

# THE FIVE R'S OF GRANT WRITING: TIPS FOR CREATING COMPELLING APPLICATIONS



## About this article



Written By: **Samantha Lego**

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Grants are an essential funding stream for charities and nonprofit organizations, with an estimated **\$50 billion** awarded across North America each year. While funding from grants may be a lifeline, the process of grant writing may sometimes feel like you need a liferaft—especially if you don't have a dedicated grant writer on the team.

Rather than let this enormous (and stressful) task consume you, you can apply a few handy tips and tricks to maximize the effectiveness of your proposal and increase your chances of success.



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# 1. Readiness

There are many **funding opportunities available**, and each one may have similar or vastly different requirements. This criterion guides grantmakers in their decision-making and helps you determine whether your organization is both qualified and a good fit for this grant.

Before applying, make sure that you are familiar with the funder's expectations, the requirements, and what documents need to be included with the proposal.

This could include details like your organization's charitable number, history, mission statement, budget, **HR-specific** information, and project-specific information.

**Pro Tip:** Create a Grants Calendar to help you track your ongoing applications, including deadlines, actionable to-do's, funds received, and reporting requirements. Just remember, the larger the grant, the longer the review process.

# 2. Research

A crucial part of your grant writing process is researching the funder.

What are their funding priorities? Which organizations have received grants from your would-be funders in the past? What is their average grant amount? When is the grant application due?

These are all important details you need to know to help you frame the narrative in your proposal. They'll help you ask the right questions when reaching out to the grantmaker to build a relationship (Step 4).

# 3. Writing

While not technically an 'R,' writing is one of the most important components of a successful grant application. And while there is so much advice on the internet on how to compile a strong proposal, we've distilled it down into a few best practices.

## a. Your writing should be clear, concise, and compelling

Just like we have the five R's, we also have the three C's: Clear, Concise, and Compelling. A grant application should tell a story and, within that story, prove to would-be funders how the grant will be used effectively to achieve your and the funder's goals. You can do this by ensuring your proposal is:

1. **Clear:** The objective and goals of your project or program should be easy to understand and measurable.
2. **Concise:** Don't leave room for misinterpretation. Your proposal should include relevant information that directly answers the questions posed by the funder.
3. **Compelling:** Grant writing is an opportunity to share your organization's unique story. The passion that caused you to begin this journey should come through in your writing. You can start with a **compelling mission statement**

## b. Apply Data-driven Storytelling Techniques

Getting noticed in a giant stack of proposals can be challenging. So how can you set your story apart from the droves of other applicants? The secret lies in data.

While a warm story might encourage someone to donate \$50, a foundation looking to grant \$50,000 can't base their decision on their heartstrings alone. You need to **focus on your impact** and include the numbers to back them up.

Share statistics that show the success of your previous programs and campaigns, highlight your proposed outcomes and forecasts for your upcoming programs, and use real stories from your community. These stories can be helpful for this proposal, but you can also share them in your next board, annual or impact report.

## c. Review Your Program's Budget

Your nonprofit budget is a story in and of itself, even if a bunch of numbers doesn't seem like it to you. The budget is an often overlooked or under-emphasized element of a proposal, but it's one of the more critical components.

Remember: **Funders make decisions** based on your proposal. If the budget doesn't match the project outline, your application is getting rejected. They're not going to call you to clarify, and they're just going to move on to the next application. So, you need to make sure that your budget lines up with the amount you need and the impact you're looking to make.

## d. Get an External Review

While you may think your proposal is as perfect as possible, it always pays to have a second (or a third, or a fourth) set of eyes on it to ensure there are no mistakes and that your writing follows the three C's discussed above.

Invite a grant expert or nonprofit professional who isn't a part of your organization to review. While you live and breathe your mission, an external reviewer might be able to easily spot gaps in your proposal or get you to add more details to explain something you might think is common knowledge. Additionally, you can use **this FREE worksheet** to help you organize your application and write a compelling proposal.

## 4. Relationships

Most nonprofit organizations pin their success on their ability to build relationships within their communities. Engaging with potential funders is no different than stewarding prospective donors. Get to know them, invite them to get involved with your mission, and learn more about their goals and community initiatives. When reaching out to grantmakers, you should always be prepared with:

- Who you are, what you do, and *why it matters!*
- How do you think extra funds will impact your program (think **30-second elevator pitch**)
- And a few contextual questions that you couldn't find the answers to in your initial

Most importantly, thank them! Don't just take their money and run, or lose out on money and immediately fade away.

There's an [entire checklist for stewarding your funder](#) regardless of whether you got the grant or not.

## 5. Reporting

While this might be your least favourite part of the grant, it's likely your funder's favourite. They want to know their money is making a difference. Be diligent in your reporting and evaluation metrics. Show the impact it's having beyond just dutifully reporting on the numbers. This will help deepen the level of trust and rapport you have with your funder and may open the door to future opportunities.

You don't know who will review your proposal at the end of the day, so it can be challenging to personalize it. But if you follow the five R's of grant writing—readying your documentation, researching your grant, writing your proposal, building relationships with your would-be funder, and reporting impactfully—you'll pull together a strong application that will heighten your chance of success not only today but for future funding opportunities as well.

*A storyteller by nature and an organizer by inheritance, Samantha Lego enjoys crafting meaningful content equally as much as colour coding spreadsheets. As the Marketing Director at Keela, a Canadian Fundraising-Specific CRM, she is always on the hunt for new and innovative ways to educate nonprofits and help them maximize their impact.*

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