Grant Writing Tips

About Saratoga Arts

Saratoga Arts fulfills its mission of making the arts accessible to all in the Saratoga region by awarding grants for arts and arts education programs in Saratoga, Fulton and Montgomery Counties; presenting professional development seminars for artists & arts administrators; offering arts education for artists of all ages and skill levels; presenting exhibitions, music, theater, and other programs at The Arts Center in Saratoga Springs and other sites; and through other activities and programs.

SARATOGA ARTS | ARTS CENTER | ARTS COUNCIL

Compiled with information provided by Saratoga Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA)

Grantwriting Tips

The key to writing a successful grant application is to present a clear, concise, detailed proposal that falls within the scope of the program from which you are requesting funds. A grant proposal is simply a request for funds to support a project or program. Your job is to convince the evaluating committee that your proposal is worth their support, and that you can carry it out at a high level of merit and skill.

We hope this Grant Writing Tips Booklet will help you as you apply for the grant programs at Saratoga Arts and other grant opportunities.

Tip #1: Make Sure You Are Eligible to Apply

Do you meet the eligibility requirements for the grant program? Taking the extra time to thoroughly read the grant guidelines is to your benefit because most of the answers to your questions can be found there. If you have any additional questions about eligibility, contact the grant administrator before submitting an application. The guidelines can be found at saratoga-arts.org/grant-programs/

Tip #2: Start Early

Grant applications require gathering information from various sources and input from many people. Allow plenty of time to gather the information you will need and put it all together. The writing and organizing of your application will be better quality if you are not in a rush to meet the deadline. Remember, the deadline for submitting an application is firm.

Tip #3: Type your Application and Support Materials

Most applications are now done through online submission systems. It helps to have all of your material ready in a format that can be copied and pasted directly into the application fields.

Tip #4: Follow Instructions!

It is essential that you follow ALL the application instructions for every grant you apply for. If you don't, your proposal will be considered incomplete and will not be funded. Every grant has different requirements and application procedures. Read and make sure you understand all instructions before you begin. A helpful Application Checklist is available in anyone of the Guidelines.

Contact Information: Make sure that the organization address, phone, email, etc and the project Contact Person's phone/email is valid. This is the information we will use to contact you for all issues related to the grant proposal, including award letters, contracts, etc.

Organization Information: Please provide enough detail to give the panel a good overview or introduction to the purpose and activities of your organization - your mission statement, a summary of your programs, your constituents, you staff, and your goals for the future.

Tip #5: Supply all Requested Artistic Support Materials

Given the grant programs at Saratoga Arts are first and foremost arts-grants, submitting effective artistic support materials is vital to your application. Your application will be considered incomplete without them. The support materials provide the review Panels with additional information about your organization, your arts event and and the artists you are planning on working with. Never assume that the Review Panel already knows this information.

Tip #6 Financial Information

You are asked to submit two types of financial information: Your organization's yearly overall Financial Budget for all programs, and a Project Budget for the proposed project. For the yearly financial budget statement, use updated audited figures if possible. For the project budget statement, estimate your income and expenses for the proposed project as accurately as possible. This is for your benefit as well as the Review Panel's information. Once your project is underway, your actual income and expenses may change slightly, but if you have done some research, you will not be faced with unexpected expenses that may jeopardize your project.

Tip # 7 Presentation

Applications should be clear, focused, purposeful. A well-written proposal is…well-written; make sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors. Have one or two other people proofread your draft to check for typos, other errors and clarity. Again, follow the funders' specific instructions for submitting the application. Label everything so that if digital attachments get separated, the reviewers know where they belong. *Presenting a well-written proposal to the Review Panel says much about how you and/or your organization operates, and consequently your potential ability to successfully carry out the proposed program if funded*.

Tip #8 How much is too much?

Are you submitting too little or too much information for the panel to review?

You are submitting <u>too little</u> information if......

- You forgot to include artistic support materials (If not, the panel will not be able to evaluate the potential artistic merit of your proposed project and will not be able to fund the project.)

You are submitting <u>too much</u> information if.......

- Have submitted programs and newspaper articles for every event your organization has ever done

Stay within the parameters of what the application asks for. Ex. If the application requests 6-10 images, do not submit less or more than that.

Writing a Good Project Proposal / Description

1. The Project Description is a narrative that completely describes your project.

In some cases, this will be the most important part of the grant application. This is your request for support - make sure it is clear, concise and complete. It should include all pertinent details about your proposed project, and be a well-written, organized document. Focus on the project details and keep any necessary context information brief. Do not include ancient history or information that does not relate to the proposed project. Refer to the grant programs guidelines for complete details.

2. The first sentence of your project description is the most important sentence - *use it wisely.* It should clearly state how much money you are requesting and what that money will be used for.
Ex:

<u>Good</u>: "The XYZ Chamber Music Ensemble requests $1,500 in support of artist fees and performance space for our upcoming 15th season." *[The reviewers know exactly what you need…now they can read the supporting information to get more details.]*

<u>NOT Good</u>: "The XYZ Chamber Music Ensemble was founded in 1892 to provide quality chamber music concerts for the community." *[OK to include later in the description when you provide a few lines about the ensemble's history and purpose.]*

3. Use good basic writing skills

Make sure that your narrative is organized and covers all the bases. Put the most important and relevant information first, and items of lesser importance later in the narrative. Check your composition, spelling and grammar, and have someone else proofread as well. It's easy to miss things in your own compositions. An application that is poorly written and full of mistakes does not inspire confidence in the reviewers, and may make them question your ability to successfully carry out the project.

4. Keep context information brief and relevant

Context information can be useful in supporting a project request, but only if it relates to the proposed project. For example, if the XYZ Chamber Music Ensemble is requesting funding for their upcoming concert season, it may be useful to the Review Panel to know that they have previously produced 15 successful concert seasons. It would *not* be useful to list the performers for each concert during the past 15 years… Context information that provides evidence that you can carry out the proposed project is helpful; too much context information, or that which is unrelated to the proposed project is detrimental to your proposal. When in doubt about what information to include, seek advice from the grant administrator.

5. Make sure your Project Description corresponds to your Project Budget statement.

This is very important - the project description narrative and budget statement provide the same information in two different forms. Discrepancies between these two will be noticed and questioned by the Review Panel. Everything mentioned in the narrative that will produce an expense or income for your project should be accounted for in your budget statement. For example, if you mention that you will hire a band for your exhibit opening, make sure you include their fee in your project expense list. If you say that a local corporation has agreed to give you $500 towards your proposed project, make sure that contribution is included in your project income statement

6. Proofread

Once you have written a good draft of the Project Description, give it to someone who has no knowledge of your project. If after reading your proposal they understand exactly what you are proposing, you have written a good draft. If they have many questions, the Review Panel will too. Revise it until it meets the test.

Writing an Effective Grant Project Proposal

I. Your Job is to Control the Panel Discussion.

Each proposal that comes before a Review Panel begins a new discussion. You, the proposal writer, want the discussion to be short and favorable to your project. *You accomplish that goal with a good narrative and budget*. You do not want the discussion to get off on the wrong track, or focus on a minor point that doesn't support your argument for funding. Your job is to make sure that nothing in your narrative and budget distracts them from your project. Here are some tips:

- **Don't write about activities that are not part of the proposed program.** Inexperienced proposal writers seem to think that quantity makes a good impression on panelists. In fact, too much information tends to confuse panelists and cause exactly the kinds of questions you are trying to avoid.

- **Keep historical and background information very brief.** The proposal is requesting support for future activities, not past ones. Often there is a reason to place the current project in some kind of context. Perhaps it is the 15th year of a successful concert series; perhaps a current program is going to be expanded. This kind of context can help make a strong argument for support. However, it should appear *later* in the narrative, as briefly as possible, and not distract from the main point.

- **Try not to project an attitude.** Panels don't want to hear how "important" or "inspiring" your program is. You invite a panelist to disagree with your assessment, and side-track the discussion. On the other side of this coin, avoid flip or sarcastic remarks - they work against your interests every time.

- **SUMMARY -**

Make sure every word supports the funding request. Keep proposals free of extra words. When context is needed, keep it brief and place it later in the narrative. Avoid praising yourself or criticizing others. Too much information is as bad as too little information.

II. The First Sentence is the Most Important Sentence.

Only one sentence can be the first sentence, and it is important to use it wisely. The first sentence of the request must clearly state how much money is requested, and what that money will be used for.

Consider these two opening statements and see which one tells the fundraising story better:

a) *The Atlas Dance Company began in 1956 when my father, Harold Atlas, determined that the state of modern dance in the Central New York region needed serious improvement.*

b) *The Atlas Dance Company requests a grant of $2,000 in support of artist fees, musicians and costumes for its 1997-98 season.*

A proposal is not a history lesson...or a music lesson...or an art history course...or a personal statement. It is a simple request for support of a project. *The principle is simple: the most important and relevant information appears first.   The next most important appears next, and so on*. This is how people read - they start at the beginning and work their way down to the end.

- **SUMMARY** -

The first sentence of your proposal is the most important sentence, so don't waste it. Structure the narrative so that the most important information is at the top, the next most important information is next, and so on.

III. Create the Narrative and the Budget at the Same Time

Your proposal narrative and budget provide the same information in two different forms. You should write them together, so that they support each other and strengthen your case.

Expenses
There are two fundamental mistakes made in project budgets: Including a budget item *not* mentioned in the narrative, AND Excluding a budget item that *is* mentioned in the narrative. Discrepancies such as these produce the kind of panel discussion you want to avoid. The solution is to write the narrative and budget at the same time, side by side.

For example:

Narrative	Budget/ Expenses	Cost
The concert will include three musicians...	Musicians (3 @$250) $750	$750
We plan to record the concert for future distribution and possible sales...	Recording Service $350 (incl. engineer & equipment)	$350
We will advertise our concerts in several local newspapers, and with a mailing...	Advertising (print) Brochures (500) production Mailing (500 brochures at . 37)	$600 $25 $170
		Total: $1895

As you see, every line in the narrative that references a cost must be reflected in the budget.

Income

Many budget requests for Decentralization support project no income of any kind other than the DEC award. This immediately raises two questions in the minds of panelists:

> 1. If this project has value to the community, why is there no community support?
> 2. If we award less than the request amount, how can they carry out the project?

The best way to avoid these questions is to show other sources of support, earned or contributed, even in-kind support, that shows that someone else besides the applicant cares about the proposed project.

The Decentralization grant program is not intended to fund the entire cost of a project – some level of community support and/or assistance is expected. This can include contributions and/or donations of money, time, services, materials, expertise, etc. Income should also include monies earned from ticket or concession sales, program advertising, and other activities your organizations carries out.

Please remember that the grant-funded program can not act as a fundraiser. DEC grants are prohibited from being used to fund entertainment costs for a fundraiser. Be creative and forge partnerships with other community members, organizations and businesses to fund your project.

In-Kind

In-Kind Donations are donations of goods and services that you would otherwise have to pay for. Some of your project expenses may be met this way, and we ask that ou list and estimate their monetary value

- SUMMARY -
The budget and narrative tell the same story, but in different forms. If they don't match up, item for item, panelists will be distracted from your project

GRANT WRITING ASSISTANCE

In addition to informational seminars, Saratoga Arts offers current applicants grant writing assistance, proposal feedback, and helpful grant-related resources.

DO YOU NEED ASSISTANCE....

- Finding a location for your arts event?
- Identifying potential artist/s for your event?
- Brainstorming potential grant proposal ideas?
- Or feedback on your grant proposal?

NEXT STEPS FOR YOU....

- Call or email the Grants Administrator to schedule a phone of in-person meeting
- Register and Attend a Grant Programs Informational Seminar at www.saratoga-arts.org/grant-programs/

CONTACT....

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