

A Guide to Preparing Effective Grant Applications

Every funding program and project is unique. Questions will vary between application forms and funding type.

This is meant only to give you a general guide to writing grant applications.

- 1. Read the guidelines** – Always read the program guidelines and application form to determine that your project is eligible and a strong fit for the program’s objectives.
 - Know what costs are eligible or are not eligible.
 - Know what the intake dates are. Put deadlines in your calendar. Plan backwards from the date the application is due to make sure you give yourself enough time to put the application together and have any supporting documentation ready to submit.
 - Understand what supporting documentation you will be required to submit (e.g., quotes, proof of ownership, financial statements, business registration, etc.) so you can have these ready to send with your application. Have your attachments prepared to attach to your application, preferably in a PDF format. *Failure to upload the required documentation at the time of submitting your application can ‘cancel’ your application.*

- 2. Contact your grants officer or advisor** – Discuss your project with the grant office before applying.
 - All programs have a ‘contact us’ or ‘search for your regional advisor’. Use your available resources.
 - Write down all the questions you have and think through your project idea in preparation for the conversation.
 - Talk through your project idea including costs, supporting documentation, and even strategies for answering the questions.
 - Ask about the approvals process so you understand, for example, when you can start the project, and how the cost share and reimbursement process works.
 - If your project is potentially eligible for ‘stackable’ funding, meaning funding from 2 or 3 different programs, it is recommended to have a joint meeting with all the grant officers /resources with the funders.

- 3. Give yourself enough time** – Successful grant writing is not done at the last minute. If you’re scrambling, most likely it’s not going to be written well, the numbers might not add up, and you might miss sections or attachments.
 - Take the pressure off. Do a first draft and come back to it.
 - Ask someone else to read your application before you submit so they can help catch things you might have missed, point out answers you may want to clarify, etc. As well, a 3rd person reading it may assist your with clarifying your answers. Remember the funding agency doesn’t know your project, sometimes when you have been working on a project for months, the grant writer may not provide enough details since ‘for them’, they know the project inside and out, but a 3rd reader may point out missing detail to provide enough information or clarification.

- 4. Write clearly and directly** – Answer all of the questions as clearly and directly as possible and thoroughly outline the steps that will be taken.

- Use plain language. When writing your application, assume the person reviewing your application does not know anything about you or your business. Pretend you are explaining to a person you never met who you are and what your business is, what your sector is, what your experience is, what you're applying to do, why it's important to your business, and what's involved in purchasing, building, etc. to complete the project.
- Check your spelling.
- Use complete sentences, do not use abbreviations. If using acronyms be sure to list them long form for clarification.
- Structure your ideas and answers. One strategy is to create a simple outline for yourself for how you plan to answer the question, then start filling it out.
- Make sure you're answering all parts of the question, or your answer may be scored lower. If the question is 'not applicable' to your project, provide a quick explanation to why.

5. Appeal to the main goals of the funding program – Funding programs have different goals.

- Reading the guidelines will tell you what the goals are. You can reflect some of the language and program goals into how you answer the questions. If you do this, make it flow naturally and not look like a cut and paste job.

There's no formula for writing a grant application. Each program, project, and business is unique. Remember that you're making a case for your business and your project as being a great candidate for the program. So, tell your story and build yourself up!

Here are some general types of questions you'll encounter and suggestions for answering:

6. Project Description / Project Summary

- This question provides context for the rest of your proposal. It is necessary for understanding the rest of the proposal and why the project is being undertaken. Here's some examples of what you may want to include:
 - Tell us who you are and what your business is.
 - Is the business a start-up, expansion, diversification?
 - Is it a new product line, manufacturing, emerging technology?
 - What do you produce?
 - How much do you produce?
 - What's your market? Who are your clients?
 - Are you supply managed?
 - Where is your business? Location, geographical area you cater to.
 - What is the size of your business? (e.g., number of employees)
 - What's your ownership structure? Are you a family run?
 - How long have you owned the business?
 - What's your experience (briefly)?

- What's the purpose of your project? What do you want to accomplish with this project?
 - Why are you purchasing the new equipment or building? (e.g., bottleneck in production)
 - What's the issue you're trying to address?
 - Why is the project being undertaken?
 - i. Are you filling a void or gap in services.
 - ii. Is there a new business opportunity for growth and expansion.
- What are you applying for specifically?
 - What does the equipment do?
 - What purpose is the infrastructure for?
 - Use plain language. Explain what it is and why it's a benefit to your business.

For the project description and other questions, quantify when you can. Your application looks a lot stronger when you can give specific numbers, such as years of experience, volume produced, acres to be put into production, time to be saved, markets to be reached, partners you'll work with, usage and demand, etc.

7. Project Benefits – Explain how the project will meet the goals of the grant program and benefit your business/entity. Looking at the grant guidelines will tell you the goals of the program (e.g., economic, environmental, social, industrial).

For example, you may want to describe how the project will:

- Increase sales, production or yields.
 - Please quantify and explain the math behind the numbers.
 - *Example: The new equipment will decrease production costs by 5% for \$X dollars and will yield an 8% increase in output, allowing for a 6.4% increase in revenue for a potential total of \$X.*
- Help the business grow and transition to new markets.
 - Is there a market? How do you know? Export opportunities?
- Enhance productivity and increase efficiency (please quantify)
- Increase profits and competitiveness.
- Result in cost efficiencies
 - *This piece of equipment will eliminate this process and increase my output of 'widgets' by 40%*
 - *The building is aged and is presently an R14 and with the new insulation, boarding, windows and doors it will be an R40 and save on operation cost regarding energy cost.*
- Demonstrate innovation (introduction of new processes, new products, etc.)
- Increase business viability (e.g. increase in farm income, product quality)?
- Respond to a niche or void in the sector.
- Create or retain jobs
 - Number of jobs, position (title), rate of payment, hours per week, start date, end date (if applicable), brief job description (ie main responsibilities)
- Address regulation challenges to stay competitive.
- Address infrastructure needs or deficiencies.
- Address sector needs.
- Build capacity
- Positively impact the regional economy

- Does the project contribute to strengthening the industry/sector/cluster in the region? If so, how?
- Does the project benefit other businesses along the value chain (e.g., feed stores, equipment dealers, etc.)? If so, how?

8. Project Implementation / Key Activities – Outline your action plan

- List the key activities that you must do and do well to support a successful project (this is the ‘physical activities’ that must be tasked.)
- Ensure to draw a very clear line relating activities to costs and outcomes.
 - Do you need an engineer?
 - Engineering or architectural support, drawing, design?
 - Construction - a building, size
 - Do you need to post request for proposals or tenders, seek quotes?
 - Renovation, repairs, leasehold improvements.
 - Do you need electrical work, plumbing, etc?
 - Purchase new or used equipment
 - Put more acres into production
 - Hire a consultant, a contractor
 - Do you need a consultant, a web designer, performers, etc...?
 - Installation
 - Permit approvals
 - Training
- Who is leading the project and what is planned? (Sometimes this is a separate “Project Management” question)
 - Show you have the knowledge and capacity to successfully start and succeed with this business venture. You may know you have the knowledge and people, but you need to communicate this to the grant evaluators.
 - Who is managing the project and what skills do they have to do it? An application is like a resume. Highlight your experience (e.g., formal education, relevant courses, work experience, industry knowledge, financial management experience). Include information that could help demonstrate your ability to deliver this project successfully.
 - If you don’t have the experience in house, who will you be hiring? This may be for all or parts of the project (e.g., site preparation, electrical). Will there be a project manager?

9. Marketing – Sometimes included (e.g., when reaching new markets, expanding products offered).

- Have you developed a marketing plan?
 - In what market(s) does the company currently compete?
 - Who are your customers - numbers, demographics, where are they from, why do they buy your product? Have you done any market research/analysis?
 - How large is the market and what is the market trend? Is it growing/flat/declining?
 - Does the company have a diverse customer base/long term contracts in place?
 - Who are the largest customers and how long has the company had a business relationship with them?
 - What is the company’s market share?
 - What is the plan for marketing the new product (email, internet, social media, TV, radio,

newspaper, mail)? Why will this be successful?

- Are there support letters provided from customers or the community groups or agencies?
- Identify your major competitors.
 - Do you have a competitive advantage in the marketplace? Explain.
 - How do you differentiate from the competition?
 - How do you compete? Example: price, quality, distribution, other?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of the key competitors?
 - How will you address the competition?
- What is your distribution plan?
 - If you're creating a new product, for instance, how will you be selling your product? What are your projected sales?
- Not being aware of your competition, not having a sound marketing plan, or no distribution plan can be a red flag.

10. Risk Analysis – Identify any risks that may threaten the completion of the project.

- What are the risk points for the project?
 - Risks are ok but how are you going to control for those factors?
 - Have all permits been received? If not, what is the status?
 - Is contractor availability or equipment delivery a risk, will it be slow or delayed creating issues with the project? How will you mitigate the problem?

11. Fiscal commitment

- Do you have a sufficient fiscal commitment and stability to move the project forward?
- What is your contribution. Programs have minimal 'cash' amounts required from the applicant.
- Ask about pre-disbursement conditions so as to avoid surprises. Very few programs have that option.
- Do you have sufficient cashflow to allow for the project activities and reimbursement of funds.
 - Most grants are a reimbursement type fund. You will incur the cost, pay the invoice in full then submit the invoice and proof of payment to get your grant reimbursement. Are you fiscally stable or do you have sufficient cash flow to pay all the project activities in full before reimbursement?
 - What if something unexpected comes up, can you manage unexpected project cost?
- When discussing if costs are eligible, ensure to clarify requirements on incrementality/admin/salaries and benefits.

12. Before you Submit – Ask yourself:

- Is my project clearly defined?
 - Does it fit with program objectives?
 - Are there clear objectives, activities, and benefits/outcomes?
- Have I fully answered all the questions?
- Have I provided all the supporting documentation requested?
 - You may need three quotes for equipment (an invoice not a handwritten note). If you can't get three quotes for a specialized piece of equipment, provide reasoning why.
- Are my project implementation timelines reasonable?
- Have I demonstrated having the ability to implement that project (skills internally, external advisors)?
- Is my project budget complete?
 - Do my numbers add up in the budget table and are they consistent (e.g., with what's in the

- quote or elsewhere in your application)
- Are the eligible and ineligible costs classified correctly? Not sure? Ask an advisor. Remember that ineligible costs still need to be financed.
- Have I clearly identified who is paying for what (e.g., grant contribution, cash, line of credit)?
- Have I demonstrated I have the resources (ex. financing) in place on my end?
- Are my costs realistic? Try not to underestimate or overestimate costs.
- Are the project benefits I outlined realistic? For example, if you say you'll hire a new person do your projections support this?

13. Reporting. Understand your responsibilities when you are approved.

- When/how often must you report on progress?
- What key indicators do you need to report on?
- Who has the appropriate authority to sign off on the reports?
- Can you provide the necessary back-up documents (receipts, etc.)?
- Communicate early if there are unexpected project delays.

Supporting documentation that may be required with an application submission:

This is a generic list and each item may not be relevant to your type of project, but of the items listed are required.

- diagrams/floor plans, engineering/architectural drawings
- financial statements
- documentation of fiscal support – bank loans, credit lines....
- building permit, water permits, etc.
- quotes, tenders, proposals
- proof of ownership. Lease agreements
- business registration, article of incorporation, etc.
- proof of a completed and current Environmental Farm Plan
- assessments (biosecurity, food safety, animal welfare, species at risk, environmental or other)
- projected financials
- marketing plans
- business plan
- business model
- letters of support