

Keys To Successful Private Foundation Grant Proposals

Most young researchers and postdocs look to the federal government when searching for fellowships and funds. While federal grants are a main source of financial aid, they remain the most competitive of almost all funding systems. Private agencies however, offer an alternative to such opportunities. It's still a competitive market but learning how to address the concerns of private funders may improve your chances when applying for foundation grants.

Foundations can take a long-term view of grants and therefore are more willing to take some risks. Even though foundations often require a letter of inquiry (LOI) that summarizes the would-be application, grant-writing mistakes *still* crop up in these propositions.

1. Be Realistic

Make sure that your research topic is relevant to what the funder wants to support. If you have a basic science project, don't apply to the foundation that supports only the humanities. Thoroughly read about an organization of interest, gain an understanding of the funder's personality. Contact OCFR—we are happy to help!

2. Follow Instructions

Please use the format that is requested. Applications that do not comply to the instructions, typed in condensed font size and cramped layout, are often rejected. Flouting the instructions is a waste. Tailor your proposal to the funder—there is no recovery from sending a proposal with another organization's name in it.

3. Engage Key Officials

Invest some time getting to know key personnel. Connect at conferences, professional meetings and other venues. Work with OCFR and your Development Officer if you plan to be in a major metropolitan area.

4. Do your homework

Big foundations behave differently than small foundations. Young agencies differ to older, more established agencies. And there are funding differences between corporate institutions and private organizations

5. You are a unicorn because....

Be succinct. Explain how your approach is different to other similar projects out there.

6. Form Collaborations

"Collaborate!" Letters from potential collaborators or fellow scientists stating their willingness to share equipment, expertise, or resources can be very beneficial to an application.

7. Fulfill All Awardee Obligations

Your investors are quite interested to know how your research is progressing. Provide progress reports as requested. Skipping this step is not a good way to impress the program officer--so make the reports.

Additional communication opportunities: Check in with your program officer, submit to them recent publications of research generated from their funds, national conference presentation or even special events within your department. Invite them to the event.

8. Keep Trying

Sometimes excellent proposals are rejected or turned down because of factors outside of the quality of the grantsmanship or science. Sometimes the project does not fall into the scope of foundation's mission or perhaps the institution has already funded many other similar projects and now wants to diversify their interests. Your science might be great and well presented, but your timing just may have missed the mark.