



# Two Keys to Successful Grant Proposals

*Of course your project is worthwhile. But how can you make sure someone funds it?*

BY DIRK REMLEY

For any nonprofit organization, the grant is among the most cherished sources of funding. Grants are usually much larger than individual contributions, and you can receive them repeatedly over the years. However, getting one is among the most difficult of challenges. Because competition is so fierce, the *way* you present information in your proposal makes all the difference in whether you receive funding. Here are the two most important keys to writing successful proposals:

## KEY #1: TELL WHY YOUR PROJECT IS NEEDED.

Almost all grant proposals include the same information. The proposal begins with an introduction, followed by description of the project, benefits to be derived from the project's successful completion, and prospective recipients' qualifications.

This information is important, but it doesn't do much to *influence* a decision. A funder won't spend money where it's not needed. Thus, you'll have little chance of success unless you make a convincing argument that your project is not just worthwhile but *necessary*.

### Need Versus Want

First, you must distinguish "needs" from "wants." Making this distinction may be harder than it seems at first glance. Many people have trouble telling

the difference. They convince themselves they need something, when it's only a want based on a need. You may *want* to own a Lexus, but what you *need* is a car. A Yugo, in fact, may satisfy the need itself.

With all the needs in the world today, funders aren't going to spend money on wants. In writing your proposal, then, you must provide not only the *what* but also the *why*. Why is a project worth funding? Because it is needed.

### Addressing Need

To address need in your proposal, answer the following questions—first to yourself, then in writing:

1. What is wrong with current conditions? (necessity)
2. What has been tried previously to correct these conditions? (failure of other alternatives)
3. Is our idea for correcting the conditions feasible? (chances for success)
4. Can our idea make a successful impact? (merit)
5. Why must our organization be the one to set this idea in motion? (qualifications)

The effective proposal will answer these questions. Spend at least as much time telling *why* as *for what* you need funds. Talk about the benefits to society—not about the goals of your organization.

## KEY #2: TAKE THE READER'S PERSPECTIVE.

The *way* you present your information is also crucial.

As you write, put yourself in the shoes of potential funders. Ask yourself why they should award money to your organization. The fact that you think it's a worthy project is not enough. Your proposal should answer these questions for potential funders:

1. Why should we put money into this project rather than some other project?
2. If we fund this project, will we be associated with a successful result?

Don't stress that your organization has needs. Stress that your organization meets needs.



# CREATIVE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

## Get Them to Open Your Envelope

Five types of messages will encourage recipients to open your direct-mail fundraising envelope (and getting prospects to open your letter is more than half the battle). Try one of these teaser approaches on your envelope: **1. Announce:** "A year-end report on your investment." **2. Compel:** "We request your response by July 30th." **3. Intrigue:** "Your certificate is enclosed." **4. Worry:** "An urgent invitation for members only." **5. Outrage:** "Does it matter what happens to this child?" *Source: FRI Monthly Portfolio*, 12300 Twinbrook Parkway, Suite 520, Rockville, MD 20852, cited in *Communication Briefings*, 1101 King Street, Suite 110, Alexandria, VA 22314.

## Set Up an Auto-Reply

When someone sends e-mail to your auto-reply, it will automatically send back information pertinent to your work—with no human intervention and at virtually no cost to you. You will receive a record of everyone who requests information through your auto-reply. This record is invaluable for fundraising. And setting up an auto-reply is "a piece of cake," says Mal Warwick in *Fundraising on the Internet* (Strathmoor Press, 2550 9th St., Suite 1040, Berkeley, CA 94710-2516, 800-217-7377).

## Piggyback on Catalog Mailings

You can save money and boost donations by adding your fundraising appeal to a catalog. A new direct-mail opportunity for nonprofits, called BetterWorld Bind-ins, will match your organization with a compatible catalog and bind your fundraising appeal into the center of the catalog. This approach can eliminate your list acquisition, postage, and mail-handling costs and cut your printing costs in half. For more information or to request a free BetterWorld data sheet, contact Fred Jardine, nonprofit marketing manager, Webcraft Technologies, Rt. 1 & Adams Station Rd., P.O. Box 6023, North Brunswick, NJ 08902-6023 (phone 800-283-4044, fax 908-821-3761).

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a Lexus, but what  
you *need* is a car.  
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satisfy the need itself.

3. If we fund this project, will we make an impact on society?
4. If we fund this project, will we help people survive?

Suppose you have plenty of money. You have the choice of using your money for your organization's program

or somewhere else where it's needed. Why would you choose your program and not the other place?

This is exactly the question facing funders. Answer it for them. ■

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These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' *Resource*

*Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

### Fundraising Software Resources

- Chronicle Guide to Grants*, 1255 23rd Street, N.W., Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20037 (202-466-1000).  
*Donor Perfect fundraising software*, SofterWare, 540 Pennsylvania Avenue, 2nd Floor, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania 19117 (800-220-8111).  
*Federal Money Retrievers that Work* (see Society for Nonprofit Organizations *Resource Center Catalog*, available in this issue).  
*Fund-Master 7.0 fundraising software*, Master Software Corporation, 5975 Castle Creek Parkway N. Drive, Suite 300, Indianapolis, Indiana 46250 (800-950-2999; fax 317-849-5280).  
*The Raiser's Edge fundraising software*, Blackbaud, 4401 Belle Oaks Drive, Charleston, South Carolina 29405-8530 (phone 800-443-9441, Ext. 307 or 803-740-5400; fax 803-740-5410).

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