

Grant Writing Basics for Libraries

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Professional Development
Alliance of Library Consortia

January 22, 2025

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Agenda

- ✓ Getting started
- ✓ Where to find opportunities
- ✓ Writing best practices
- ✓ Four common application components
- ✓ Funder's point of view
- ✓ What to do if your application is funded/not funded
- ✓ Most common missteps
- ✓ Resources to help you

About me

Senior Director, CARLI (Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois), University of Illinois System, 2016-

Current grants:

- US Department of Education, Open Textbooks Pilot Grant, \$2 million
- Institute of Museum and Library Services, LB21 Planning Grant, \$150,000
- Illinois Secretary of State grants

Instructor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, iSchool, Master's Library and Information Science Program, 2018-

Teaching “Grant Writing for Libraries” and “State Libraries & Library Consortia”

Illinois State Library Director, 2005-2016; ISL staff 1989-2016

- State Library awards millions annually in federal and state grant funding
- Secured many federal and state competitive grants

abcraig@uillinois.edu



**UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
SYSTEM**

**Altogether
Extraordinary™**

I ILLINOIS

School of Information Sciences





NOFO, GPO???

*Notice of Funding Opportunity
Grant Program Officer*

How do I get started?

- What do you see as a need in your community? What would you change if you could?
- What do you feel passionate about?
- What makes you frustrated or angry? What do you wish you could do for the people you serve?
- What brought you joy recently? Can you extend that happiness to your community?



A photograph of a concert crowd. In the foreground, several pairs of hands are raised, forming heart shapes. The background is filled with more people and bright stage lights, creating a hazy, energetic atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

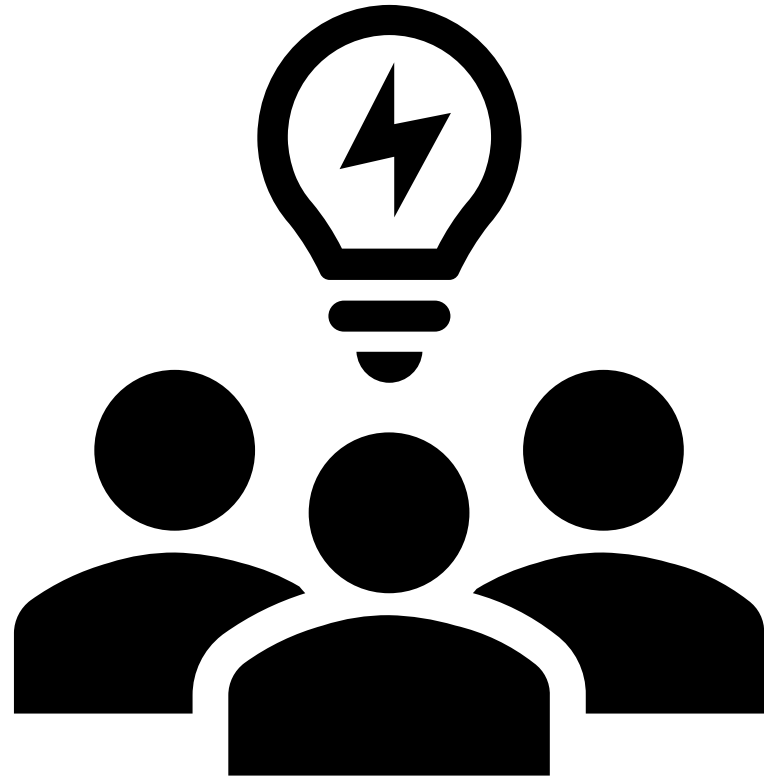
***How can
YOU make
a difference
for your
target
audience?***

Why grants?

- Provide capacity to accomplish new projects/services/capacity not otherwise possible
- Collaborate and have a bigger impact
- Build a skill that's transportable
- Engage in our profession!



Winning your governing authority



- How can you make them a cheerleader for your project?
- Think about how the project will benefit the organization as a whole and paint that picture for them.
- Describe the conditions before the grant and after the grant...what will have changed?

Where to find opportunities

- Private foundations (Bill & Melinda Gates, Andrew W. Mellon), companies (Ben & Jerry's, Target, WalMart), government resources (local, state, and federal), your own organization
- Agency websites, newsletters
- Blogs
- Google
- [Philanthropy Today](#)
 - A free email with news, trends, and opinion articles about the nonprofit world, as well as links to our tools, resources, and webinars. Delivered every weekday.

Resource list at the end of this packet



SEARCH GRANTS



BASIC SEARCH CRITERIA

Keyword(s):

Opportunity Number:

Assistance Listings:

SORT BY:

Relevance (Descending)

DATE RANGE:

All Available

OPPORTUNITY STATUS:

- Forecasted (16)
- Posted (123)
- Closed (1,122)
- Archived (5,930)

FUNDING INSTRUMENT TYPE: —

| Opportunity Number | Opportunity Title | Agency | Opportunity Status |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------|--------------------|
| NLG-LIBRARIES-FY25 | National Leadership Grants for Libraries (2025) | IMLS | Posted |
| NAG-ENHANCEMENT-FY25 | Native American Library Services Enhancement Grants (2025) | IMLS | Forecasted |
| LB21-FY25 | Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program (2025) | IMLS | Posted |
| NAG-BASIC-FY25 | Native American Library Services Basic Grant (2025) | IMLS | Posted |
| NAG-HAWAIIAN-FY25 | Native Hawaiian Library Services Grants (2025) | IMLS | Forecasted |

Writing best practices

- Follow the application instructions to the letter!
 - Follow ALL the instructions, not just some.
 - If you do not understand something in the NOFO, ask the GPO.
- Respond in order to the rubric/scoring mechanism POINT by POINT.
 - DO NOT make the reviewers hunt for responses to scoring criteria.
- Peruse the funder's website for example applications.
 - Are there standout characteristics in these examples that you could incorporate into your application?



Writing best practices, continued

- Avoid first person (I, we, our, us); instead, use “the XYZ organization plans to...”
- Clarity before everything else!
 - No jargon, acronyms, or trendy language.
 - Grammar, spelling, punctuation matter
- Focus! Don’t overpromise; don’t embellish.
- Find at least one great editor to read the final draft application who has not seen previous drafts.



Real world examples



- “Page limits: Note the page limit for the Preliminary Proposal Narrative in the table above. IMLS will remove any additional pages and **will not send them to reviewers as part of your application.**”
- “Naming convention: Use the naming conventions indicated in the table above. **IMPORTANT:** Attachment file names are limited to the following characters: A-Z, a-z, 0-9, underscore (_), hyphen (-), space, period (.). If attachment file names use any other characters, **the application may be rejected by Grants.gov.**”

Power up those verbs!

Instead of:

We **hope** the participants will learn something.

Say this:

Five sessions **will require** participants to use their new computer skills to ...

Bottom line: write strategically!

- Show how an existing scenario/problem/issue could change as a result of this project
- And the solution is...your grant project!
- Paint a picture in the minds of the reviewers



Four common application components

1. Narrative
 2. Budget
 3. Evaluation/outcomes
 4. Timeline/schedule of completion
- *Most NOFOs require submission of a package containing several components.*
 - *Many possible components--depends on the NOFO.*
 - *Some NOFOs do not allow certain pieces (letters of support, bids, quotations).*



1. Narrative=heart of your application

- The narrative MUST be readable...a story!
- Focus on your target audience
 - Pepper your narrative with empirical and anecdotal information
 - Spark interest and create a connection with the reader
- Describe how items budgeted are integral to project activities and/or how they will be used



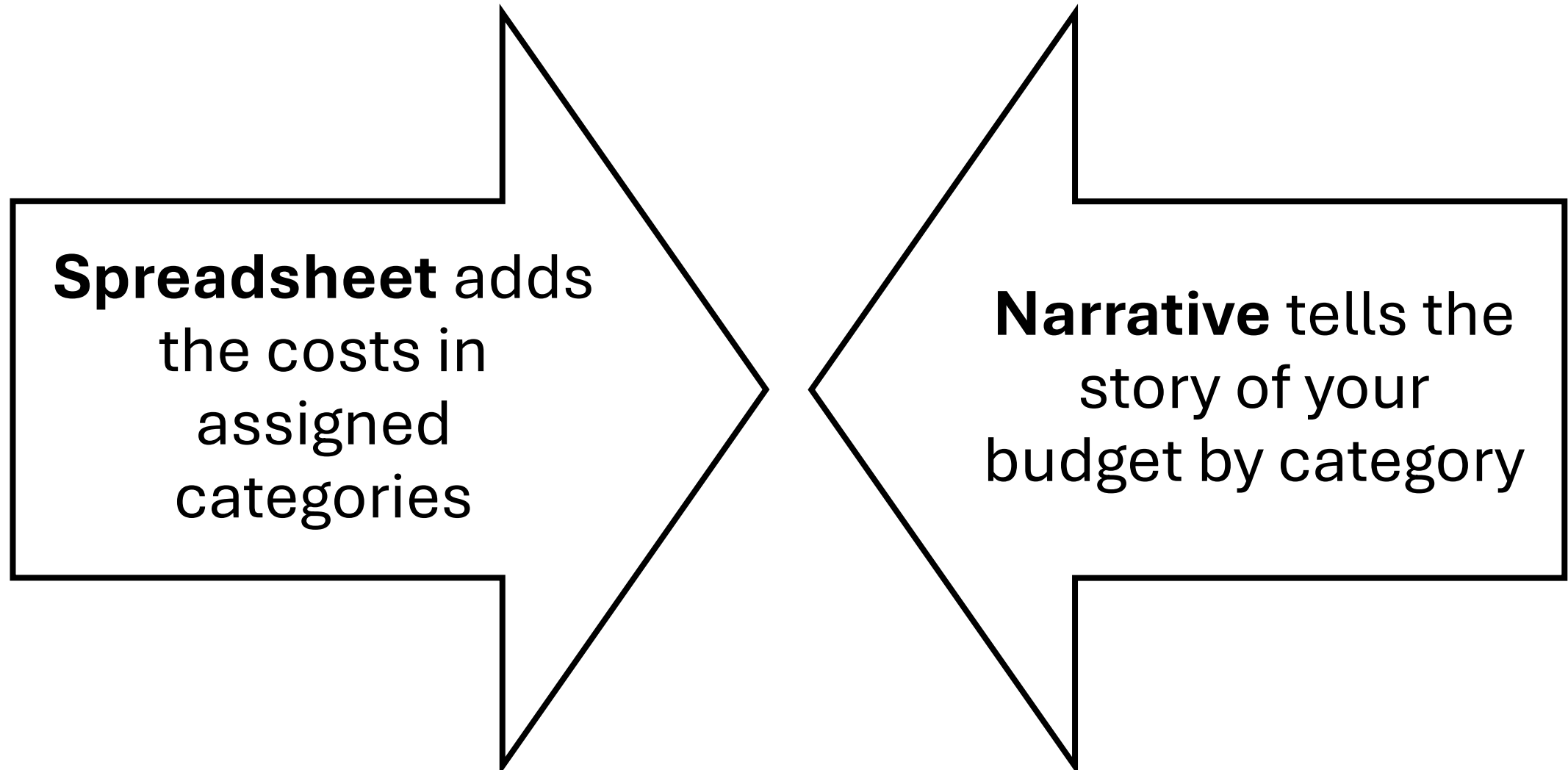
Kate McDowell, *Data Storytelling Toolkit for Libraries:*

<https://uiucdstl.wixsite.com/uiucdstl>

Photo by [Brett Jordan](#) on [Unsplash](#)

2. Budget

Usually, two required pieces that work together...



Budget spreadsheet example

| Budget Categories | Amount Budgeted Year 1 | Amount Budgeted Year 2 | Grand Totals |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Salaries and Wages | \$8,000.00 | \$5,500.00 | \$13,500.00 |
| Consultant Fees | \$2,000.00 | \$2,000.00 | \$4,000.00 |
| Travel | | \$1,500.00 | \$1,500.00 |
| Supplies and Materials | \$2,660.00 | | \$2,660.00 |
| Equipment | \$8,000.00 | | \$8,000.00 |
| Services; Contracts and Subawards | \$1,000.00 | \$1,500.00 | \$2,500.00 |
| Other Costs | | | |
| TOTAL DIRECT COSTS | \$21,660.00 | \$10,500.00 | \$32,160.00 |
| Indirect Costs (10% maximum) | \$2,166.00 | \$1,050.00 | \$3,216.00 |
| TOTAL GRANT REQUEST (Direct Costs + Indirect Costs) | \$23,826.00 | \$11,550.00 | \$35,376.00 |



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
 OFFICE OF NAVAL RESEARCH
 875 NORTH RANDOLPH STREET
 SUITE 1425
 ARLINGTON, VA 22203-1985

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Agreement Date: March 1, 2022

NEGOTIATION AGREEMENT

INSTITUTION: **THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
 CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS 91820-6242**

The Facilities and Administrative (F&A) Cost rates contained herein are for use on grants, contracts and/or other agreements issued or awarded to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign by all Federal Agencies of the United States of America, in accordance with the provisions and cost principles mandated by 2 CFR Part 200. These rates shall be used for forward pricing and billing purposes for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Fiscal Year 2025. This rate agreement supersedes all previous rate agreements/determinations related to these rates for Fiscal Years 2025.

Section I: RATES - TYPE: PREDETERMINED (PRED)

F&A Rates:

| TYPE | FROM | TO | ON CAMPUS | | OFF CAMPUS | | APPLICABLE TO |
|------|--------|---------|-----------|-------|------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| | | | RATE | RATE | RATE | BASE | |
| Pred | 7/1/24 | 6/30/25 | 58.6% | 25.9% | (a) | Organized Research | |
| Pred | 7/1/24 | 6/30/25 | 44.9% | 26.0% | (a) | Sponsored Instruction | |
| Pred | 7/1/24 | 6/30/25 | 31.7% | 21.7% | (a) | Other Sponsored Activities | |

DISTRIBUTION BASE

(a) Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC), as defined in 2 CFR Part 200, consisting of all salaries and wages, fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and subawards up to the first \$25,000 each subaward (regardless of the period covered by the subaward); and excluding equipment (defined in Section II, paragraph G.1.), capital expenditures, charges for patient care

Your institution may have a “federally negotiated indirect cost rate.”

IMLS BUDGET FORM

a. Legal name (5a from SF-424S):

9. Indirect Costs (Read the instructions about Indirect Costs before completing this section.)

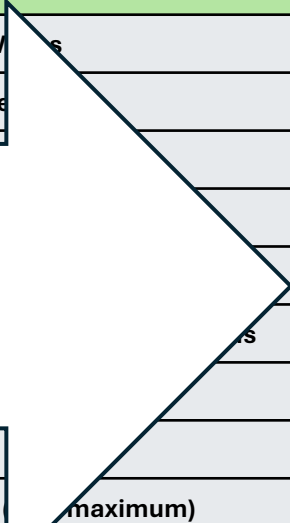
- Current indirect cost rate(s) have been negotiated with a federal agency. Name of Agency: Expiration Date:
- Indirect cost proposal has been submitted to a federal agency but not yet finalized. Name of Agency: Proposal Date:
- Applicant chooses a rate not to exceed 10% of modified total direct costs, and declares it is eligible for the 10% rate. Until Amended:
- Applicant chooses not to include indirect costs.
- Grant program does not allow indirect costs.

| Rate and Base | Year 1 | | Year 2 | | Year 3 | | Total | | |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| | Grant Fund | Cost Share | Grant Fund | Cost Share | Grant Fund | Cost Share | Grant Fund | Cost Share | Grand Total |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
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Budget narrative

The separate budget narrative explains the spreadsheet...

- Explain the computation you used to arrive at each of these numbers.
- Review your justification for each cost.
- Justify big equipment costs.
- Check your program narrative and timeline to ensure everything mentioned is included in the budget.
- Avoid explaining small expenses (“Buying 100 pens”), roll up to larger category (“office supplies”).



| Budget Categories | | Amount Budgeted Year 1 | Amount Budgeted Year 2 | Grand |
|--|--|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Salaries and Wages | | \$8,000.00 | \$5,500.00 | \$13,500.00 |
| Consultant Fees | | \$2,000.00 | \$2,000.00 | \$4,000.00 |
| | | | \$1,500.00 | \$1,500.00 |
| | | \$2,660.00 | | \$2,660.00 |
| | | \$8,000.00 | | \$8,000.00 |
| | | \$1,000.00 | \$1,500.00 | \$2,500.00 |
| TOTAL DIRECT | | \$21,660.00 | \$10,500.00 | \$32,160.00 |
| Indirect Costs (maximum) | | \$2,166.00 | \$1,050.00 | \$3,216.00 |
| TOTAL GRANT REQUEST (Direct Costs + Indirect Costs) | | \$23,826.00 | \$11,550.00 | \$35,376.00 |

Budget FYIs

- NOFO will likely include a list of allowable and non-allowable expenses.
- May mention “cost share” or “matching” funds required, expressed as 1:1 or 2:1.
- May cap the indirect cost rate.
- May indicate forms, assurances, certifications that must be completed.
- May require certain cost elements in the project design (e.g., use of a certain technology or that a certain skill is acquired).
- May require attached bids, quotations, deposit receipts, proof of work, etc.
- After submission and review, GPO may request clarification.

Resource list at the end of this packet

3. Evaluation/Outcomes

For my project/idea, my target audience is:

(describe your target audience)

My project should change this for the target audience:

(some type of knowledge, skills, attitude, behavior, actions, or status)

By how much?

(name a percentage or quantity)

I could use the following evaluation tool to measure the outcomes/impact:

(survey, test, observation)

Example outcome statement

- *Is it measurable?* - 80%
- *Are the participants described?* - adults participating in three classes
- *What change will take place?* - will gain confidence to search the XYZ database independently
- *What can individual participants do as a result of attending the program or how much of a change will be made?* - find the information they seek
- *Is a timeline evident?* - after attending three classes provided by the grant

Eighty percent of the adults participating (80 of 100 total participants) will gain confidence to search the XYZ database independently to find the information they seek after attending three classes provided by the grant.

Funder's point of view

- Published NOFOs=carved in stone
- Consistent, fair practices are important
- Not a popularity contest
- Many factors may weigh in the decisions (region, grant category, organization type)
- Demonstrated record of grant management excellence can be important
- Look at their websites, mission statements



A pair of glasses with thin metal frames and clear lenses is resting on a white sheet of paper. The paper is placed on a wooden desk with a visible grain. The scene is lit from the top left, creating soft shadows.

The GPO

-
- **The GPO *wants* your project to succeed!**
 - The GPO may have written the NOFO; they can help you decide category and whether your application might be a good fit
 - Research the NOFO—read it thoroughly—before contacting GPO
 - Some programs will allow the GPO to read a draft
 - Some programs may not allow phone calls or may limit the number of times you can call
 - If you do schedule a conversation, have questions ready and listen

[What to say and not say to program officers](#) (Chronicle of Higher Education)



Managing Your IMLS Award - January 2025

It's Time for a Change

If this tip does not apply to your project right now, consider saving it for future reference.

We know projects may experience a few bumps along the road to completion. Here are tips on what to do if you need to make a budget revision, request an extension to your period of performance, make a personnel change, or request approval for some other modification:

DO consult the [General Terms and Conditions for IMLS Discretionary Grant and Cooperative Agreement Awards](#) corresponding to the date of your award for guidance on changes and to find out what information to include with your request.

DO refer to [How to Submit a Change Request in eGMS Reach](#) for help in navigating eGMS Reach. If you need to establish an eGMS Reach account, email Reach-HelpDesk@imls.gov and ask them to resend your credentials.

Reviewers



Many grant opportunities are *extremely* competitive.

- Funders may assemble reviewer panels of outside (non-funder) experts, professionals in the field, members of the target audience.
- Reviewers only know what you tell them. Don't assume anything.
- Individuals on review panels have a range of expertise levels vis-à-vis issues specific to your field.
- Write your proposal for a reviewer who has never worked in an organization like yours.
- Reviewers' comments may serve as the deciding factors among MANY worthy recipients.

If your application is funded...

Be a FANTASTIC awardee!

- **Communication** is key
 - Let the GPO know about any challenges, problems, changes
 - Your success is their success! Be the grant they brag about!
 - Send pictures, stories, data regularly to GPO
- **Audits** are common and to be expected
 - Document all conversations with GPO by email
 - Keep meticulous records
 - Follow allowable expenditures rules closely
 - No-fund lists are real
- **Budget** amendments are common; keep in close touch with your GPO about changes.
 - Most funders do not want funding returned. Talk to your GPO about FULLY expending your award if needed.

If your application is not funded...

- Don't take it personally
 - No applicant gets everything applied for...too many other variables for funders!
- Talk to your program officer
 - Why was the grant denied?
 - Is it worth retooling and resubmitting?
 - Do you have comments available from the reviewers? Did the reviewers understand the proposal?
 - What can we change to improve its viability?
- Keep writing!

[Four questions to ask after a grant rejection - Professional Grant Writers](#)
(Professional Grant Writers)



Writing a grant = following a recipe

- Figure out what you want to make/what's the occasion?
- Assemble quality ingredients
- Read and reread the "recipe" before starting
- Assemble a team of experts
- Follow the steps in order
- Presentation counts
- Practice, practice, practice

Public domain photo:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/14639118@N03/27716107584>

In a nutshell

**Budget/
Timeline**

Planning

Team

Research

Idea



Most common mistakes



- Misaligned idea/stated purpose of grant
- Not following instructions
- Missing the deadline
- Not following page limits
- Typeface, margins, lines not followed
- Organized in a way other than prescribed
- Using obtuse or overly complex writing
- Not following budget instructions
- Exceeding allowable request amount
- Asking for items that are not allowed
- Incomplete application package
- Sloppy, unprofessional presentation
- Not talking to your GPO
- Read funders mission, what they want
- Read the NOFO several times, highlight!
- Submit early, watch time zones
- Read the NOFO carefully
- Use prescribed settings
- Set up your outline with headings
- Can someone who's not expert understand it?
- Involve a team of colleagues
- Carefully read NOFO info about budget
- Ensure each expense is allowed
- Ask someone to check your application
- Find that friend who can proofread
- Make a GPO appointment to review your idea/proposal

US grant sources: examples

- Most federal grant funding should be searchable on Grants.gov, “a system that provides a centralized location for grant seekers to find and apply for federal funding opportunities” <https://www.grants.gov/search-grants>
- USA.gov - <https://www.usa.gov/government-grants-and-loans> USA.gov is the official website of the U.S. government. Information is also on agency websites and other federal resources:
 - Health and Human Services - <https://www.hhs.gov/grants/grants/index.html>
 - Health Resources and Services Administration - <http://www.hrsa.gov/index.html>
 - Institute of Museum and Library Services - <https://www.imls.gov/grants/grant-programs>
 - Library of Congress - <https://www.loc.gov/>
 - National Archives - <https://www.archives.gov/grants>
 - National Endowment for the Arts - <https://www.arts.gov/grants>
 - National Endowment for the Humanities - <https://www.neh.gov/>
- Illinois State Library <https://www.ilsos.gov/departments/library/grants/home.html> and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity - <https://dceo.illinois.gov/aboutdceo/grantopportunities.html> *Or the equivalent in your state...*
- Blogs: <https://librarygrants.blogspot.com/> and <https://www.instrumentl.com/blog/how-to-find-corporate-grants>
- Foundation Directory (many libraries provide access to this) - <https://fconline.foundationcenter.org/>
- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation - <https://www.mellon.org/resources> and Kellogg Foundation - <https://www.wkcf.org/grantseekers/> *and many other private foundations, too...*
- Philanthropy News Digest - <https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/> “Philanthropy News Digest (PND), a daily news service of Candid, is a compendium, in digest form, of philanthropy-related articles and features culled from print and electronic media outlets nationwide.”
- Chronicle of Philanthropy - <https://www.philanthropy.com/>
- American Council of Learned Societies - <http://www.acls.org/>

Grant resources in brief

- Gerding, S. (2024). *Winning Grants: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians* (third ed.). American Library Association. <https://alastore.ala.org/wingrants3>
- *Grant Writing Guide*. Northwestern University. <https://www.northwestern.edu/foundationrelations/grant-writing-guide/>
- *Planning and Writing a Grant Proposal: The Basics*. (n.d.). The Writing Center University of Wisconsin – Madison. <https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/grants/>
- Karsh, E., & Fox, A. (2019). *The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need* (fifth ed.). Basic Books. [The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need: Karsh, Ellen, Fox, Arlen Sue: 9781541617810: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781541617810)
- Renfro, J. (2024). *Grant Writing: The Essentials*: University of Northern Iowa, Rod Library. <https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/grant-writing-essentials>

New
OER

Sources for Data and Statistics to Strengthen Need Statements

Institute of Museum and Library Service. “Public Library Survey.” <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey> *Public libraries nationwide annually report statistical information.*

U.S. Census Bureau. “Explore Census Data.” <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/> *Provides data on demographics to economic indicators.*

Budget resources in brief

Actual costs are always best, but if you need help estimating:

Salaries and Wages:

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2023. 25-4022 Librarians and Media Collections Specialists. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes254022.htm>

Supplies and Materials or Equipment:

- SLJ's 2023 Average Book Prices, SLJ Staff, Feb 29, 2024 <https://www.slj.com/story/slj-average-book-prices-2023-follett-baker-taylor>

Services:

- The Digital Library Federation Assessment Interest Group's working group on Cost Assessment gathered data from digitization projects nationwide and developed this tool to calculate the approximate costs for digitization. Digitization Cost Calculator: <https://dashboard.diglib.org/>

Travel: *Always follow your organization's travel policy.*

- State of Illinois Travel Guide for State Employees: <https://cms.illinois.gov/employees/travel.html>
- U.S. General Services Administration Per Diem Rates: <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>
- IRS Standard Mileage Rates: <https://www.irs.gov/tax-professionals/standard-mileage-rates>

Your questions

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