



Grant Writing & Funding Development

Reasons for Rejections

By Carrie Light

Ok, so you found a grant that was a great fit for your program, you answered all the questions completely within the page limits, use statistical data to back up your needs, and remembered to sign the application. You know that your application passed the technical review (for those who don't know about technical review see my next article on the top 10 reasons why your grant may not even be read!), so why were you rejected? This is a question we get asked a lot from clients who write their own grants and unfortunately there is no easy answer. However a properly written grant application that is not funded may not be the fault of the writer. As long as grants are being written and reviewed by flawed human beings, the funding process will have some flaws as well. Some things to keep in mind if your grants are rejected:

- 1. Grants are reviewed by people!** There is no magic computer that scans your grants and spits out a score. Grants are read by other people who score the grant sections numerically (just like being in school) and the grants with the highest point values receive funding. And while your grant may have been written properly, perhaps it just didn't connect with the reviewer. For example, you're applying for a substance abuse prevention grant and your programs works with drug use among the homeless and another application deals with drinking among youth. Both grants were well written, however the reviewer has a son just starting college and is worried about binge drinking. Who is more likely to receive a higher score? Unfortunately not you! Reviewers may try to be objective as possible, but some programs will always speak to us more than others. The upside, perhaps next time your program will be the focus of the attention.
- 2. Location, location, location!** Perhaps your state is funding ten grants for work with the homeless and you've submitted a great application, but not funded. The truth is that any government grant will be considering location of its applicants. Let's say you may work in Miami, and another applicant in Orlando. Both of you have worthy programs and excellent applications. However the state has already funded two programs in Miami and has no funded programs in Orlando. Guess who gets the grant. Sadly, not you. While not always mentioned in the application, location plays an important role in funding. Federal grants will often try to spread out their funding to cover all parts of the country, even if several grant applications are located in one state.
- 3. Pay your dues!** So you're applying to a federal grant that is offered every year. Your feedback is good and your scores are high, but you weren't funded. Like most things in life, something getting a government grant simply comes down to paying your dues. With a limited amount of money, not all grants can be funded--not even all well written grants. When in doubt, it may simply come down to your history. Your first time well written application compared to a well written application from an organization that has applied the last three years is most likely not going to make the cut. Remember that DUNS number you needed for the application? That allows the government to track all the grants you have ever applied for.

Applying several years in a row also shows the government that your organization is stable and has the outside resources needed to be around for awhile, characteristics all funders look for. I have experienced this personally, and while the first rejections are frustrating getting that large government grant in year 3 makes it all worth while. Not to mention improving your grant skills!

4. **Grants should be reader friendly.** Reading and reviewing grants takes time, but some grants take longer than others and the longer a reviewer has to take to understand the grant, the lower your score will be. I am not talking about physical application length, but rather the ease at which a reviewer can understand what you are saying and locate specific answers to grant questions within your body of work. Most grant reviewers-- like you-- have a full time job, families, and community engagements and often must review many applications in a very short period of time. Each section of each grant receives not only a numeric score, but also comments from each reviewer. After the reviewer has already read 11 other proposals and can't immediately locate your mission statement, he is not going to be in a generous mood. While you can't control the schedule of your reviewer, you make sure all sections of your grant are under subheadings and spaced to make reading easier. Use the RFP to identify headings and make all of your answers specific to the questions asked

5. **We are living in God's time, not our own.** While you may want a grant tremendously, sometimes it is simply not yet God's timing for you to have a grant. That in no ways means you shouldn't bother applying. But you must also learn to take the rejections without losing your determination to succeed! As humans we are so used to the hustle and bustle of everyday that we all too often lose sight of the mission we began with. Here is a true example, several years back Jeffrey worked intensively on a federal grant that was great fit for his client. Despite the positive comments and high score he was not funded. The next year he wanted to apply again, but couldn't find anything to fix in the grant. So, he pulled out the old grant, changed all the dates, and resubmitted it word for word. That year his grant was funded! So why was the grant rejected previously? Perhaps it was simply not God's timing to receive the grant then.

Writing grants takes hard work and dedication, but it is not a short term funding strategy. As a matter of fact, you will probably receive several rejections before you are successfully funded. But remember, those rejections are part of the grant process and are often more educational than your successful grants. Whether it is improving your grant writing skills, or enhancing your relationship with God, every rejection can teach you something if you are willing to learn.