

How to Read and Understand Grant Rejection Letters to Give a Competitive Advantage to your Grant Writing

In the grant world rejection is an unfortunate, but expected fact of life. No grant writer, no matter how experienced or well educated gets every grant for which they apply. For beginning grant writers, the first few rejection letters can easily persuade you to forget the whole process entirely. While I'm not sure getting a rejection letter can ever feel good, understanding the grant process and how to read a rejection can at least take the sting out of the letter.

Don't Take It Personally

This is probably the hardest and most important lesson to learn. Grant writing takes hard work, lots of time, and an incredible amount of focus. When you have so thoroughly invested yourself in this process, a rejection letter seems aimed at you directly. But, that is not the case. Grants can be rejected for any number of reasons, some of which could be considered frivolous or petty. But rarely do these reasons have to deal with you personally. Make a post it note and stick on your wall if you have too, but remember grant rejection is not personal, it's just part of the business.

Request Feedback

While your first thought may be to pull the covers over your head or burn the RFP (those of you who have received rejections from federal grants understand!), instead try to learn as much as you can from the experience. If you have not already done so, request feedback from the funding source and learn what the reviewers thought of the grant. Did you miss funding by only one point, were they confused by your budget, or did geographic considerations effect the outcome? Finding out what you did well and what was difficult for reviewers will help you to put together a stronger application next time. You will also feel better because even though you did not receive funding, you will know that your time was not wasted because you gained valuable constructive feedback. For private funding sources, feedback may not be as readily available. In such cases, reading the rejection letter is even more critical.

Read the Rejection Letter. Again!

Most grant writers I know, particularly newer grant writers, have a bad habit of not really reading their rejection letters. They get to the point "Unfortunately, not all applicants can be funded and we regret to inform you..." And they just skim the rest or stop reading altogether. This is a huge mistake; not all rejection letters are created equal. What else does the funding source say? Look for details. Do they say you don't match their interests? Then perhaps your organization is simply not a good fit for funding. Do they say you didn't submit all the needed paperwork? Find out what was missing and re-apply. Do they say they don't accept unsolicited proposals? Then work at developing a relationship with them. Do they say that your project was worthy but that funds have already been allocated for this year? Then find out when you can apply for next year and do so! If the funding source tells you to re-apply always do so, there is a reason they say that. Most rejection letters have

valuable information in them, but you must read them to find out!