

# Evaluating a Grant Opportunity

## Top 10 Questions to Ask

### Before Working on a Grant Application

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There are a lot of questions that people ask me about their grant applications. There are some questions however, that should be asked prior to working on an application and most of the time, they are an afterthought.

Success in grant writing depends on three factors:

- Strong Programs
- Good Relationships
- Compelling Proposals

To determine if your application is competitive, it is helpful to consider the following questions and how much of an impact they might have on your 'fit' to the foundation's priorities depending on the answers.

1. When are funding decisions made? If decisions are made after you need the money, should you even bother applying?
2. If you are blessed enough to be awarded a grant, when can you expect the dollars in-hand? Will the dollars come in time for the project and if not, do they have another cycle that will be during the timeframe of the project?
3. What is a realistic ask based on your organization, your need, your project and the foundation's current priorities? This usually requires a conversation with foundation staff. Don't assume you should ask for the top end of their range just because they have a range listed. This is a mistake I see with folks all the time.
4. If matching funds are a requirement, can the match be in-kind or does it have to be dollar-for-dollar? Be sure to get Letters of Support, Memorandums of Understanding/Agreement as necessary to prove these matches as required.
5. You might be a perfect fit 'on-paper' for what a foundation wants to fund, but do you have to have a history of success for a certain period of time (typically 3-5 years minimum) before they will consider an application from you?
6. Do you have to have a formal/official audit for the foundation to consider funding your organization or will a compilation report suffice? Keep in mind that a 990 is NOT an official audit.

7. If you start a project before dollars are in-hand, can you ‘repay’ yourself once grant dollars are received? Or, can you only use dollars on expenses that occur after grant funds have been received?
8. Are there more dollars given out during a particular cycle? If so, should we wait until that cycle to have the best chance of an award?
9. What are the policies of the foundation for amending budgets during a grant cycle?
10. Based on an analysis of your program, project or organization’s current Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities or Threats, does this grant proposal:
  1. Will your proposal solve or address any of the weaknesses or threats facing your program, project or organization?
  2. Will your proposal bring to fruition any of the opportunities listed?
  3. Will your proposal give your organization a competitive advantage or build upon its existing strengths?

If you cannot answer yes to answer any of the items listed in a-c above, the next question you need to ask yourself is, ‘Why are we writing this grant?’

There are many more questions that may need to be addressed prior to working on a grant application. I encourage you to ALWAYS have a conversation with the foundation prior to working on any application (unless they expressly say not to contact them) because ***building relationships is the most important part of all fundraising.***

I hope these questions will help you as you work on securing grant funding for your programs, projects, and organization in the coming months!