

Grant Application Tips

Diocesan and parish personnel often ask why some grant and scholarship requests get awarded, while others do not. There is no secret recipe or magic equation that guarantees a funding award. However, there are certain mistakes and shortcomings that greatly reduce the likelihood of a favorable response.

The mission of any foundation is to support initiatives that fall within its stated objectives. Foundations want to provide financial assistance, but for the purposes of integrity and accountability, they must insist upon certain criteria. Once the objective elements are established, the applicant has to pass the subjective interpretation of the reviewers. Convincing and pleasing those reviewers is the key to receiving an award. The following points are offered as suggestions for improving your future grant and scholarship applications.

1. Carefully review the grant or scholarship program's criteria. Do not expect (or ask) a foundation to support applications that are outside its stated objectives. Ensure that your total request is within the normative ranges provided by the program.
2. All applications and supporting documentation must be received by the specified due date. Do not ask for extensions. A late application—even when postmarked by the due date—almost always guarantees a negative response.
3. Type all applications. Often a word processor document can be used in place of the original form, but be sure to follow the directions.
4. Follow instructions and the format/headings specified on the application. Failure to do so makes it more difficult for the reviewers to read and compare applications.
5. Observe the stated lengths for narrative responses. Often a foundation will specify a maximum number of pages or number of words.
6. Budgets and financial figures are critical. Check, double-check, and triple-check all calculations. Figures that do not add up are seen as a lack of effort on the part of the applicant.
7. Do not leave questions unanswered or blank on the application. Use prudent estimates if necessary. Specify "not applicable" or enter a zero, unless the instructions specifically prohibit such a response.
8. Clearly identify how much money is needed and the purpose of the funds. General funding to offset the total cost is less likely to be funded. Identify a specific, tangible expense to be funded.
9. Foundations consider their grant and scholarship awards as an investment in the community or the ministry. A foundation will expect a level of investment and effort on the applicant's part before awarding funds. Never ask for 100% of the expense to be covered by the foundation. Even if the applicant can only provide a minimal amount of its own funds, this shows more responsibility than no applicant investment. Minimal amounts are relative to the amount of funding requested.
10. Have you requested or secured funding (or in-kind services) from other sources? If so, clearly disclose this information. It demonstrates effort and commitment on the part of the applicant. Do not place all eggs in a single basket.
11. Be concise and direct. Provide only the information requested. Do not provide supporting documentation unless requested by the foundation. Extraneous paper will not be considered by the reviewers.
12. Talk with the foundation's program administrator if clarification is necessary. Although these administrators are not normally part of the decision making process, they are important gatekeepers. The administrator can influence how the reviewers receive the application.