

Adjusting Budget to Eligibility

If your project appears eligible in all but min/max \$ amount or other \$ issue, and in every other respect this grantor seems highly likely to give very strong consideration to your project consider slightly restructuring your project plan/budget to fit that eligibility criterion.

These are some commonly-used strategies:

- Re-scope “project” to achieve needed proportions.

If the amount you plan to request is a larger proportion of total project than grantor allows, consider adding additional elements of identifiable \$ value, so that the grant amount is proportionately less. Do this ONLY if the elements you add actually make sense as part of the project (i.e., not obvious “add-ons) AND if you know you’ll be able to secure them without using grant funds. Explore using more of your own cash, finding more/additional partner resources of value to be used, or intensify fundraising.

- Break up among different grantors

To drop your request below a required maximum, consider redefining your project as several smaller projects and applying for each to different grantors. This can be risky if it’s essential to have all parts funded at the same time, but it can work if you find funders willing to cut you a little slack, and multiple grantors with award dates close together.

- Phase over time

Another way to get your request below a required maximum is to consider completing only one stage at a time, in a series of smaller grants. Note: there must be stand-alone value to whatever you plan to accomplish with your “Phase I” grant, i.e., it will make something better even if “Phase II” is never funded. Depending on scale, getting only Phase I done can improve chances of funding Phase II more than if you’d tried to do both as one project.

Tips for contacting a grant officer:

Don't, until you're very very very sure that the answer to your question is not on the website.

Examples of appropriate questions are those seeking to clarify ambiguities, terminology, or anything else that would assist you in determining whether/how to approach applying.

Timing:

In theory, you're planning your project well before an application deadline and can time your contact to make grant officer's life a little less hectic. Those who work for grantors with specific application dates may have greatest availability at the mid-point between two grant cycles, but in theory you can call at any time. Just before, and immediately after, application due dates they tend to be swamped with last minute questions, and then often assist with the organizing for application reviews.

One useful strategy:

Grant officer contact info appears on websites ("Staff" "Our Team" etc.) It's considerate to first email a request for a phone appointment, with "Phone appointment?" subject line. In your message simply ask if there's a time when you could chat by phone; then BRIEFLY mention that you've reviewed the website and would like to be sure you're understanding correctly, or whatever. They'll get back to you pretty quickly.

When you talk:

It can help at the start to (1) confirm your understanding that grant officer can't speak to whether or not you'll receive a grant (2) assure officer that you have searched the website and could use help applying their [eligibility, terminology, priorities] to your project; and (3) be super prepared; provide the minimum facts needed as context for your question. Let the grant officer ask you for additional info; they have the best sense as to what else they'd need to know to be able to provide guidance on your question.

Remember to say thank you!!

Calculating maximum project & “admin” amounts

If your original rough project budget + 10% of project costs is not dramatically above or below a grantor’s maximum allowed grant, you may want to calculate the maximum dollar amount that could be used for admin within that total grant maximum, and the amount that would left over for actual project costs, and adjust your budget accordingly.

To do this, divide the maximum allowed grant amount by “1 + percent allowed admin”).

The result of that calculation is the maximum you could apply to project costs. Subtract that amount from the maximum allowed grant to determine the maximum you could apply to admin.

For example:

maximum total grant: \$10,000

up to 10% admin allowed

Divide \$10,000 by 1.10

(Divide max grant amount by 1.[allowed admin percentage])

In the above example, \$9,091 could be used for project costs, and \$909 for admin.

ASSIGNING FACTS TO QUESTIONS

Because each response to an individual question is evaluated based on only the facts mentioned in that response, facts of significance to more than one question have to be mentioned again in each of those answers; each answer must include everything you'd like the reviewer to know and consider. Details and potential inferences vary wildly from project to project; the matrix below is a VERY general list of the kinds of facts that, depending on the details, might be useful in one or more responses.

For example,	...might have significance for				
	Mission & History	Project Need	Project Description	Evaluation Method	Budget narrative
Date founded/age, mission, strategy, evolution/trajectory, impt <u>recent</u> org improvements, #served, obstacles overcome	X				
Evidence of EDI awareness/effort/action	X	X	X	X	X
Past/current partnerships & grants not directly relevant to this project	X				
Org. past experience & accomplishments <u>similar/ relevant</u> to this project	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship of project to strat. plan/future	X		X	X	X
Models informing proj. design (own or another groups): realistic, effective			X	X	X
Alignment with grantor mission	X	X	X	X	
Other project support: partners, donors, grantors	X		X	X	X
Project Specifics: Who, what, where, why, when			X		

Editing to meet word/character limits:

An on-line form usually specifies the maximum words or characters allowed, and shows a running tab of how many are used/available.

To check what's being counted, type three short words into the space in the form and see what the running tab has measured: words, or characters; and, if characters, whether the count included blank spaces.

When each draft answer feels near final, use tool in Word (Review Document/Word Count/[choice of what to count]) to get a feel for how much you need to reduce (or can add!!)

Reducing words:

- Minimize (ideally, eliminate) your and other organizations' names in narratives; use "we" "our" etc for your name, try "local partner" for others.
- Use strong action verbs (avoid "to be" in any form!). Dynamic verbs provide a heap of nuance and engage reader's subconscious:
 ~~"This was the single greatest increase in donations"~~
 "Donations mushroomed" ("exploded" "accelerated"). *English is exceptionally verb-rich* and nuanced; see on-line thesaurus)
- Trust your facts & position them for obvious implications (don't waste words on "this matters because..." or "this was important because..."). A fact's relevance/implications are usually self-evident (otherwise you wouldn't have mentioned it). Let reviewer draw inferences – they'll trust them more.
- Eliminate prepositional phrases (words after, e.g., "of," "that" "which" "for" "before" "after"). ID key point and communicate via one adjective/verb/verb tense:
 ~~"After the discussion at last Saturday's meeting it became very apparent that..."~~
 "Saturday's meeting demonstrated" (or "highlighted," "underscored," "reinforced," etc.)
- Hyphenate! "our organization serves the entire county" could be "our county-wide service [dynamic verb here]"
 "approved by the board of directors" could be "board-approved"

Reducing characters:

- Use numerals; don't spell out numbers (also less work for reader)
- Minimize (ideally, eliminate) your and other organizations' names; use "we" "our" etc. for your name, try "local partner" for others.

Persuasive presentation:

Present your project/actions with commitment and confidence: We will do x (not “we ~~plan to, hope to, expect to, dream of~~)

Lead with and focus on the positive (except when describing “need”). Bumming out the reader at the beginning of a sentence is counterproductive – you’ve dug an unnecessary hole, and the reader’s much less likely to be excited about your great new alternative. Compare how it feels to read

“Our building is a wreck, the joists are rotten, the roof leaks, and there’s mold, but the location’s really good, so we’re going to tear it down and rebuild”
vs. “Our new building capitalizes on our existing public access, and creates modern, more hygienic, and reliably warm, safe, dry space for service delivery.”

Keep your reader happy

Any negative is negative, and has that effect on a reader. Starting a sentence or introducing an idea with negative-based words subliminally dampens a reader’s frame of mind, even if you follow it with something positive (compare preceding sentence to the more negative “No matter what you say next, if you start a sentence with a negative-based word, you will have dampened a reader’s frame of mind.”) Scan your draft for any use of words such as “not,” “no one,” “never” “neither/nor,” and reword. A fix may involve restructuring the sentence, changing subject and object, etc.; the result is always more attractive and effective.

Same principle for words such as “although,” “despite,” and “but.” Readers understand these (correctly) as meaning that the reader is going to be asked to digest one thing and its implications, then compare or contrast with something else, and then agree with the conclusion you’re arguing for. To avoid asking the reader to work that hard, consider whether the countervailing consideration actually matters that much, can be deleted; if it DOES matter, explore using a verb to lead with you and your triumph, rather than the barrier:

~~“Despite the severe reduction in donated funds, we’ve been able to keep delivering our core services”~~

~~“All usual sources of donated income disappeared, but we’ve been able to keep delivering~~

“We adapted our service model to the reduction in donated income by prioritizing and sustaining our core services”

Readers get impatient, frustrated and bored by the passive tense because it avoids assigning responsibility and ignores cause and effect (e.g., “Mistakes were made”; “The wall was damaged”; “The passive tense should not be used”). Active verbs are both inherently more engaging and ensure identification of the actor or force responsible for a result (“We made mistakes” “George damaged the wall” “You should not use the passive tense.”)

Letters of Interest and Cover Letters

It's increasingly rare for a grantor to request a true "letter" on letterhead, because most are adopting on-line forms. However, if you are asked to provide an actual letter, below are some typical opening and closing phrases that may help you get started. They're not perfect, just give you the gist. Check the website for address to which letter is to be sent; usually the salutation addresses the Board of Directors, or a specified committee.

Sample opening sentences:

- Cover letter: "Please find enclosed our request to the Blah Blah Foundation for a grant award in the amount of \$2500. As described in more detail in the enclosed application, the requested funds will be combined with additional resources to [improve our service to the homeless, expand our services to additional underserved populations, etc.]. All other resources for this project have been secured; your support, if provided, will allow us to immediately begin implementation.
- LOI: "Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of interest. We are writing to describe our work in Southwestern Oregon, and to inquire if the Blah Blah Foundation would be interested in considering a grant to our organization in the amount of \$\$\$. Grant funds will be used to.... [or "We are writing to request your consideration of a partnership with our organization to...]

Sample closing sentence:

- Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and please do not hesitate to contact me if any additional information would be helpful for your review.