

POWER^{UP} YOUR PANTRY

GRANT WRITING



Grant-funded refrigerators in Boonville, MO

Grant Writing is part three in a series of three guide sheets that discuss options for raising funds for your food pantry. The others include **Raising Money from Individuals** and **Fundraising Options**.



This series is intended for food pantries and other hunger relief groups looking for ways to enhance their current operations and better meet the needs people who use their services.

The information provided is based on survey and other research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security at the University of Missouri.

Parts of the guide were adapted from chapter 11, *Funding the Way*, in *Step Up to Leadership*, University of Missouri Extension, M172 (extension.missouri.edu/p/M172)

Food pantries seek-out and apply for grants for many reasons.

Some are looking for ways to update or improve their facility – think new paint on the walls in the waiting areas and offices, better freezers and refrigerators, or sturdy shelving. Others may look for grants to enhance educational programs – to install a kitchen for cooking demonstrations, create classroom space, or give community gardening a try.

There are many different types of grants to consider. Some are issued by local foundations, religious organizations or other entities. These are normally meant to serve agencies in a certain community or region of a state, or groups affiliated with a particular religious denomination. Corporations often have charitable foundations that make grants available wherever they do business. Others are offered by local or state governments, or in some cases, the federal government.

Below are examples of actual grants received by Missouri food pantries:

- Missouri Department of Economic Development Neighborhood Assistance Program grant to renovate and expand the food pantry in Shelbina
- USDA grant to construct a high-tunnel for a food pantry community garden in Mexico



Grant-funded high tunnel in Mexico, MO

Missouri food pantry grants received, continued...

- Cargill Cares (employee-led charitable group of the Cargill corporation) grant to construct a new food pantry in California
- First Presbyterian Church grant to purchase kitchen equipment for the food pantry in Mexico
- Missouri Department of Agriculture Urban and Non-traditional Agriculture grant to expand the food pantry community garden in St. James



Tips for Grant Writing

Successful grant writers will tell you that grant writing is like gardening, riding a bike, and learning to drive – it is best learned by doing.

1. **Set clear goals.** What do you want to accomplish? How do you want to accomplish it? Prior to searching for grants, be clear about what you want to do. Once your goals are clear, you can then begin looking for funding opportunities. Need help with developing goals? Use the SMART goal setting process:
 - a. **Specific** – develop goals that are clear and understandable
 - b. **Measurable** – develop goals that can be evaluated for progress and completion
 - c. **Action-oriented** – create an action plan with key steps and partners
 - d. **Realistic** – develop goals that are practical and achievable
 - e. **Time management** – create a timeline for reaching your goal
2. **Find the right grant.** There are thousands of grants in the world ranging from government grants to national foundations to smaller, local trusts. It will be key to find the grant opportunity that best matches your goals and is a good fit for your organization. Your likelihood of being successful depends on meeting the grant maker's interests. Be careful about changing, contorting, or misrepresenting your goals to match a grant, though making minor changes to your goals to address the specific purpose of a grant is acceptable.

3. Start early. Often people think a proposal won't take long, but the shortest ones are usually the most difficult. State your case clearly and succinctly in a way that makes it stand out amid hundreds of others.

4. Get organized. Generally, any funder willing to give you money will ask for copies of these documents:

- Proof of non-profit status
- A financial review performed by a certified public accountant
- List of staff and board members
- Current and previous year's budget for your organization.

These documents help grant makers ensure the soundness and stability of the organizations they fund.

5. Follow directions and answer the questions carefully. Most grant applications will have different guidelines related to formatting, deadlines, budgets, attachments, and how they are scored. Read, reread, and follow the directions carefully. Minor mistakes can often disqualify an application. In addition, most grant applications will ask very specific questions in an effort to find the best match based on the grant maker's goals. Read the questions carefully and provide clear, concise, and consistent responses. Grant writing is not a creative writing exercise.

6. Do research and ask questions. Get to know the grant maker through the internet or by reaching out to a program officer. If something is not clear in the application, ask questions early in the process to save time and effort. If the grant has been offered before, find out how many groups applied and how many were awarded grants. In some cases, you will also be able to find information about previously funded projects to get a better idea of what the grant maker is looking for.

7. Learn by doing. Successful grant writers will tell you that grant writing is like gardening, riding a bike, and learning to drive – it is best learned by doing.

Funders give grants to local groups because they trust you to know what is best for your community. However, they will have reporting requirements to ensure that money is being spent as intended and to document and share your successes with other communities. Be prepared to account for the money you spend by keeping receipts and documenting reasons for expenditures. Track progress towards reaching the goals identified in the application along the way (as opposed to right before a grant report is due) and keep records of meetings, meeting attendance, program participants, evaluations, and other pertinent information.

If you don't receive a grant on any given attempt, ask for feedback about why the grant was not approved. Some grants are very competitive and only award a small number of grants based on the total number of applications. Also, treat each grant application as a learning process. Your grant writing will improve over time.

Tips before you submit!

- **Read the guidelines** all the way through initially and then reread them during your writing and after you're done with your final draft.
- **Look at your proposal through the eyes of your funder.** How does it connect to their interests? It's easy to get so deep into your interests/problems that you forget the real reason for the need.
- **Get an objective reviewer.** Have someone who is not familiar with your project read through it and then tell you what they think it's about. It's easy to make assumptions of knowledge on the part of the reader because we are so familiar with our own backstory. If your objective reviewer is a good proofreader, all the better. It is nearly impossible to catch every mistake when you proof your own work.

After the Award

Funders give grants to local groups because they trust you to know what is best for your community. However, they will have reporting requirements to ensure that money is being spent as intended and to document and share your successes with other communities. Be prepared to account for the money you spend by keeping receipts and documenting reasons for expenditures. Track progress towards reaching the goals identified in the application along the way (as opposed to right before a grant report is due) and keep records of meetings, meeting attendance, program participants, evaluations, and other pertinent information.

Resources for Grant writing and Finding Grants

Civic and faith-based organizations often make grants available. Likewise, **businesses, banks, and corporations** often have charitable wings. Check with individual groups or businesses that are active in your area.

Fundsnet Services (<http://www.fundsnetervices.com/>) provides a relatively straightforward way to search for grants in several different topic areas.

Regional Community Foundations exist in most regions and counties of the state. They often make grants available to local, community-based organizations such as food pantries.

GrantSpace (<http://grantspace.org>) provides a variety of free, on-line grant writing training. Registration is free.

Check with your **local public library** to see if they help with finding grants. Many of them subscribe to an on-line directory of foundations and other grant makers.



For more information:
foodsecurity.missouri.edu