

Top 10 Grant Writing Best Practices

NM Grant Writers • Field-Tested Rules & Quick Examples

How to Use These Best Practices

Adhering to proven best practices elevates your proposals above average submissions. Integrate these 10 rules into your drafting routine to maximize reviewer scoring.

The Top 10 Best Practices

01 Read RFP 3 Times

The Strategy: Read the Request for Proposals (RFP) three distinct times: first for eligibility and general scope, second to annotate specific narrative prompts and evaluation criteria, and third to create a detailed compliance checklist.

Quick Example: On your second read, highlight keywords like "evidence-based intervention" or "rural youth focus" so you can mirror those exact phrases in your project summary.

02 Align to Funder Priorities

The Strategy: Frame your program so it directly serves the funder expressed goals rather than asking the funder to adapt to your organization preferences.

Quick Example: If a foundation prioritizes "workforce readiness for underserved youth," emphasize your vocational mentoring track over general social activities.

03 Use Data and Citations

The Strategy: Validate every statement of need with current local data, state statistics, or peer-reviewed research citations.

Quick Example: Instead of saying "food insecurity is high," write: "According to the 2024 New Mexico Food Bank Report, 22.4% of households in McKinley County experience severe food insecurity."

04 Write Active Voice

The Strategy: Use clear active voice sentences where the subject performs the action. Active voice builds confidence and momentum.

Quick Example: Replace "Workshops will be facilitated by our team" with "Our bilingual health educators will lead 12 community nutrition workshops."

05 Keep It Simple

The Strategy: Avoid dense academic jargon and overly complex sentence structures. Reviewers appreciate concise, easily digestible prose.

Quick Example: Instead of writing "utilize a multi-faceted paradigm of synergistic interventions," write "combine tutoring, nutrition, and family counseling."

06 Get Peer Review

The Strategy: Have a colleague or external partner who did not write the proposal review your draft against the RFP rubric prior to submission.

Quick Example: Ask your peer reviewer to grade your draft using the funder actual scoring sheet to spot missing answers or unclear logic.

07 Follow Formatting Exactly

The Strategy: Obey all font, margin, line spacing, page limit, and file naming conventions without exception.

Quick Example: If the RFP specifies "Calibri 11pt, 1-inch margins, PDF format," ensure your exported file matches those settings exactly before uploading.

08 Start Early

The Strategy: Begin gathering attachments, partner support letters, and budget quotes at least 3 to 4 weeks before the deadline.

Quick Example: Request partner letters of commitment on Day 1 so third-party delays do not jeopardize your final submission.

09 Tailor Every Application

The Strategy: Never submit a generic proposal. Customize the executive summary, organization background, and budget narrative for every single funder.

Quick Example: Highlight your STEM achievements for a technology grantmaker, and highlight your social-emotional outcomes for a family foundation.

10 Proofread

The Strategy: Conduct a final line-by-line proofread on a printed hard copy or PDF viewer to catch lingering typos, budget alignment discrepancies, or formatting glitches.

Quick Example: Read narrative numbers aloud alongside your budget spreadsheet line items to verify 100% agreement.

Ready to Put These Best Practices to Work?

Gain instant access to our complete starter toolkit featuring pre-built section templates, budget calculators, and grant tracking systems.

Grant Writer Jumpstarter (\$27)

Includes fill-in-the-blank narrative outlines, grant calendar spreadsheets, budget narrative calculators, and real winning grant excerpts.

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