



# How to Answer the Dreaded Grant Question about Future Funding

To be sure your request is funded, try one of these responses.

By Karen Eber Davis

**Y**ou're applying for a grant, and you come to this question on the application: "How will you fund this program *after* the grant?" You slide your hands off the keyboard and wonder, "How can I answer this?"

Here are four possibilities:

## Four Answers

**Answer #1:** We don't expect to need future grant funds for this project.

Grantors like this answer, as long as you can explain why you won't need future funding. Here are a few good reasons for giving this answer:

- **You'll use the grant to pay for your project's one-time expenses.** These costs might include, for example, computer equipment, a new roof, furniture for a new addition, unique staff training, office set-up, or the creation of a curriculum.

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- **You're requesting funds for a program that will produce income.** If you work with a dance company, for instance, you might request funds for a new event that will produce ticket sales.
- **You're developing a pilot program.** The project may be so experimental that you'll need new grant funds only if the activity is *very* successful, something no one can predict now.
- **Your staff will assume the activity long-term if the grant pays for startup costs.** A case in point: Staff of an Easter Seals group found that developmentally disabled adults were relying on expensive door-to-door transportation. With grant funds, the nonprofit hired short-term staff to teach these individuals to use the mass transit system. After the grant, existing staff offered occasional classes for newcomers.
- **The grant funds will reduce your other expenses.** One circus organization sought grant money to buy stage lights

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rather than renting them. As they explained in their application, the money that went to renting lights would be used to maintain the new lights.

**Answer #2:** Yes, we’ll need additional funds, but you can take our plan seriously.

This is an acceptable response as long as you make it clear that you’ll need more funds for only a limited time. Here are some ways you can explain giving this answer:

- **You’d like the funder to support your organization over several years.** As an example, if your activity costs \$30,000 a year, your grant request might be for \$59,700 over three years. You would thus receive \$30,000 or 100% for year one, \$19,800 or 66% for year two, and \$9,900 for year three. You’ll still need a plan to raise new funds but over three years instead of one. This longer period is often enough for other development efforts to be productive. The longer time also benefits your organization by establishing a long-term relationship with the funder and providing greater stability for the program. In addition, it saves you time because you only need to write one request rather than three or more.
- **Other new funds will be available soon.** Local funders are often willing to help nonprofits by providing match money if the grant will bring new dollars to a community. In your application, identify the source of these funds and the other grantor’s timeline. Funders are more willing to continue a grant over a number of years if their money will be doubled, tripled, or quadrupled.
- **Your request builds on a new idea in your field.** If you can foresee federal funding within 18 months, you can show that funding *now* will increase your chances of getting funding on a national level *later*. This is similar to the above match, but it takes place *before* the match is available. One economic development nonprofit created a school-to-work program with a local grant for \$100,000. With the group’s early start and the boost of local commitment, the organization was able to secure a million-dollar federal grant to extend the program.

**Answer #3:** We will increase our fundraising efforts.

This is probably the most common answer grant readers see. If your application is accepted, the funder will expect you to follow through on this promise. If your organization fails in this task, your reputation and future requests to this and other funders may suffer.

- **If you have access to operating grants, discuss how you’ll submit applications to these sources.** Identify the grant programs available, your submittal plans, and an estimate of the amounts you’ll request.
- **Explain that you plan to seek funds from individual**

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**donors.** You’ll need an action plan to raise funds from people associated with your organization. Perhaps you can request a challenge grant. In this case, matching funds from individuals *must* be obtained before the grant funds are available. If you plan to go with individual donors, you could ask the funder to support ongoing fundraising efforts. For example, a faith-based group requested and obtained funds for the program activity, mailings, and development-office set-up.

**Answer #4:** We don’t have any plans to fund this program beyond the grant period.

Funders are wary of this response and rarely fund proposals based on this answer. Only on very special occasions, particularly near the holidays, do they grant such a request. They generally want to know that the program they’re funding will continue, especially when an ongoing need exists for the services.

## Long-Haul Thinking

Even if a funder doesn’t ask, develop a plan for what you’ll do after the grant. If you can’t figure one out, you may need to forego the grant and seek another way to implement your activities. In any case, make plans to follow through on any arrangements you make in the application.

Funders will look closely at your response to the future funding question. Writing a strong answer will bring you closer to getting that grant. 

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**Focusing on Foundation Grants: The Powerful Reverse Needs Assessment** (Vol. 12, No. 4)

**Seven Deadly Grantwriting Sins** (Vol. 27, No. 6)

**Nonprofits & Funders: Two Sides of the Same Coin?** (Vol. 24, No. 4)

**Two Keys to Successful Grant Proposals** (Vol. 15, No. 3)

These resources are available at [NonprofitWorld.org/members](http://NonprofitWorld.org/members). Also see Learning Institute programs on-line: Resource Development and O for Opportunity: Exploring New Revenue Opportunities for Nonprofits ([NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute](http://NonprofitWorld.org/LearningInstitute)).