources	Tools, materials, or personnel needed
Process	A step-by-step breakdown of execution

III. Methodology for Individual Grantees (Students and Researchers)

If you are applying for a research grant or academic funding, the methodology must reflect scientific rigor and clarity of purpose. Reviewers will look for a design that fits the research question, a realistic schedule, and a plan for analyzing and sharing the results.

EXAMPLE (STUDENT IN KENYA STUDYING URBAN AGRICULTURE)

Goal: Assess the impact of urban rooftop farming on household food security in Nairobi.

Methodology:

- **Literature Review (Months 1 to 2):** Review 25 peer-reviewed articles on urban agriculture.
- **Survey Design (Month 3):** Design a household food security questionnaire.
- **Fieldwork (Months 4 to 6):** Visit 50 rooftop farms and collect data from 150 households.
- **Data Analysis (Months 7 to 8):** Use SPSS to analyze food production and consumption trends.
- **Dissemination (Month 9):** Present findings at a university conference and submit for journal publication.

Browning (2015) describes the methodology as your contract with the funder: it says what you will do and how the funder will know that you did it.

IV. Methodology for Organizational Grantees (NGOs and CBOs)

For nonprofits, including community-based organizations (CBOs), the methodology focuses on the measurement and evaluation of community-based interventions, on logistics, and on program implementation.

- **Purpose:** Explain how you will measure the project's success.
- **Content:** Define indicators, data collection methods, the frequency of monitoring, and who is responsible. Include both qualitative and quantitative measures.
- **Tips:** Align monitoring and evaluation (M&E) with project objectives and donor requirements, and demonstrate accountability and learning.
- **Example:** "We will track the number of trained health workers (output) and maternal mortality rates in the target communities (outcome), with quarterly progress reports."

EXAMPLE (NGO IN BANGLADESH IMPLEMENTING A LITERACY PROGRAM)

Goal: Improve literacy among 1,000 women in Dhaka's slums.

Activities and Timeline:

- **Baseline Assessment (Month 1):** Conduct literacy tests among 1,000 women using standardized tools.
- **Curriculum Development (Month 2):** Adapt the existing government-approved adult literacy curriculum.
- **Recruit Trainers (Month 2):** Hire and train 20 facilitators from the local community.
- **Literacy Classes (Months 3 to 9):** Run five weekly sessions in 10 community centers.
- **Monitoring (Months 4 to 9):** Use attendance and learning assessments to track progress.
- **Final Evaluation (Month 10):** Conduct post-intervention tests and focus groups to assess impact.

Staff Roles:

- **Program Manager:** oversees operations and budget
- **M&E Officer:** manages data collection
- **Field Facilitators:** conduct daily lessons

Gitlin and Lyons (2013) emphasize that organizational grantees must demonstrate coordination and clarity of execution in the action plan in order to avoid implementation gaps.

V. Gantt Chart Example

A Gantt chart presents the schedule visually or in table form. The simplified version below corresponds to the literacy program above.

Month	Activity	Responsible Party
Month 1	Baseline Assessment	M&E Officer
Month 2	Curriculum Adaptation and Hiring	Program Manager
Months 3 to 9	Literacy Classes	Community Facilitators
Months 4 to 9	Monitoring and Mentorship	Field Supervisors
Month 10	Final Evaluation and Reporting	M&E Officer

VI. Tips for Writing a Strong Methodology

- **Be specific:** Avoid vague verbs like "support" or "assist." Use "train," "distribute," "measure," and similar precise verbs instead.
- **Be realistic:** Do not plan to do too much in too little time.
- **Be measurable:** Tie activities to outcomes. Write "Train 500 farmers" instead of "Empower communities."
- **Be aligned:** Your methodology must reflect the goals and needs identified in the problem statement.

VII. COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Overambitious timelines
- Unclear roles and responsibilities
- A disconnect between proposed activities and the budget
- Failing to explain how activities will lead to the desired outcomes

VIII. Bridging Individual and Organizational Approaches

Some projects blend research and implementation, such as those in which PhD students work with NGOs or academics evaluate nonprofit programs. Such partnerships can give both sides something valuable that neither could easily obtain alone.

EXAMPLE (SCHOLAR IN INDIA PARTNERING WITH A HEALTH NGO)

The researcher collects data from a rural HIV-prevention program run by the NGO, evaluates its success, and co-publishes the findings, creating value for both academia and community impact.

In Clarke's (2009) view, collaboration between researchers and implementers yields richer data and greater impact.

Step 7: Expected Results and Evaluation (Outcomes and Metrics)

One of the most critical components of a grant proposal is demonstrating that the project will produce meaningful, measurable change. Funders want to know not just what you plan to do, but what difference it will make and how you will know it succeeded. This step explains how to frame expected results, identify outcomes, and design evaluation strategies and metrics for both individual and organizational grantees.

> *"What gets measured gets managed, and funded."*
> *Anon*

I. Understanding Results, Outcomes, and Impact

Expected results are the changes or benefits that will occur because of the project. They can be classified into three levels:

- **Outputs:** tangible deliverables or activities completed (for example, the number of workshops held)
- **Outcomes:** short- to medium-term changes in knowledge, behavior, or conditions (for example, improved literacy rates)
- **Impact:** long-term change at the systemic or community level (for example, a reduction in poverty)

A good proposal, as Gitlin and Lyons (2013) suggest, does not stop at activities; it envisions transformation.

II. Expected Results: Examples for Different Grantees

a. For Individual Grantees (for example, Student Researchers)

Project: Investigating the link between climate change and crop failure in Northern Nigeria.

- **Outputs:** one comprehensive research paper submitted for peer review; three stakeholder interviews conducted
- **Outcomes:** a policy brief created for local agricultural authorities; increased awareness among 200 farmers of climate resilience strategies
- **Impact:** adoption of improved irrigation methods by small-scale farmers (monitored after the project)

b. For Organizational Grantees (for example, NGOs)

Project: Enhancing access to education for displaced children in Lebanon.

- **Outputs:** 12 temporary learning centers established; 30 teachers trained in trauma-sensitive pedagogy
- **Outcomes:** 1,500 children enrolled and attending classes regularly; reading levels improved by 40% within six months

- **Impact:** integration of displaced children into formal schooling systems over two years

III. Crafting SMART Outcomes

Effective outcomes should be SMART:

- **Specific:** clearly state what will change
- **Measurable:** include numbers or indicators
- **Achievable:** realistic for the timeline and resources
- **Relevant:** aligned with the funder's and the community's priorities
- **Time-bound:** set a deadline for when outcomes will occur

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> "By the end of the 12-month period, 75% of participating women will demonstrate a 50% increase in digital literacy scores."

IV. Evaluation Strategies: Measuring Progress

Evaluation is the process of determining whether the project achieved its intended results. Different types of evaluation answer different questions at different times.

Type of Evaluation	Purpose	Timing
Formative	Improve implementation	During the project
Summative	Assess outcomes	At project end
Impact	Assess long-term effects	After the project

According to Karsh and Fox (2014), a strong evaluation plan builds funder confidence that the project will be accountable and data-driven.

V. Evaluation Tools and Methods

- Pre- and post-tests
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Focus group discussions
- Observation checklists
- Case studies
- Statistical analysis tools (for example, SPSS and Excel)
- Third-party evaluators (for large projects)

VI. Sample Evaluation Matrix

An evaluation matrix links each outcome to the indicator that will measure it, the source of the data, and the frequency of collection.

Outcome	Indicator	Data Source	Frequency
500 youth trained in ICT skills	Number of training graduates	Attendance records	Monthly
70% job placement within 6 months	Employment status	Post-training survey	Quarterly
Improved mental health awareness	Percentage of youth scoring above 70% on a quiz	Pre- and post-test	Pre and post

VII. A Thought to Guide You

> *"Funders fund the future, not the past. Make your results forward-looking."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

VIII. PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Using vague results such as "raise awareness" without explaining how much or how you will know
- Listing activities as outcomes (for example, "held training")
- Failing to budget for evaluation tools or personnel
- Not aligning outcomes with project goals and funder priorities

IX. Linking Results to Sustainability

When articulating results, consider how the outcomes will continue beyond the life of the grant. Funders want to see that their investment will lead to long-term change.

EXAMPLE

Rather than simply distributing books to rural schools, propose training local teachers to create self-sustaining reading clubs.

Step 8: Budget and Budget Justification

Your budget tells the funder how their money will be spent, and every line must be justified. The budget is treated in detail in the next chapter, but at the drafting stage you should include the following categories:

- Personnel
- Equipment
- Travel
- Supplies
- Indirect costs (if allowed)

> **TIP**
>
> Align the budget with the narrative, so that there are no surprises. Every major activity in the plan should have a matching cost, and every cost should trace back to an activity.

A persuasive budget does more than add up. It shows the reviewer that the person who prepared it has thought about the practical details of delivering the project, from the number of staff hours each activity will consume to the price of transport between sites, and that the total requested is neither inflated to leave room for negotiation nor squeezed so tightly that the project cannot be completed. Reviewers have seen both mistakes many times, and each of them damages trust in the applicant.

> **EXAMPLE (STUDENT GRANT IN GERMANY)**
>
> €2,000 for archival research trips, €1,000 for translation, and €500 for conference travel.

Clarke (2009) advises that budgets should reflect priorities and reality rather than optimism or guesswork.

Step 9: Sustainability Plan (If Applicable)

The sustainability plan answers the question: *What happens after the grant ends?* Funders are understandably reluctant to start something that will collapse the moment their support is withdrawn, so a credible answer can strengthen the whole application. Discuss:

- Future funding plans
- Income-generating components
- Partnerships
- Community ownership

It is useful to think of sustainability in three layers. Financial sustainability asks how the work will be paid for once the grant has been spent, whether through new grants, fees for service, or support from government or local institutions. Institutional sustainability asks whether the organization, department, or team will have the systems, skills, and policies to continue the work, and whether staff who leave will take the knowledge with them. Community sustainability asks whether the people the project serves will have the knowledge, the skills, and above all the sense of ownership to carry the benefits forward without outside help. A strong plan speaks, even briefly, to all three.

> **EXAMPLE (NGO IN NIGERIA)**
>
> After one year of donor funding, women trained in agribusiness will contribute to a cooperative that generates revenue and pays for continued mentoring.

As Karsh and Fox (2014) suggest, a funder's best return is a project that thrives long after its money is gone.

Step 10: Appendices (If Applicable)

Appendices hold the supporting material that would clutter the narrative but that reviewers may wish to check. They may include:

- Letters of support
- CVs of key staff
- An organizational chart
- Maps or photos
- Proof of nonprofit status

The rule for appendices is that they should support the narrative and never replace it. A reviewer should be able to understand and score your proposal without opening a single attachment, and should open them only to confirm something the narrative has already claimed. Refer to each appendix by name at the point in the text where it matters, keep the set to what the funder has actually asked for, and resist the temptation to add material merely because you have it.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A community-based NGO in Peru may attach endorsement letters from tribal leaders showing local support.

Summary: The Proposal Structure at a Glance

Section	Purpose
Executive Summary	Overview of the full proposal
Background	Context and relevance
Problem Statement	Explains the problem
Project Description	Details the solution
Objectives and Outcomes	Defines success
Methodology	Plan of action

Section	Purpose
Evaluation Plan	Shows impact
Budget	Shows how funds will be used
Sustainability Plan	Ensures long-term viability
Appendices	Adds credibility and documentation

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Vague goals and activities
- Ignoring the funder's guidelines
- An overly ambitious scope
- No plan for sustainability or evaluation
- Weak justification for budget items

TIP

Use active voice and persuasive language. Reviewers appreciate clarity and confidence.

EXERCISE

Write the executive summary of your proposed project (150 to 200 words).

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Name three standard sections of a grant proposal.
2. Which section of the proposal deals with timelines?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- A proposal is a single argument built from ten linked components, from executive summary to appendices.
- Define goals, objectives, and outcomes separately, and make every objective SMART.
- The methodology is your contract with the funder: it must show what, how, when, where, and who.
- Distinguish outputs, outcomes, and impact, and match each to an indicator and a data source.
- Write the executive summary last, and align the budget and sustainability plan with the narrative.

CHAPTER 6

Budgeting for Success

Budgets show that your plan is financially viable and responsibly managed, and a well-justified budget enhances your proposal's credibility. A budget is more than just numbers; it is a clear financial blueprint that supports your project goals. Whether you are a student applying for a research grant or an NGO seeking funding for a large-scale program, your budget tells the funder: "We understand what it takes to make this happen, and we're ready to manage it responsibly."

Budgeting success in grant writing goes beyond listing costs. It is about presenting a clear, accurate, and justifiable financial plan that aligns with your project goals, and it demonstrates to funders that you understand your project's needs, can manage resources responsibly, and will deliver value for money. A successful budget tells the story of your proposal in numbers. It includes direct costs (such as salaries, equipment, and travel), indirect costs (such as administrative overhead), and often a narrative or justification that explains how each expense supports the project's success. Funders look for transparency, realism, and alignment between the budget and the project narrative, and if your goals are ambitious but your budget is vague or unrealistic, your proposal risks rejection, even if the idea is strong.

> *"A good budget doesn't limit your vision; it anchors it in reality."*
> *Anon*

I. Why Budgeting Matters

Funders want to see that you:

- Understand your project's financial needs.
- Can justify your expenses.
- Will be accountable and transparent.

Clarke (2009) describes the budget as a reflection of the project's soul, since what you value most will show up in your numbers, while Karsh and Fox (2014) note that many funders begin their review of a proposal with the budget, because it is where feasibility is either confirmed or questioned. Whatever order a reviewer actually reads in, the budget will be checked against the narrative, and any mismatch between the two will raise questions that your proposal may not be present to answer.

II. Components of a Grant Budget

Most budgets are organized under a standard set of categories. Funders sometimes define their own, so always check the template, but the following structure will be familiar in almost every setting.

Category	Description	Example
Personnel	Salaries or stipends for project staff	Research assistant, project coordinator
Fringe Benefits	Health insurance, retirement	15 to 25% of salaries (varies by country)
Travel	Field visits, conferences, site supervision	Transport to refugee camps, airfare to a workshop
Equipment	Items above $500 (or the funder-defined threshold)	Laptops, scientific instruments
Supplies	Consumables or items below $500	Stationery, training materials
Contractual	Consultants or subgrants	External evaluator, software developer

Category	Description	Example
Other	Miscellaneous needs	Printing, internet, monitoring software
Indirect Costs	Administrative overhead, if allowed	Often capped at 10 to 15% by the funder

Direct costs are those that can be tied specifically to the project, such as the salary of the person who runs it, while indirect costs support the organization as a whole, such as accounting, utilities, and management time. Many funders cap indirect costs or disallow them altogether, so read the guidelines closely before deciding how much to include.

III. Budget Example: Individual Grantee (Student Researcher)

Project: Investigating women's participation in local governance in rural Uganda

Budget Item	Amount (USD)
Research assistant stipend	$1,200
Travel to 3 districts	$900
Interview recording tools	$300
Stationery and printing	$200
Data analysis software	$400
Dissemination (journal fees, conference)	$1,000
Total	**$4,000**

IV. Budget Example: Organizational Grantee (NGO Project)

Project: Empowering 500 adolescent girls with STEM skills in India

Budget Item	Amount (USD)
Program Manager (12 months)	$9,000
5 STEM Trainers (part-time)	$15,000
Equipment (5 laptops, robotics kits)	$6,000
Internet, utilities	$1,800
Travel to partner schools	$1,500
Monitoring and Evaluation	$2,200
Communications and printing	$1,000
Indirect costs (10%)	$3,650
Total	**$40,150**

Notice that the indirect cost line is calculated on the direct costs of $36,500, and that the total is the sum of every line above it. Arithmetic like this must be checked and re-checked, since a budget whose figures do not add up tells a reviewer that other parts of the proposal may not have been checked either.

V. Tips for Effective Budgeting

- Align costs with your methodology.
- Use realistic estimates; do not undercut or inflate.
- Justify all items in a budget narrative.
- Follow the funder's guidelines and templates.
- Include in-kind contributions if applicable (for example, office space and volunteer time).

In-kind contributions, meaning goods, services, or time that you or your partners provide without charge, deserve particular attention. They demonstrate commitment and community ownership,

and some funders require a cost-share, so listing them clearly can strengthen your case.

VI. Budget Narrative: Telling the Story Behind the Numbers

The budget narrative, also called the budget justification, explains each item. It shows that every dollar has a purpose and that the amounts were not chosen at random.

> **EXAMPLE (TRAVEL JUSTIFICATION)**
>
> "We estimate $900 for travel to three project locations (300 km apart), including public transport, meals, and overnight lodging for the project team during field data collection."

A good justification states what the item is, how the amount was calculated, and why the project needs it. Where possible, show the arithmetic: the number of trips, the cost per trip, and the source of the estimate.

Gitlin and Lyons (2013) make the point that a number without a narrative is just noise, and that every line should be explained.

> **VII. COMMON BUDGETING MISTAKES**
>
> - Forgetting hidden costs (for example, insurance and bank fees)
> - Requesting items the funder does not allow (for example, construction costs)
> - A lack of consistency between the budget and the activities
> - Failing to show value for money

VIII. Budgeting in International Contexts

For applicants working across borders, consider:

- **Currency fluctuations:** specify the currency and the date of the exchange rate.
- **Local cost norms:** use realistic local figures such as daily wages and transport costs.
- **Legal requirements:** account for tax rates and fringe benefit obligations.

> *"A global proposal needs a local budget. Funders want context-anchored costs."*
> *Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko*

IX. Final Check: The Budget Checklist

BUDGET CHECKLIST

- ☐ Are all costs allowable under the funder's guidelines?
- ☐ Are all costs essential to achieving project goals?
- ☐ Is the budget complete, consistent, and balanced?
- ☐ Do you have quotes for large purchases or contractors?

EXERCISE

Draft a sample budget for your project, with a short justification for each line.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why does budgeting matter?
2. What do funders want to see in a budget?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- A budget is the proposal told in numbers, and it must match the narrative line for line.
- Organize costs into standard categories, and separate direct from indirect costs.
- Justify every line in a budget narrative that shows how the figure was calculated.
- Check the arithmetic, the funder's allowable costs, and the currency basis before submitting.

CHAPTER 7

Strengthening Your Proposal with Supporting Documents

In grant writing, the core narrative of your proposal, no matter how compelling, must be backed by relevant, credible supporting documents. These documents help funders verify your claims, assess your organizational capacity, and build trust in your ability to deliver on your objectives. They provide proof of capacity, credibility, and alignment, and the most common among them are letters of support, CVs of key personnel, a work plan or Gantt chart, and an organizational chart. Including a letter of commitment from a university partner, for example, can strengthen a proposal seeking to build an academic research consortium.

I. Why Supporting Documents Matter

Funders often receive hundreds of proposals, and what sets a successful one apart is not just a well-articulated project plan but evidence that supports every claim made. Supporting documents can:

- Demonstrate your qualifications or organizational capacity.
- Provide legitimacy through past performance.
- Show alignment with legal, financial, and strategic requirements.
- Enhance transparency and trustworthiness.
- Reinforce the credibility, feasibility, and professionalism of a grant proposal.

While the proposal tells the story, supporting documents prove that the story is real, well planned, and achievable.

Miner and Miner (2008) make the point that funders do not fund ideas alone; they fund ideas with proof.

> *"Documentation is the bridge between your vision and a funder's confidence."*
> *Anon*

II. Common Supporting Documents

Type	Purpose	Examples
Organizational Documents	Establish legal identity and credibility	Certificate of incorporation, bylaws
Financial Documents	Prove fiscal responsibility and solvency	Audited financial statements, budget reports
Letters of Support or Commitment	Show stakeholder backing and collaboration	Letters from partners, government bodies, and community leaders
CVs and Resumes	Highlight the relevant expertise of team members	The principal investigator's academic resume, NGO staff profiles
Work Samples or Past Reports	Demonstrate track record and experience	Previous project reports, evaluation summaries
Needs Assessment Data	Justify the problem statement	Survey results, baseline studies
Logical Framework (LogFrame)	Present a structured overview of goals, outcomes, and indicators	LogFrame matrix or theory of change
Monitoring and Evaluation Plan	Show how success will be measured	M&E tools, indicators, schedule

Type	Purpose	Examples
Risk Mitigation Strategy	Address potential implementation challenges	Risk matrix or contingency plan

A logical framework, usually called a LogFrame, is a compact table that links a project's goal, outcomes, outputs, and activities to the indicators, sources of verification, and assumptions that go with each. A simple layout appears in Appendix B. A risk mitigation strategy, in turn, lists the things that could go wrong, such as delays, staff turnover, or security problems, estimates how likely and how serious each would be, and states what you will do to prevent or manage it. Funders read such a plan as a sign of maturity rather than pessimism.

III. Examples for Different Applicants

a. Student Applicant

Project: Field research on water access in rural Ethiopia

Supporting documents:

- Letter of recommendation from a supervisor
- Institutional affiliation letter
- Research ethics clearance
- Proposed timeline and travel itinerary
- Sample questionnaire and consent forms

b. NGO Applicant

Project: Mobile health outreach for HIV prevention in South Africa

Supporting documents:

- Organization registration certificate
- Three years of audited financials
- Memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with local clinics and district health boards

- Staff bios and CVs
- Past program reports with success metrics
- Sustainability strategy
- LogFrame and Gantt chart

IV. How to Prepare High-Quality Documents

- **Tailor each document to the funder's guidelines.** Do not include irrelevant or outdated files.
- **Ensure consistency between the proposal narrative and the documents.** For instance, if you mention a partner, include their letter.
- **Keep it professional.** Use organizational letterheads, a formal tone, and careful proofreading.
- **Label documents clearly,** for example "Annex 3: Organizational Chart" or "Appendix B: M&E Framework."
- **Submit in the required format.** PDFs are preferred unless stated otherwise.

A strong letter of support deserves special mention. Rather than a generic endorsement, the best letters are specific: they say who is writing and in what capacity, what relationship they have with the applicant, what they will contribute (space, data, staff time, access to participants), and why the project matters to their own community or institution. When you request such a letter, make the writer's task easy by providing a short summary of the project, the funder's name, the deadline, and a few bullet points they may wish to address.

V. Quotes and Testimonials: Adding Credibility

Well-placed quotes from beneficiaries, community leaders, or past evaluators can give your proposal a human voice. They work best when they are short, specific, and used sparingly, and when they are genuine, attributable, and shared with permission.

EXAMPLE (ILLUSTRATIVE BENEFICIARY TESTIMONIAL)

"This program changed my life. Before the training, I had no job. Now I teach others." (A fictitious program beneficiary in Kenya)

EXAMPLE (ILLUSTRATIVE PARTNER ENDORSEMENT)

"[Program Name] was one of the most impactful community-led initiatives we have supported." (A fictitious regional officer at an international development agency)

The testimonials above are fictitious and are offered only to show format, length, and tone. In your own proposals, use only genuine testimonials that you have permission to quote.

VI. Legal and Ethical Considerations

- Always obtain permission for using third-party documents or quotes.
- If you are working with vulnerable populations, include evidence of ethical clearance or informed consent processes.
- For collaborative proposals, ensure that all partner organizations formally endorse the project.

VII. What Funders Say

> *"The biggest red flag is a great narrative with no backing. No support letters, no numbers, no data, it's all talk."*
> *An illustrative program officer at a major foundation (fictitious)*

According to Gitlin and Lyons (2013), funders often use supporting documents to make final judgments, especially when multiple proposals are equally strong in content. In a close competition, the

application with complete, consistent, professionally presented documentation is the one that feels safest to fund.

EXERCISE

Give three examples of supporting documents for each of two different applicants.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are supporting documents?
2. Why do supporting documents matter?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Supporting documents prove the claims your narrative makes about your capacity, credibility, and partnerships.
- Typical documents include organizational and financial records, letters of support, CVs, past reports, a LogFrame, an M&E plan, and a risk strategy.
- Make each document specific, consistent with the narrative, clearly labeled, and in the required format.
- Obtain permission for every quote, letter, or third-party document you include.

CHAPTER 8

Navigating the Submission Process

Submitting a grant proposal is the final step in a long and intensive process, yet it is also the phase where many strong proposals fall short, through missed deadlines, incorrect formatting, or incomplete documentation. Understanding and mastering the submission process is essential for securing funding, especially for postdoctoral fellows, NGOs, and academic institutions working in global contexts. Adhering to submission guidelines is crucial, because many proposals are rejected for late or incomplete submissions. Start early to allow time for internal approvals, double-check formatting, file types, and naming conventions, and submit at least 48 hours before the deadline.

How to Navigate the Submission Process

Working Backward from the Deadline

The most dependable way to avoid a last-minute crisis is to plan the submission in reverse, beginning with the deadline and working back to today. One workable pattern, which you should adapt to the size of the application and the rules of your institution, is to settle the concept and confirm eligibility about six weeks before the deadline, to have a full first draft ready four weeks before, and to request letters of support and begin internal approvals at the same time. Two weeks before the deadline, the draft should go to a colleague who has not worked on it, and the budget should be checked line by line against the narrative. In the final week you complete the supporting

documents, correct the formatting, and prepare the upload, so that the last forty-eight hours are reserved for a calm final review and the submission itself rather than for writing. Short calls will compress this schedule, but the order of the steps stays the same.

I. Understanding Submission Guidelines

Every funder, whether a government agency, a foundation, or a university, has specific submission protocols. These may include:

- The submission platform (for example, Grants.gov, ResearchConnect, or the EU Participant Portal)
- File formats (PDF, DOCX, or Excel for the budget)
- Page limits and font styles
- Deadlines (date, time, and time zone)
- The number of required copies
- Attachments and annexes

Miner and Miner (2008) advise reading the Request for Proposals (RFP) or Call for Applications (CFA) line by line, since attention to detail can be the difference between rejection and success.

II. Common Mistakes to Avoid

COMMON SUBMISSION MISTAKES

- **Missing the deadline:** Funders often enforce strict cut-offs, and late submissions are usually not accepted.
- Uploading incorrect or outdated files.
- Exceeding page or word limits.
- Using incorrect file names or formats.
- Omitting required signatures or institutional approvals.

> *"Your proposal can be brilliant, but if it misses the deadline or key instructions, it may never be read."*
> *Anon*

III. The Role of Institutional Offices (for Postdocs and Scholars)

Many academic institutions require proposals to go through internal vetting before external submission. The offices involved typically include:

- The Grants Management Office
- The Office of Sponsored Programs
- The Research Compliance Office

These offices exist to protect both you and the institution, since a signed application commits the university to the terms of any award. They also have deadlines of their own, which are usually well ahead of the funder's, so find out early what they are.

EXAMPLE (POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW)

Dr. Maya Singh, applying for a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship in Germany, had to secure approval from her host university's legal and ethics board two weeks before the EU deadline. The internal process included a draft review, a financial compliance check, and a signature from the Dean of Research.

Portal	Audience	Tip

IV. Online Submission Portals: Tips and Best Practices

Portal	Audience	Tip
Grants.gov (USA)	NGOs, universities, postdocs	Register early. A SAM.gov registration and a Unique Entity ID (UEI) are required.
European Commission Portal	EU applicants, postdocs	Use the participant register and check eligibility rules by country.
Wellcome Funding platform	Researchers, NGOs	Prepare the budget in GBP and use their templates.
UN Agencies e-Tender Portals	NGOs, civil society	Upload all required annexes and terms of reference (TORs) carefully.

Registrations on some of these portals can take days or even weeks to complete, which is why the advice to register early is not a formality. Portals and requirements are updated from time to time, so always confirm the current process on the funder's own site.

Start the submission itself at least 24 to 48 hours before the deadline, because servers crash or slow down near closing times, and a technical failure on the last afternoon is rarely treated as an excuse.

V. Submission Checklist

BEFORE YOU CLICK SUBMIT

- ☐ All required fields are filled.
- ☐ All documents are uploaded in the correct format and order.
- ☐ Institutional sign-offs are included.
- ☐ The budget and narrative align.

☐ Word and page limits are respected.
☐ You have received and saved confirmation of submission.

> *"I submitted a proposal early once and received feedback that helped me correct a formatting error. Without that, I would have lost the opportunity."*
> *An illustrative NGO director in Colombia (fictitious)*

VI. After Submission: What Next?

- Save a copy of your full proposal package.
- Record the submission reference number.
- Track expected timelines (some funders publish review schedules).
- Follow up if you do not receive a confirmation within 24 to 48 hours.

> **TIP**
>
> For highly competitive grants (such as those from the NIH, the ERC, or the Ford Foundation), consider scheduling a post-submission debrief or readiness session with your institutional office.

VII. Resubmission Strategy

If your proposal is not funded, do not despair. Many funders allow resubmissions, and a considerable number of awards go to proposals on their second or third attempt. Gitlin and Lyons (2013) remind applicants that rejection is not the end but often the beginning of refinement, and that the best proposals are built on the lessons of earlier drafts.

EXERCISE

Outline a submission checklist for a grant you are considering.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are the common mistakes to avoid before submission?
2. What should you do if your proposal is rejected?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Submission is where strong proposals are most often lost to avoidable errors.
- Read the guidelines line by line, and know the platform, formats, limits, and deadlines.
- Allow time for internal approvals, and submit 24 to 48 hours early.
- Keep a complete copy and the confirmation, and treat a rejection as the start of revision.

CHAPTER 9

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Writing a successful grant proposal involves more than a great idea. Many strong concepts fail to get funded because of common, avoidable mistakes, and whether you are a student, a postdoctoral researcher, or an NGO practitioner, being aware of these pitfalls and knowing how to sidestep them can dramatically increase your chances of success. Even the most passionate and well-intentioned grant seekers can fall into traps that weaken their proposals. Grant writing is highly competitive, and small mistakes, such as vague objectives, poor formatting, or missing documents, can lead to rejection.

Understanding these pitfalls is the key to avoiding them. From failing to follow guidelines to overlooking the importance of a strong needs statement or a realistic budget, each misstep can undermine the overall quality of an application. This chapter examines the errors that applicants make most frequently, and for each one it describes the problem, gives an example, and offers a practical solution, so that you can submit proposals that are clear, compelling, and funder-ready.

I. Ignoring the Guidelines

Problem: Applicants often skip or skim funder guidelines, and the result is a disqualified proposal. A reviewer who has a stack of applications and a checklist of requirements has little reason to make allowances for the one that ignored the rules.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A researcher submitted a 12-page proposal when the maximum allowed was 10. It was automatically rejected.

Solution:

- Read the Request for Proposals (RFP) or call for applications line by line.
- Create a checklist of requirements (format, sections, word count).
- Follow funder instructions precisely, and treat them as non-negotiable.

> *"It's not just what you write, but how and when you write it that makes a grant proposal successful."*
> *Anon*

Karsh and Fox (2014) warn that ignoring small instructions can cost you the grant, because the devil is in the details.

II. Lack of Clarity in the Problem Statement

Problem: A vague or overly broad problem statement weakens your proposal, because the reviewer cannot tell what exactly you are proposing to fix.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> An NGO applied to address "poverty in Africa" without specifying the community, the causes, or the target group. The funder found the scope unmanageable.

Solution:

- Define the problem specifically and locally.
- Use data or evidence to justify the need.
- Show why now is the time to act.

Miner and Miner (2008) put the point bluntly: if you cannot define the problem clearly, no one will fund your solution.

III. Weak Objectives and Outcomes

Problem: Proposals that confuse activities with objectives, or that lack measurable outcomes, are often rejected. Reviewers cannot score what they cannot measure.

Solution:

- Write SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- Include clear expected results and evaluation strategies.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> Instead of saying, "We will train youth," say, "We will train 200 unemployed youth in vocational skills over 12 months, with 70% obtaining employment within six months."

IV. Poor Budgeting

Problem: Budgets that are unrealistic, inconsistent with the narrative, or filled with errors undermine credibility.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A proposal budgeted $15,000 for stationery but only $5,000 for core program activities, raising red flags.

Solution:

- Align budget items with the proposal narrative.
- Justify major costs.
- Double-check for math or formatting errors.

Gitlin and Lyons (2013) observe that budgets are not just financial documents but storytelling tools.

V. Overuse of Jargon or Academic Language

Problem: Using technical or complex language may alienate reviewers, especially in funding bodies that draw on several sectors. The person scoring your proposal may be an expert in the funder's field but not in yours, and a sentence they must read twice is a sentence that costs you points.

Solution:

- Write clearly and simply.
- Avoid unexplained acronyms or buzzwords.
- Tailor your language to the audience, not to your peers.

VI. Failure to Demonstrate Sustainability

Problem: Funders want assurance that the project will last beyond their funding, and a proposal that is silent on what happens when the money runs out leaves that question unanswered.

Solution:

- Include a sustainability plan (for example, community ownership, future funding, or policy integration).
- Highlight scalability if relevant.

VII. Insufficient Collaboration or Community Involvement

Problem: Solo proposals, meaning those prepared and carried out by an applicant working alone, often lack credibility in addressing complex issues. Most serious problems cross institutional and disciplinary boundaries, and funders know it.

Solution:

- Partner with local institutions or stakeholders.

- Include letters of support, MOUs, or evidence of joint planning.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A postdoc included letters from host faculty and local NGOs, strengthening her interdisciplinary health study in Uganda.

VIII. Last-Minute Submission

Problem: Rushed submissions increase the risk of typos, missing documents, and upload errors.

Solution:

- Start early, at least four to six weeks before the deadline.
- Create an internal deadline 48 hours before submission for a final review.

> *"Great proposals are not written in a rush. They are drafted, reviewed, and refined."*
> *Anon*

IX. Lack of Supporting Documents

Problem: Proposals that lack CVs, letters of support, legal documents, or M&E plans may be incomplete, and incomplete proposals are often screened out before anyone reads the narrative.

Solution:

- Refer to a proposal submission checklist.
- Double-check the funder's annex requirements.

X. Not Following Up

Problem: Some applicants never confirm whether their proposal was received or what the result was, and so they lose both the chance to correct a problem and the chance to learn from the outcome.

Solution:

- Track submission confirmation.
- Request feedback, whether you are accepted or not.
- Use feedback to improve for resubmission.

Building a Personal Review Routine

Knowing the pitfalls is one thing and catching them in your own work is another, because the writer of a proposal is the person least able to see its flaws. A simple review routine will help. Begin by setting the draft aside for a day or two so that you can read it with fresh eyes, and then read it aloud, since awkward sentences, repeated phrases, and unexplained jumps in logic are far easier to hear than to see. Next, check it against the funder's own scoring criteria, scoring each section honestly as a reviewer would. Finally, ask someone who does not know your field to read the executive summary and tell you, in their own words, what you are proposing and why it matters. If their answer differs from what you intended, the draft is not yet finished.

> **EXERCISE**
>
> Outline some common pitfalls in grant writing, and note which of them you are most at risk of making in your own current project.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why do many concepts fail to get funded?
2. What are solo proposals?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Most failed proposals are undone by avoidable mistakes rather than weak ideas.
- The ten pitfalls are ignoring guidelines, vague problems, weak objectives, poor budgets, jargon, no sustainability plan, no collaboration, last-minute submission, missing documents, and no follow-up.
- Each has a practical remedy: checklists, specificity, SMART language, consistency, plain writing, partnerships, early deadlines, and feedback.

CHAPTER 10

After Submission: Follow-Up and Feedback

Submitting a grant proposal is not the end of the journey; it is the beginning of the review phase and the preparation for your next steps. Regardless of the outcome, effective follow-up and feedback strategies can enhance your grant-writing success over time. Many applicants lose future opportunities because they fail to follow up, learn from rejections, or build ongoing relationships with funders, and the weeks and months after a submission are among the most useful, and the least used, in the whole grant cycle.

How to Follow Up and Give Feedback

I. Acknowledge Submission Receipt

After submitting your proposal, confirm that it was received successfully. Most online platforms send an automatic confirmation email or submission number. Save a copy of the confirmation and print the entire proposal package for your records.

Miner and Miner (2008) advise treating proposal records like legal documents, since they may be requested in audits or reviews.

II. Understand the Review Timeline

Funder review periods vary. Some respond within a few weeks, while others take several months, especially for large or international grants.

EXAMPLES

- The NIH (USA) may take six to nine months from submission to award.
- The European Research Council (ERC) may take up to 12 months.

Check whether reviewers provide status updates through email or portals, and whether decisions are made in multiple stages, such as pre-selection, interviews, and final funding. Knowing the stages helps you plan your own work, and it tells you whether silence means that nothing is wrong or that something needs checking. Timelines change, so confirm them in the funder's current guidelines.

The waiting period is easier to bear, and more productive, when you use it. While a decision is pending, you can begin preparing for the next opportunity, update your biography and your list of past projects, draft a version of your proposal that could be adapted for a different funder, or simply return to the work that your proposal describes. Applicants who treat the wait as a pause often find that the next deadline arrives before they are ready, while those who keep moving find that each application is easier than the one before.

III. Following Up Politely

If the decision date has passed and you have not heard back, it is acceptable to reach out politely. Keep the message short, courteous, and specific, and send it to the contact named in the call.

EMAIL TEMPLATE: FOLLOWING UP ON A SUBMITTED PROPOSAL

Subject: Follow-Up on Submitted Proposal: [Your Project Title]

Dear [Funder Contact Name],

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to inquire about the status of our submitted proposal, "[Project Title]," submitted on [Date] under [Call Reference]. We remain enthusiastic about the opportunity and would appreciate any update you may be able to share.

Kind regards,
[Your Name and Organization]

Karsh and Fox (2014) remind us that a polite follow-up shows professionalism and sustained interest, and that silence should not be assumed to mean rejection.

IV. If You Are Selected

Congratulations! If your proposal is successful:

- Carefully review the award letter or contract.
- Note reporting requirements, budget restrictions, and timelines.
- Arrange a kick-off meeting with stakeholders (especially for organizational grants).
- Submit the required banking or compliance documentation.

TIP

For postdocs and university grantees, contact your institution's Grants Office for onboarding procedures.

Treat the award letter as the beginning of a contractual relationship. It may differ from your proposal in the amount awarded, the budget lines that were approved, or the conditions attached, and you should raise any questions before you begin spending.

V. If You Are Not Selected

Rejection can be disheartening, but it is a natural part of the grant-seeking process. Most successful grantees have faced rejection before winning, and the difference between those who eventually succeed and those who give up is very often what they did in the weeks that followed.

Gitlin and Lyons (2013) describe failure as a feedback loop in which each "no" can bring you a step closer to a "yes," provided you are listening.

What to do if your proposal was rejected:

- Request reviewer feedback.
- Revise based on the weaknesses identified.
- Highlight the changes in a cover letter or summary of modifications.

VI. Requesting Reviewer Feedback

Some funders, including federal agencies such as the NIH and foundations such as the Ford Foundation, offer reviewer comments. These can be invaluable for strengthening your next application. When you ask, be gracious, since the person reading your request may also be the one who decides whether to welcome your next submission.

EMAIL TEMPLATE: REQUESTING REVIEWER FEEDBACK

Dear [Funder],

Thank you for considering our proposal, "[Project Title]." While we are disappointed not to be selected, we remain committed to our work and would be grateful for any feedback the reviewers may have provided to help us strengthen future submissions.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

VII. Revise and Resubmit

Many proposals are funded after one or two iterations. Use the feedback to revise:

- Clarify your objectives and outcomes.
- Adjust your budget to reflect reviewer concerns.
- Strengthen your partnerships or sustainability sections.

EXAMPLE

A youth empowerment NGO in Kenya revised its original budget and impact indicators after feedback from the Mastercard Foundation. Its resubmission six months later was successful.

VIII. Document the Process

Maintain a proposal log that includes the title, funder, date submitted, outcome, feedback received, and any resubmission date. A simple table kept up to date will help you track your progress and refine your grant-writing strategy over time.

Proposal	Funder	Submitted	Outcome	Feedback	Resubmit
EmpowerHer	UN Women	March 1, 2025	Not funded	"Clarify impact metrics"	Planned: Aug 2025

IX. Build Long-Term Relationships with Funders

Even if you are not selected, funders may remember a strong proposal and invite you to apply again. Ways to stay connected include:

- Subscribing to funder newsletters
- Attending grant workshops, webinars, or conferences
- Sharing periodic updates on your work or project milestones

> *"Success in grant writing is rarely instant. It comes to those who submit, learn, revise, and submit again."*
> *Anon*

EXERCISE

Draft a follow-up email for a proposal you have submitted or plan to submit.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How do you give feedback?
2. What should you do if you are selected?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Save your confirmation and a full copy of the package, and learn the funder's review timeline.
- Follow up politely when a decision date passes.
- If you win, read the award letter carefully and plan reporting from day one.
- If you do not, request feedback, revise, and resubmit.
- Keep a proposal log and stay connected with funders.

CHAPTER 11

Sustaining Success: Building a Grant-Winning Reputation

Winning a grant is an achievement. Winning consistently is a legacy. Sustaining success in the grant-seeking space requires more than excellent proposals; it calls for trust-building, accountability, continuous improvement, and visible impact. Funders want to invest in individuals and organizations they can rely on, and building a grant-winning reputation means becoming that trusted grantee. Long-term success involves delivering on funded projects, publishing results, sharing impacts with funders, and applying for continuation grants.

> *"Grants are not just won, they are earned through credibility, consistency, and commitment."*
> *Anon*

How to Sustain Success and Build a Grant-Winning Reputation

I. Deliver on Your Promises

The first step toward maintaining a positive funding reputation is to execute the funded project faithfully. That means you should:

- Implement activities as outlined.
- Meet deadlines and deliverables.
- Maintain communication with the grantor.

When circumstances change, as they inevitably do, tell the funder early and propose a solution. Funders are generally far more forgiving of a problem reported promptly than of one discovered by accident.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> An NGO in the Philippines successfully completed a UNICEF-funded sanitation project ahead of schedule and under budget. Its performance led to automatic shortlisting for future funding calls.

Miner and Miner (2008) stress that execution is everything: a well-implemented project speaks louder than a brilliant proposal.

II. Ensure Transparent Reporting

Grantees who submit timely, honest, and thorough reports, both narrative and financial, are more likely to be trusted again. Good reporting is also a gift to yourself, because the records you keep during the project become the evidence base for your next proposal.

Tips:

- Use the standardized templates provided by the funder.
- Share challenges as well as successes.
- Include stories, testimonials, and visuals where appropriate.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> A postdoctoral researcher in Brazil documented her field challenges in a malaria intervention with humility and clarity. Her transparency impressed the Wellcome Trust, leading to an extension grant.

III. Track and Communicate Impact

Your impact is your currency. Funders want to see not just activity, but transformation.

Best practices:

- Use qualitative and quantitative indicators.
- Publicize results through newsletters, media releases, blogs, and social media (with funder permission).
- Include funder logos or acknowledgments where required.

Gitlin and Lyons (2013) note that impact is not just about numbers; it is about narratives that connect data with human experience.

IV. Build Institutional Memory

For organizations and institutions, developing internal systems to document and replicate successful grant approaches is key. Without such systems, hard-won knowledge leaves the building whenever a staff member does.

Actions:

- Create a grant repository (templates, reports, budgets).
- Conduct internal debriefs after each grant cycle.
- Mentor junior staff and train new team members in grant writing.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> An education nonprofit in Ghana created a grant success manual and trained all staff quarterly. As a result, it sustained a 75% grant win rate over five years.

V. Maintain Professional Relationships with Funders

Stay engaged with donors beyond the funding period:

- Send periodic updates on progress, even after the grant ends.
- Invite funders to your events or presentations.
- Acknowledge their support in relevant publications or media.

This shows appreciation, professionalism, and a readiness for future collaboration.

VI. Apply Strategically, Not Desperately

Reputation also means discernment. Do not apply for every grant available. Apply for those aligned with your:

- Mission and expertise
- Capacity to deliver
- Strategic priorities

A track record of relevant, high-quality proposals is more respected than frequent, unfocused submissions.

VII. Engage in Peer Learning and Grant Communities

Sustained success benefits from staying informed and connected:

- Join global and local grant-writing networks.
- Attend grant boot camps, workshops, and funder meet-ups.
- Subscribe to grant newsletters (for example, FundsforNGOs, GrantWatch, and Research Professional).

Karsh and Fox (2014) observe that a learning grantee is a growing grantee, and that funders value those who invest in sharpening their craft.

VIII. Share Your Successes

Being visible helps you build credibility. Consider publishing or presenting:

- Project case studies
- Grant-writing tips for peers
- Conference papers or workshops on grant management

This not only builds your reputation but also contributes to the broader knowledge ecosystem.

IX. Create a Legacy of Mentorship

Reputation is not only about personal or organizational success; it is about creating a culture of excellence. Mentor others and share what works.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> Dr. Abena Mensah, a social scientist in Ghana, trains university students in grant writing. Her mentees have since secured over $500,000 in scholarships and project grants.

Putting It into Practice

Reputation is built from small, repeated habits rather than from any single achievement. A researcher or organization that keeps a calendar of upcoming deadlines, reviews its grant pipeline every few months, thanks funders promptly, reports on time, and records what each application taught it will, over the course of several years, become the kind of grantee that funders recognize and recommend to one another. None of these habits is difficult, but all of them require attention, and attention is what separates the occasional winner from the consistent one.

> **EXERCISE**
>
> Write down five ways you can build a grant-sustaining reputation.

> **CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**
>
> 1. What is a grant-sustaining reputation?
> 2. How can a researcher's reputation be ruined?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Winning consistently depends on delivering faithfully, reporting honestly, and communicating impact.
- Organizations should build institutional memory through repositories, debriefs, and mentoring.
- Stay in touch with funders, apply selectively, learn from peers, and share what you learn.

CHAPTER 12

Case Studies and Practical Exercises

Learning grant writing is not just about understanding theory; it is about applying knowledge in real-world contexts. That is where case studies and practical exercises come in. They bridge the gap between knowing and doing by allowing you to analyze real or simulated grant scenarios, practice writing sections of proposals, and solve common challenges faced by grant writers. Case studies provide insights into successful (and unsuccessful) grant applications, showing how strategy, structure, and storytelling influence funding decisions. Practical exercises give you hands-on experience in tasks such as drafting problem statements, designing budgets, or reviewing proposals from a funder's perspective. This chapter is designed to sharpen your skills through active learning, deepen your understanding of effective proposal writing, and build your confidence to write grants that get funded. Grant writing is best learned by doing, and case studies and exercises turn knowledge into skill.

The seven cases below are drawn from a range of sectors and regions. Like the other examples in this book, they are illustrative rather than reports of particular real applications, and they are meant to show patterns rather than to document specific events. Four describe successes and three describe failures, and the failures are as instructive as the successes, because in every one of them a good idea was undone by something the applicant could have controlled. As you read, ask yourself the same questions each time: What did the applicant understand about the funder? What evidence did they offer? What was missing?

Case Study 1: Success

An environmental NGO in Brazil received $100,000 from WWF after demonstrating how its reforestation project engaged communities, delivered measurable environmental benefits, and included a strong M&E plan.

Case Study 2: Failure to Success

A Ghanaian education technology startup initially failed in its grant application due to unclear objectives and a weak sustainability plan. After revising its logic model and including stakeholder testimonials, it secured funding from UNICEF.

Case Study 3: Postdoc Example, Success

A Kenyan postdoctoral researcher secured a Carnegie Foundation grant by demonstrating strong institutional support, policy relevance, and a detailed dissemination strategy.

EXERCISES ON CASE STUDIES 1 TO 3

1. Analyze the three case studies above. List three success factors and two lessons from failure.
2. Conduct a peer review of a sample proposal, using a provided rubric.
3. Write a one-page summary of a proposal idea based on what you have learned.

Case Study 4: Success, the EmpowerHer Girls Initiative

(*Nonprofit, Education Sector*)

EmpowerHer, a small NGO in Kenya, applied for funding from the Malala Fund to support a project providing mentorship and scholarships for girls in rural communities.

What worked:

- **A strong needs statement:** It used data from UNICEF and local surveys to highlight gender disparities in education.
- **Community buy-in:** It included letters of support from local chiefs, schools, and parents.
- **Clear objectives:** Its goals were SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- **A realistic budget:** The budget was detailed and aligned with the proposed activities.

Outcome: Awarded $50,000 for a two-year pilot, with potential for renewal. Its storytelling and clear plan made a strong impression.

Case Study 5: Success, the CleanWaters Project

(*Academic-Community Collaboration, Environmental Sector*)

A university department in India partnered with local water cooperatives to apply for a USAID grant to improve clean water access in peri-urban areas. (USAID has since been wound down, a reminder of how quickly funding landscapes can change; the lessons of this case about partnership and evidence apply to any funder.)

What worked:

- **A collaborative approach:** It showed a solid university-community partnership.
- **Use of evidence:** It included pilot data and a literature review supporting the intervention model.
- **An M&E plan:** It detailed how outcomes would be measured and evaluated over time.

Outcome: Received $150,000 from USAID. The well-researched proposal and strong academic-community collaboration stood out.

Case Study 6: Failure, the Rise & Shine Youth Program

(*Youth Empowerment Sector*)

A community group in Nigeria applied for a grant from a corporate CSR foundation to fund a youth skills training center.

What went wrong:

- **A weak problem statement:** It offered no local data and relied on general claims.
- **No budget justification:** It submitted a budget but did not explain the costs.
- **No letters of support:** The proposal lacked evidence of community partnerships.

Outcome: Rejected. Reviewers noted that the proposal lacked supporting data and stakeholder involvement.

Case Study 7: Failure, the AgroBoost Women's Cooperative

(*Agribusiness and Women's Empowerment*)

A women's cooperative in Uganda applied for a UNDP grant to scale up cassava processing facilities.

What went wrong:

- **A missed deadline:** The application was submitted three hours late.
- **Non-compliance:** It ignored word limits and included unrequested annexes.
- **Poor formatting:** Spelling and grammar issues made it hard to read.

Outcome: Disqualified during the first screening phase. The proposal failed because of technical non-compliance, despite a strong idea.

What the Cases Teach

Set side by side, the cases reveal a pattern. The successful applicants knew their funders, backed their claims with evidence, involved the communities they serve, and presented a plan and a budget that fit together. The unsuccessful ones fell short on exactly those points, or on the basic discipline of following instructions. None of the failures

was caused by a lack of passion or of need, and that is the central lesson of this book: passion and need earn a hearing, but preparation and precision earn the grant.

Follow-Up Exercise: Review and Improve

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Choose one failed case study (Case 6 or Case 7).
2. Rewrite the needs or problem statement and the budget justification (or select another weak section) as if you were improving the proposal for resubmission.
3. Ensure your revised section includes:
   - Clear, evidence-based reasoning
   - Proper formatting
   - Language that reflects urgency and alignment with the funder's goals

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What would you have done differently if you were the grant writer?
- What kind of supporting documents could have strengthened the proposal?
- How does understanding failure improve your approach to future applications?

CHAPTER IN BRIEF

- Case studies connect theory to practice by showing the same principles succeeding and failing.
- Successful applicants understood the funder, used evidence, involved the community, and aligned the plan with the budget.
- Failures were caused by weak problem statements, unexplained budgets, missing letters of support, and noncompliance with deadlines and rules.

CHAPTER 13

Conclusion: Turning Proposals into Purpose

Grant writing is more than a professional skill. It is both a science and an art, and a transformational tool that demands clarity, passion, strategy, and persistence. It enables individuals and organizations to translate vision into action, passion into projects, and ideas into measurable change. Whether you are a student applying for your first research fellowship, a postdoc seeking to expand your work, or an NGO building community capacity, the grant process empowers you to create lasting impact. By following the detailed steps in this guide, you not only improve your chances of winning funding but also build a sustainable reputation as a trusted and innovative project leader.

Key Lessons Across the Journey

Throughout this book, we have walked through the essential stages of successful grant writing:

- **Identifying the Right Grant:** Aligning your goals with funders' missions is non-negotiable.
- **Developing a Compelling Idea:** Clear, focused, and innovative ideas win attention.
- **Writing the Proposal:** Step-by-step writing, supported by strong context, methodology, and measurable outcomes, sets you apart.
- **Budgeting and Supporting Documents:** Transparency and realism here build trust.

- **Submission and Follow-Up:** Timeliness, professionalism, and responsiveness matter.
- **Post-Award and Reputation:** Sustaining success depends on how well you deliver and grow from each experience.

These components are universally applicable, whether you are based in Nairobi or New York, working solo or as part of a consortium.

Global Realities, Local Relevance

Grants are global, but contexts are local. A strategy that works in Europe may need adaptation in Asia or Africa, because funders, reviewers, and communities carry different expectations about language, evidence, hierarchy, and relationships. Here are specific tips by category:

- **Students and Early-Career Researchers:** Focus on clarity, potential, and mentorship. Seek smaller grants to build experience.
- **Postdoctoral Fellows:** Show how your work contributes to the field. Demonstrate independence and future scalability.
- **NGOs:** Highlight your impact through stories and numbers. Showcase community engagement and sustainability.
- **Institutions:** Emphasize institutional capacity, partnerships, and compliance systems.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> The "Tech for Tomorrow" initiative by a youth-led NGO in India started with a $5,000 seed grant from a local donor. After demonstrating outcomes, the group scaled its model and won a $100,000 grant from Google.org.

Common Traits of Consistent Winners

Regardless of geography or sector, successful grantees share a few common characteristics:

- **Preparation:** They maintain updated profiles, documents, and templates.
- **Persistence:** They treat rejections as learning tools.
- **People skills:** They network, build partnerships, and mentor others.
- **Professionalism:** They follow deadlines, respect donor protocols, and communicate effectively.

The best grantees, as Karsh and Fox (2014) suggest, do not just ask; they listen, learn, and lead.

Final Words of Encouragement

Grant writing is not always easy. It can be time-consuming, complex, and even discouraging. But it is also one of the most empowering and liberating pathways for social, academic, and institutional development.

> *"Behind every successful grant is a dream well-articulated, a need well-documented, and a commitment well-demonstrated."*
> *Anon*

> *"You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated."*
> *Maya Angelou*

Let each application refine your voice. Let each rejection sharpen your vision. Let each award humble and propel you.

A Call to Action

To Students: Start where you are. Use small grants and fellowships to build your research and your résumé.

To Scholars and Postdocs: Make grant writing a part of your academic growth. Collaborate. Share. Mentor.

To NGOs and CSOs: Know that your work is vital. Your communities depend on you. Keep building, applying, and scaling.

To Institutions and Funders: Continue investing in transparency, equity, and access. Create enabling environments and simplified systems that foster inclusion.

> *"Our world changes when someone decides to put their idea on paper and backs it with action. You can be that someone."*
> *Anon*

Your First Thirty Days

A book can only point the way, and the real learning begins when you start applying what you have read. If you are unsure where to begin, the following sequence will carry you through the first month.

1. **Week one:** Write your one-page concept note (Appendix B), and complete the mission statement exercise from Chapter 1.
2. **Week two:** Search at least two grant databases, shortlist three opportunities, and score them with the checklist in Chapter 3.
3. **Week three:** Choose one opportunity, read its call line by line, and draft the problem statement and objectives.
4. **Week four:** Draft the methodology and a first budget, and ask a colleague to review them using the questions in Chapter 9.

By the end of the month you will not have a finished proposal, but you will have something more valuable: a clear idea, a realistic target, and the working habits of a successful grant writer.

Final Thought

Whether you are applying for a $500 micro-grant or a $5 million research award, remember: your proposal is a promise. Make it meaningful. Make it measurable. Make it matter.

Appendix A: Quick-Reference Checklists

The checklists below gather the practical advice of the preceding chapters into a form you can use while you work. Copy them into your own notes, adapt them to each funder, and tick them off as you go.

A. Is This the Right Grant?

FIT AND FEASIBILITY

- ☐ The grant aligns with your mission and project.
- ☐ You meet all eligibility requirements.
- ☐ The funding amount and duration are appropriate.
- ☐ You have the capacity to deliver and report.
- ☐ The deadline is realistic.
- ☐ The funder has funded similar work before.
- ☐ You have sufficient internal capacity to implement and report.

B. Reading the Call for Proposals

BEFORE YOU BEGIN WRITING

- ☐ You have read the call line by line at least twice.
- ☐ You have listed every mandatory ("must" or "required") element.
- ☐ You have noted every preferred or encouraged element.
- ☐ You know the budget range, geographic focus, and eligibility conditions.
- ☐ You know the page limits, formatting rules, and submission platform.
- ☐ You know the deadline, including the time and time zone, and your internal deadline.

C. The Proposal Itself

NARRATIVE CHECKLIST

- ☐ The executive summary states who you are, what you propose, why it matters, and how much you request.
- ☐ The background sets the context and connects local need to broader goals.
- ☐ The problem statement is specific, local, and supported by credible evidence.
- ☐ Goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly distinguished, and objectives are SMART.
- ☐ The methodology answers what, how, when, where, and who.
- ☐ Outputs, outcomes, and impact are linked to indicators and data sources.
- ☐ The sustainability plan explains what happens after the grant ends.

☐ The language is clear, free of unexplained jargon, and reflects the funder's terminology.

D. The Budget

BUDGET CHECKLIST

☐ All costs are allowable under the funder's guidelines.
☐ All costs are essential to achieving project goals.
☐ The budget is complete, consistent, and balanced, and the arithmetic has been checked.
☐ Every line is explained in a budget narrative.
☐ You have quotes for large purchases or contractors.
☐ Currency, exchange-rate date, taxes, and indirect costs are handled as the funder requires.

E. Supporting Documents

DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST

☐ Organizational and legal documents are current.
☐ Financial statements or budget reports are included where required.
☐ Letters of support are specific, signed, and consistent with the narrative.
☐ CVs of key personnel are tailored to the project.
☐ The LogFrame, work plan, M&E plan, and risk strategy are included where required.
☐ Each document is clearly labeled and in the required format.

F. Submission and After

FINAL CHECKS

- ☐ All required fields are filled, and all documents are uploaded in the correct format and order.
- ☐ Institutional sign-offs are in place.
- ☐ Word and page limits are respected.
- ☐ You submitted at least 24 to 48 hours before the deadline.
- ☐ You saved the confirmation, the reference number, and a complete copy of the package.
- ☐ You have recorded the proposal in your log and noted the expected decision date.

Appendix B: Planning Templates

A. One-Page Concept Note

A concept note is a short document that forces you to test an idea before you commit to a full proposal. Many funders also invite concept notes as a first stage of application, so a well-prepared one can serve you twice. Aim to fit it on a single page.

CONCEPT NOTE OUTLINE

Title: A short, descriptive name for the project.

Applicant: Who you are, in two sentences, including relevant experience.

The Need or Problem: What is the specific problem, who is affected, and what evidence shows it is real and urgent?

Proposed Solution: What will you do, in plain language, and why is this approach likely to work?

Target Population and Location: Who will benefit, how many, and where?

Objectives and Expected Outcomes: Two or three SMART objectives, with the changes you expect to see.

Implementation Plan: The main activities and the time frame.

Budget Estimate: The total request and the main categories of cost.

Sustainability: How will the benefits continue after the grant ends?

Alignment with the Funder: Which of the funder's priorities does this project advance?

B. A Simple Logical Framework (LogFrame) Layout

A logical framework summarizes a project on one page, linking what you will do to what you expect to achieve and to how you will know. Several versions exist, and funders sometimes supply their own, but most share the structure below.

Level	Description	Indicators	Verification	Assumptions
Goal (Impact)	The long-term change to which the project contributes			

Level	Description	Indicators	Verification	Assumptions
Outcomes	The short- to medium-term changes the project aims to achieve			
Outputs	The tangible products and services the project will deliver			
Activities	The main tasks that will produce the outputs			

Read the matrix from the bottom up as a chain of reasoning: *if* the activities are carried out, *then* the outputs will be delivered; *if* the outputs are delivered, *then* the outcomes will follow; *if* the outcomes occur, *then* the project will contribute to the goal. The assumptions column records what must be true outside your control for each link to hold, and it is where a thoughtful applicant shows that risks have been considered.

C. Outline of a Letter of Support

LETTER OF SUPPORT: SUGGESTED ELEMENTS

1. Letterhead, date, and the name of the funder and program.
2. The writer's name, role, and relationship to the applicant.
3. A clear statement of support for the specific project, naming it.
4. The specific contribution the writer or organization will make (for example, space, data, staff time, or access to participants).
5. A sentence or two on why the project matters to the writer's community or institution.
6. The writer's signature and contact details.

Appendix C: Answer Guide to the Chapter Quizzes

The answers below are brief models drawn from the chapters. Where a question asks about your own project, there is no single correct answer, and the guide suggests how to approach it instead.

Chapter 1

1. *What is grant writing?* It is the process of preparing and submitting a structured request for funding from a government agency, foundation, corporation, or other funder, by identifying a need, proposing a solution, outlining activities, and showing how success will be measured.
2. *Name two types of grants.* Any two of program grants, project grants, capacity-building grants, and research grants.

Chapter 2

1. *Define "funding landscape."* The full range of funding sources, including government agencies, foundations, corporations, and international organizations, together with their priorities, eligibility criteria, and processes.
2. *Name one trend in global funding.* For example, climate action, gender and inclusion, innovation, or evidence-based programs.
3. *List two types of funding organizations.* For example, government agencies and private foundations (or corporations, or community foundations).
4. *What does RFP stand for?* Request for Proposals.
5. *Why is it important to follow formatting instructions exactly?* Because noncompliance can lead to automatic disqualification, and

because it signals the attention to detail a funder expects from a grantee.

Chapter 3

1. *List two tools for finding grants.* For example, GrantWatch, FundsforNGOs, Devex, Research Professional, or Candid's Foundation Directory.
2. *What should be considered when matching a grant?* The funder's mission, geographic focus, target beneficiaries, past funded projects, eligibility criteria, deadlines, and funding range, together with your own capacity to deliver and report.
3. *Identify and list two grants for your project.* Use the Chapter 3 exercise: search a database, then note who offers each grant, what it funds, and how your project fits.

Chapter 4

1. *What does SMART stand for?* Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.
2. *Mention three key elements of a grant proposal.* For example, a problem statement, objectives, a methodology, a budget, and a sustainability plan. (The key elements of a compelling idea are the problem statement, objectives, innovation or added value, and alignment with funder priorities.)

Chapter 5

1. *Name three standard sections of a grant proposal.* For example, the executive summary, problem statement, project description, objectives, methodology, evaluation plan, budget, and sustainability plan.
2. *Which section of the proposal deals with timelines?* The methodology or action plan, usually supported by a Gantt chart.

Chapter 6

1. *Why does budgeting matter?* A budget shows that the plan is financially viable and responsibly managed, it demonstrates that the applicant understands the project's needs, and it is a point at which funders test feasibility.

2. *What do funders want to see in a budget?* Realistic, justified, transparent costs that align with the narrative and follow the funder's guidelines.

Chapter 7

1. *What are supporting documents?* Materials attached to a proposal that prove the claims made in the narrative, such as letters of support, CVs, organizational and financial records, past reports, a LogFrame, and an M&E plan.
2. *Why do supporting documents matter?* They verify claims, demonstrate capacity, and build trust, and they can decide between equally strong proposals.

Chapter 8

1. *What are the common mistakes to avoid before submission?* Missing the deadline, uploading incorrect or outdated files, exceeding page or word limits, using incorrect file names or formats, and omitting required signatures or approvals.
2. *What should you do if your proposal was rejected?* Request reviewer feedback, revise to address the weaknesses, and resubmit where the funder allows.

Chapter 9

1. *Why do many concepts fail to get funded?* Because of avoidable errors such as ignoring guidelines, vague problem statements, weak objectives, poor budgets, and missing documents, rather than because the ideas themselves are weak.
2. *What are solo proposals?* Proposals prepared and carried out by an applicant working alone, without partners, which often lack credibility on complex issues.

Chapter 10

1. *How do you give feedback?* Politely and professionally: thank the funder, express your continued commitment, and ask for any reviewer comments that can help you strengthen future submissions (see the template in Chapter 10).
2. *What should you do if you are selected?* Review the award letter or contract carefully, note reporting requirements, budget restric-

tions, and timelines, arrange a kick-off meeting, and submit the required compliance documentation.

Chapter 11

1. *What is a grant-sustaining reputation?* A reputation as a trusted grantee, built through delivering on promises, transparent reporting, visible impact, and professional relationships, that makes future funding easier to win.
2. *How can a researcher's reputation be ruined?* By missed deadlines, unfulfilled deliverables, dishonest or late reporting, misuse of funds, or poor communication with funders.

Glossary of Grant-Writing Terms

Annex or Appendix. Supporting material attached to a proposal, such as letters of support, CVs, or charts.

Budget Narrative (Budget Justification). The written explanation of each budget line, showing how it was calculated and why it is needed.

Call for Proposals (CFP). A funder's public invitation to submit applications for a specific program. See also *RFP*.

Capacity-Building Grant. A grant that strengthens an organization's infrastructure, systems, or skills.

CBO (Community-Based Organization). A nonprofit group that works within and on behalf of a local community.

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). A company's programs for social or environmental benefit, which often include grant-making.

Direct Costs. Costs that can be tied specifically to the project, such as project staff salaries, equipment, and travel.

Executive Summary. A one-page overview of a proposal, written last and placed first.

Fringe Benefits. Employer costs on top of salaries, such as health insurance and retirement contributions.

Gantt Chart. A schedule that shows each project activity against a timeline.

Impact. Long-term change at the community or systemic level to which a project contributes.

Indirect Costs. Costs that support the organization as a whole, such as administration and utilities, often capped by the funder.

Indicator. A measurable sign of progress or achievement, used to track outputs, outcomes, and impact.

In-Kind Contribution. Goods, services, or time contributed to a project without charge, such as office space or volunteer hours.

Letter of Support. A letter from a partner or stakeholder endorsing a project and describing their contribution.

Logic Model. A diagram or table that links resources and activities to outputs, outcomes, and impact.

Logical Framework (LogFrame). A matrix that summarizes a project's goal, outcomes, outputs, and activities with their indicators, verification sources, and assumptions.

M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation). The systematic tracking of a project's progress and the assessment of its results.

MOU (Memorandum of Understanding). A document describing the agreed roles and commitments of partners.

Outcome. A short- to medium-term change in knowledge, behavior, or conditions resulting from a project.

Output. A tangible product or service delivered by a project, such as a workshop held or a center established.

PI (Principal Investigator). The lead researcher responsible for a funded research project.

Program Officer. A funder's staff member who manages a grant program and often advises applicants.

RFP (Request for Proposals). A formal invitation from a funder to submit proposals for a specific program, detailing priorities, eligibility, and requirements.

SMART. A framework for objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Sustainability. The ability of a project's benefits to continue after grant funding ends.

TOR (Terms of Reference). A document defining the scope, tasks, and conditions of a piece of work or a contract.

UEI (Unique Entity ID). The identifier assigned through SAM.gov that US federal agencies require of organizations applying for federal awards.

References

Angelou, M. (2008). *Letter to My Daughter*. Random House.

Browning, B. (2015). *Grant Writing for Dummies* (5th ed.). Wiley.

Candid. (2024). *Foundation Directory Online*.

Clarke, C. A. (2009). *Storytelling for Grantseekers: A Guide to Creative Nonprofit Fundraising*. Jossey-Bass.

Devex. (2024). *Find Funding Opportunities*.

Geever, J. C. (2012). *The Foundation Center's Guide to Proposal Writing* (6th ed.). Foundation Center.

Gitlin, L. N., & Lyons, K. J. (2013). *Successful Grant Writing*. Springer Publishing.

Karsh, E., & Fox, A. S. (2014). *The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need*. Basic Books.

Miner, J., & Miner, L. (2008). *Proposal Planning and Writing* (4th ed.). Greenwood Publishing Group.

About the Author

Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko is a professor of political science with over a decade of experience teaching Statistics for Political Science and Research Methods to students at all levels. She is a published author, writer, and storyteller with over 70 publications, including *Research Methods in Political Science*, *Grant Writing Course Guide*, and *Mastering Academic Research: Tools, Techniques and the Scholar's Mindset*.

Angela is a recipient of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund book, conference, and research grants from the Nigerian government, a Peace Research grant from IPRA USA, and a Postdoctoral Research grant from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, USA. She also serves on the grants review and editorial boards of several organizations. She is the founder of the Adela Foundation for Women's Rights and Development, an organization that advocates for the rights of women and girls, and she is passionate about helping students and scholars thrive through knowledge, balance, and purpose.

Blog: https://theunletteredprofessor.substack.com
Website: adelabooks.com