Tips on Writing a Successful Grant Application

Teachers are sometimes intimidated by idea of “writing a grant.” While most of the information provided here is specific to the Michigan Youth Arts (MYA) grants, much is also applicable to other grant applications. In the same way we teach students to read the materials carefully before beginning, that is the first and perhaps most obvious suggestion we make.

**Review the guidelines:** Be sure the trip you are considering or the supplies you want to purchase fall within the grant guidelines. Time is wasted by everyone if you write a grant for which you don’t really qualify. If you are unsure, please contact us and we can clarify. Know what you will need to complete the grant application; for example, your school tax ID number and cost estimates from your transportation provider or art supplies vendor.

**Inform your Administrator:** If you are awarded a grant you will need the signature of your principal on the contract, which states the award amount, the purpose of the grant and method of payment. Every year we have teachers who win a grant for which the principal is unwilling or unable to agree to the terms and conditions. MYA grants are reimbursement grants, which means your school must pay for the trip or supplies, submit your receipt along with your final report, and then get reimbursed. We understand that this is a cash flow problem for some schools and we work as efficiently as we can to make payments promptly. In some cases the PTA or other community organization has been willing to advance the money until reimbursement arrives.

**Read through the entire grant application:** Again, this is something teachers tell students and yet sometimes fail to do themselves. Allow time to get written estimates from vendors.

**Answer questions directly and completely without jargon:** Our grants ask you describe your school community. Please do not paste in a Wikipedia entry (that’s been done). Describe your location and give the reader a sense of who your students are and what challenges they may have:
Our school is in a rural area in the UP where the closest museum is 2 hours away. Some students have never been to a museum of any kind. We have a significant number of low income families and more than a third of students are English Language Learners (ELL). Our active PTA supports enrichment activities but the need is greater than they can handle.

Another question will ask about your educational goals. Please do not simply list state benchmarks or content standards even if you also include the text like this:

\textit{ART.VA.IV.8.2 - Articulate an understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts of artwork with aesthetic sophistication.}

Not all grant readers are educators and certainly not all can know your content area. It is better to use clear language to say what you are doing and why:

\textit{My 8\textsuperscript{th} grade art students will visit the Detroit Institute of Arts to look at American art from early Native American through the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. This parallels the time frame they study in American History and will provide visual connections to their text. We will also focus discussion on landscapes and observe how America was portrayed by artists and why.}

The bus grant asks you to describe how you will prepare for your visit. We know that the most powerful field trip experiences are not those that try and see everything in one day and hope that students will get something out of it, but rather those that focus on specific learning outcomes. Demonstrate that you --as the teacher-- know what resources the institution has available and use them, or provide an itinerary with specific tasks.

\textit{"We will read Little House on the Prairie before visiting Greenfield Village and use their online resources to prepare for our visit. A docent will meet our group at the Firestone Farm where we will see a demonstration of how families cooked in the 1800s."}
A field trip that just ends with no follow up has missed a huge opportunity. Yet often teachers simply say, “I will have the students write a report about the trip.” I’m already bored. Please come up with a more engaging task:

“Students will construct a diorama of a farm kitchen.” or

Students will work in small groups and perform a skit in which a child arrives from the 1880s and you need to explain kitchen implements like blenders and microwaves.”

Save your work: While many online applications such as ours will save your work, it is much smarter to write your draft in a separate Word document before entering text into the online application. Editing is easier in Word and you will always have a copy in case the technology fails. And yes, spelling counts. Grants are competitive and poor grammar and spelling can undermine your case.

Know the deadline and give yourself some wiggle room: Many online applications have a set end time and applications will not be accepted after that time. Also, staff is only available to answer questions or provide assistance during regular business hours; if you have a problem at 10:15 pm of the last day there will not be help available.

Attachments: Use the recommended size and format for attachments. The estimates required for both MYA grants should be in pdf, doc, or jpg formats so anyone can open them. We receive submissions with formats that cannot be opened and while we may have time to ask for better files, not all agencies will bother with that courtesy.

Ask questions: We are available and willing to answer questions regarding the grant. Don’t see the field trip destination you are interested in? Ask and perhaps they can be added. Unsure about whether a supplies purchase is eligible? Just ask.

Now write that grant.

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