



# Grant-writing Made Easier

Tips on how to get to know a funder and describe your organization



# About this resource

**A great application for a grant starts by understanding the relationship between a funder and the grant recipient. This guide focuses on that relationship.**

No two grants are the same! This guide is meant to prepare you to apply for a grant opportunity. But, this resource does not deal with any one specific grant application. It is meant to help you describe your organization and programs so that you are prepared to apply to many types of grants.

Though each grant application may have different requirements, all require an organization to understand who it is, what it does, and how it wants to make a difference.



## You should use this resource if...

- Your organization is a non-profit serving your community
- Your organization has a small staff or no staff dedicated to writing grants
- You have limited or no experience writing grants
- Your organization wants to start or continue obesity prevention or healthy lifestyle programming in your community



# Words used in this guide

**Funder:** The funder is the one who gives the grant. The funder might be an individual, the government, a corporation, or a foundation.

**Grant recipient:** The grant recipient is the non-profit organization that receives money from a grant. This means the organization has applied for the grant, has been accepted, and has received money from the funder.

**Mission:** A mission is written as a short 1-2 sentence statement describing what your organization wants to accomplish. It explains why your organization exists. It talks about the big problem your organization wants to solve. The mission statement does *not* need to explain how your organization will accomplish things. The mission statement is *not* a history of your organization. The mission statement talks generally about how your organization would like to improve a certain part of the community.



*Think about the last letter or e-mail you wrote to a good friend. The stories you told, questions you asked, and words you used were written with that person in mind. You probably would not have sent that same letter to another person. In the same way, you want to get to know the funder offering the grant so that you can write your application especially for that funder. You want the information you give and the words you use to be written with that funder in mind.*

This guide will help you learn about the relationship between the funder and the grant recipient so that you can write a grant application with the funder in mind. Understanding the funder and the relationship will help your organization look for the right kinds of grants and write a great application.



# Guide Table of Contents

## Sections:

1. An introduction to grants
2. Get to know the role of a funder
3. Focus on funders that are a good fit
4. Describe your organization to the funder
5. A review of important writing techniques
6. Additional resources



# Section 1

## An introduction to grants

- What a grant is not
- What a grant is
- What a grant might be



## A grant is *not*...

- ...just a gift of money
- ...a reward for doing “good work” in general
- ...an excuse to “branch out” and do an activity that has nothing to do with your mission



## A grant *is*...

- ...a **partnership** between a passionate funder and a successful non-profit organization
- ...an **agreement** where the non-profit organization completes a project in exchange for funding
- ...a way for your organization to do new things that **directly help accomplish your mission**



## A grant *might* be...

- ...small, medium, or large in size
- ...for a short one-time project or for a longer period of time
- ...for one organization to use on its own, or for several organizations to use while working together
- ...for general funding or funding for a specific purpose



## Section 2

Get to know the role of a funder

- A funder chooses a mission
- A funder sets goals
- A funder offers grant opportunities
- A funder reviews grant applications
- A funder gives grant money to organizations



## A funder chooses a mission

A funder has a passion and wants to make a difference. They also have money to invest in making a difference. The funder chooses a mission that matches their passion, and invests their money in a way that will help them accomplish their mission.

*Example:*

Family Fund\* is a family foundation dedicated to promoting healthy lifestyles throughout Chicago. The family was successful in their line of work and they want to give back to the community. They are very concerned about the problem of childhood obesity. They are passionate about doing something to help. They have money that they can give to help the community, but they do not have the experience or staff to do programs on their own. Instead, they started a foundation so that they could give money to programs that were already doing great work to help promote healthy lifestyles.

Family Fund's mission statement: Family Fund is dedicated to preventing childhood obesity by creating healthy neighborhoods in Chicago.

\*Family Fund is not a real foundation and was created as an example for use in this guide.



## A funder sets goals

A funder has a mission statement to define who they want to help and what they want to accomplish. Next, they set goals for how they will accomplish their mission.

*Example:*

Family Fund wants to help Chicago residents and wants to prevent the spread of the childhood obesity epidemic. The Fund's mission statement says in a general way what it wants to accomplish. Next, it set goals as a way to work on its mission. The Fund finds out who needs the most help and what areas of the city are most at risk for childhood obesity. The Fund does some research and sees that there are some really great ways to encourage healthy neighborhoods. As a result of the research, the Fund decides its goals are to help put in more playgrounds, see more fresh fruit and vegetables in local stores, and improve the condition and safety of parks so that residents can be active outside. The goals help the Fund focus on concrete things they can do to work toward making their mission a success.



## A funder offers grant opportunities

Once a funder has goals, they need to make their goals happen. Unless they decide to run their own programs and hire staff for projects, they will invite other organizations to do the activities in exchange for funding. The invitation is the grant opportunity that they make public.

*Example:*

Family Fund has set its goals and wants to see more playgrounds, safe parks, and fresh food in Chicago's neighborhoods. To make this happen, the Fund posts a grant opportunity on its website. The Fund offers 10 grants for \$10,000 each to organizations in the city of Chicago that are working to encourage healthy neighborhoods. The Fund will give money to organizations that show they can successfully improve playgrounds and parks or make fresh produce available.



# A funder reviews grant applications

Getting a grant is a competitive process. A funder can receive applications from thousands of organizations for each grant. It is their job to read through the applications and decide which organizations will actually get the money.

They will *only consider applications* that: help the funder accomplish its mission, pay attention to the criteria in their grant posting, and follow the directions for filling out the application.

An organization should NOT apply if they do not meet the requirements – it is a waste of time for the funder and for the organization.

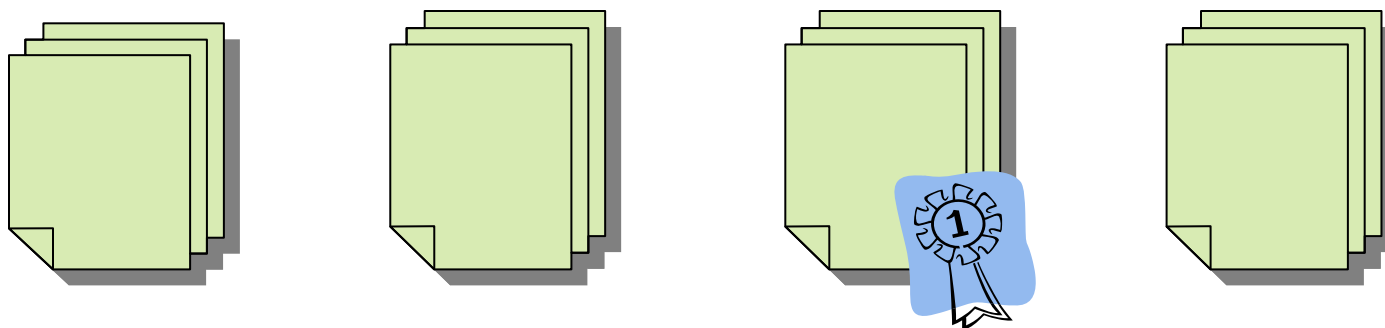
*Example:*

Family Fund received 1000 grant applications. It quickly eliminated applications from organizations that did not meet the criteria listed on the application and the Family Fund website. Next, the Fund read the rest of the applications. The best applications were ones from organizations that had applications without errors, provided clear descriptions of their activities, had a strong staff, showed experience in their community, and had good plans for using the money.

# A funder gives grant money to organizations

The funder picks the applications that best meet the grant criteria and decides to give the grant money to those organizations. Sometimes the number of strong applications is greater than the amount of money available. In those cases, the funder must prioritize.

The grant recipients then use the grant money to do something that helps **both** the funder **and** the organization work toward accomplishing their missions. The grant is the agreement that brings the funder and the grant recipient together to form a partnership for a common cause.





## Section 3

Focus on funders that are a good fit

- Start with a list of possible funders
- Understand what it looks like when your organization is a good fit with the funder
- Understand how the funder thinks
- Learn important details about the funder



# Where do you look for funders?

Start with these suggestions to make a list of possible funders

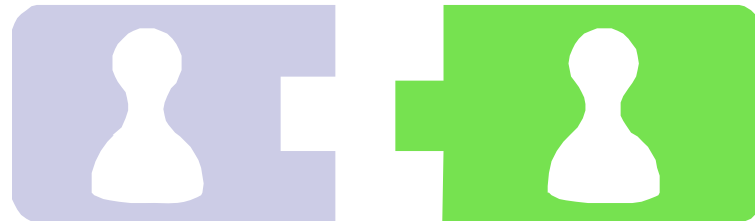
- Sign up to receive the weekly CLOCC newsletter on the CLOCC website at <http://www.clocc.net>
- Look on the CLOCC website for news and upcoming events
- Use the databases at the Donor's Forum library to do a search specifically for funders with missions that fit well with yours – information is available at <http://www.donorsforum.org>
- Use the additional resources listed in this guide on Pages 41-44
- Stay active in groups for non-profits in your community, and receive any e-mails they offer
- Join organizations that hold programs for your field of interest or for your profession (for instance, a dietetic association if you have a dietician on staff).



# Narrow your list of funders

It takes time to write a great grant application. It is better to do a great job on a few applications than to do just an “OK” job on a lot of applications.

Instead of applying for grants from a lot of funders, narrow your list to just a few, focusing on the funders that are a good fit. When your organization is a good fit with a funder, you have a much better chance of successfully getting a grant. Use your time wisely – do not apply for a grant from a funder that is not a good match for your organization.



## A funder is a good fit for your organization when:

- You are both working on solving the same problems
- You have similar mission statements and goals
- Your organization can help the funder accomplish its goals
- You both support work in the same geographic area
- The funder has given money to organizations similar to yours in the past
- Your programs and activities are similar to programs and activities the funder has given money to in the past

*There are thousands of non-profits doing outstanding work for their communities across the country. The passion and commitment of each organization is exciting and important. However, a funder does not give money to non-profits just because they are doing good work! The funder gives money to non-profits who do good work AND who work on a cause the funder cares about.*

*When you care about the same things in the same places, and you and the funder have similar ideas of how to get things done, you have a good fit.*




Understanding how a funder thinks will help you know whether or not they are a good fit for your organization

Answer these questions to understand how the funder thinks:



- Who does the funder want to help?
- Does the funder have one focus or several?
- What does the funder want to change in the community?
- Does the funder have certain geographic priorities? Do they give money to organizations throughout the country? Do they only give money in Chicago? Do they only give money if your organization works in a specific neighborhood?
- When does the funder accept applications for grants? Is there one specific deadline, or a “rolling deadline” where they review applications at many times throughout the year? When do they expect you to hold your program?
- Who does the funder NOT give money to? Are there any kinds of organizations who will not be considered for funding?
- What does the funder want to see in the grant application?



Learning important details about the funder will help you get to know the funder and understand whether or not your organization and the funder are a good fit. In order to do this, you must do research!

## In order to learn important details about the funder:

- Read the grant application requirements
- Read the funder's website
- Call or email and ask the funder questions to clarify information, if needed
- Many funders appreciate the personal touch, but some do not. Try to call or email, but do not push if they do not respond.

# Read the grant application requirements



The **grant application requirements** will have a lot of information. You should read the application carefully and more than once before taking action!

The grant application is a good place to start when getting to know what a funder wants to do and who they want to fund.

**Read the application carefully.** Make note of the application deadline. Pay attention to program timeline requirements, types of programs they will fund, and how much money they will give. Look to see if they require your organization to partner with other organizations.

# Read the funder's website



Look on the funder's **website**. Though some small foundations may not have a website, most funders do. Get as much information as possible. You will probably have to look on many pages within the website. However, this will help you learn important details about the funder.

Look on the website to find:

- Mission statement
- Giving priorities
- Geographic focus
- Who they gave money to in the past
- Annual report



## Ask questions to clarify information

- You want to make sure you understand all the information available to you.
- If you have read the grant application, looked on the funder's website, and still have questions or think something is confusing, call the contact listed on the grant application to clarify.

**However**, make sure you observe the instructions listed on the application. If they specifically tell you to use e-mail or phone, follow those instructions.





*You are on your way to writing a **great** grant application if you do research about the funder, understand if your mission is a good fit with the funder's mission, and follow the grant application instructions carefully.*



## Section 4

Describe your organization to the funder

- What a funder wants to know about your organization
- Describing what your organization wants to accomplish
- Talking about what you do as an organization
- How you know when your organization is successful
- Creating a tool box to be prepared to apply for a grant



# What a funder wants to know about your organization

Now that you have done your research and know that your organization and the funder are a good fit, it's time to show that your organization is the right one to help the funder accomplish its mission.

The **grant application** is the way you tell the funder about your organization. This is the only chance you have to explain who your organization is, what it does, and why you want the funder's support. Using the grant application to:

- Tell the funder that your organization is a good fit
- Explain why your organization should get the grant
- Describe your organization's programs and activities
- Present the ways you will show the funder that their investment was worthwhile

Describing your organization to the funder is the first and most important step.

- No two grant applications are the same, but they often ask for the same kinds of descriptions.

Here are examples of the kind of descriptions a funder wants to know.



What does your organization want to accomplish? Describe the improvement your organization wants to make in your community, the population you serve, and the vision you have for the future.

<b>If they ask for...</b>	<b>This means...</b>
Mission (or Mission Statement)	This is the long-term overall goal and vision of the organization. The mission statement is brief. It defines who your organization is and what it wants to accomplish. It gives a general direction, but does not detail specifics.
History	The history provides a few basic facts about the organization. When was the organization founded? Where was it started? How many people has the organization helped?
Goals	Goals are the specific things the organization wants to accomplish. If your mission says your organization wants to encourage healthy lifestyles in the neighborhood, one goal might be to find a space for a year-round farmer's market in the neighborhood. Goals are specific ideas that support your mission.
Objectives	Objectives detail the numbers or qualities your organization wants to achieve while working on its goals. Objectives can be measured, and can help your organization see if it is making progress. They can talk about qualities such as: when you plan to hold an event, how many people you want to recruit to attend, or if you plan to develop a new curriculum. Objectives let a funder know that your organization is serious about achieving its goals and that there is a plan for doing so.



What do you do as an organization? A funder wants to know about the specific needs in your community, how you plan to accomplish your mission and goals, and what your organization does in order accomplish its goals.

<b>If they ask for...</b>	<b>This means...</b>
Programs/activities	These are the things your organization does with the population it wants to serve. These may be events, trainings, or meetings. An organization often uses grant money for a program or activity.
Identified needs the program will address	Here, your organization describes specifically why its community, client, or participant needs a certain program. For instance, childhood obesity is a challenge across the country, but your community may have extra challenges. Discuss these challenges and provide any information you have to prove that these challenges exist and that your organization's program will help. Statistics for census, health data , etc. can be very useful.
Collaborations	Funders like to know that your organization has good working relationships with other organizations in the community. Here is a chance to discuss the partnerships your organization has for various programs and causes. Here you will provide the names of the programs you work with and how you work together.
Sustainability	A funder does not like to give money to a program that they think will end as soon as the grant money has been spent. Here, you need to talk about how your organization plans to continue to offer the program after the grant time is over. If asked, you may also discuss what additional money your organization has to support the program (if any).



## How will your organization know if it is successful?

<b>If they ask for...</b>	<b>This means...</b>
How will your organization measure effectiveness	Your organization should have a way to determine whether or not it is doing what it said it would do in the grant application. You might do this by taking attendance, giving a set of surveys, or measuring activity levels before and after an intervention. How your organization measures success will depend on what your organization is doing.
Criteria for success	Perhaps your organization is planning a fitness session at a school. Putting up signs and hiring a fitness instructor is only useful if people come to the event. If nobody shows up, the event is probably not successful. How you determine what is successful will depend on the audience, the community, the activity, and many other factors. Here you must explain what has to happen for your organization to feel successful in reaching its goals and objectives.
Expected results	What do you think will happen as a result of your organization's program? Do you think people will start buying more fruits and vegetables? Do you expect parents to start exercising more? Explain what your organization expects to see and why.

# Have a tool box of descriptions ready before you find an interesting grant

Now that you have an idea of what a funder wants to know about your organization, take the time to write descriptions so they are ready to go when you find a grant to which you want to apply. The charts on pages 29-31 are a good list of the kinds of descriptions you will often need for a grant application. Start a document called your “grant tool box.” Write sentences or brief paragraphs for each of the descriptions and save them in your tool box. When you find a grant to apply to, you can pull sentences out of the tool box and update them in order to write the grant. That way you won’t have to start from scratch each time.

You will want to have descriptions for at least the following:

- Mission statement
- A sentence for each goal
- Brief paragraphs to describe each program or activity you have
- Organization history
- Description and experience of current staff members
- Summary of information on the needs in your community, including any current statistics, research, or reports
- Summary of any recognition or press coverage you have received
- List of partners you work with and how you work together



Have descriptive tool box statements on your organization and your programs ready **before** you search for grants – this way you will be ready when you find a grant opportunity that is a good fit for what you do.



## Section 5

A review of important writing techniques

- Proofreading
- Spell check
- Formatting
- Getting to the point
- Reading the application with “fresh eyes”

# Don't skip the proofreading step!

You know how it feels to be distracted. Maybe you hear a funny noise in the background or see something out of the corner of your eye. Distractions can be irritating. Distractions take your attention away from what is most important.

When a funder reads a grant application poor spelling, poor grammar, bad formatting, and sloppy writing are all distractions. Even if you have a very important mission and do great work, the funder might miss important information in the application if they are distracted by those things!

You want the funder to read your application from start to finish and appreciate what you want to accomplish. In order to keep them focused, get rid of the distractions!!

**Even if you are short on time before the deadline, proofread for mistakes.** It is a simple step that makes a big difference!



# Do not rely on spell check to catch all spelling errors



Spell check is a wonderful tool and you should use it.

However, spell check does not catch everything! Spell check does not know what a word means, only whether or not it is spelled correctly. For example, the words “there,” “their,” and “they’re” all have different meanings. Even if the word is spelled correctly, it might not make sense in the sentence. To check for meaning and use of the correct word, you have to read the application for errors.

Some grant applications require you to fill out a form online. Online forms do not usually have spell check. For online forms:

- Use another program like Microsoft Word to write the text first.
- Use spell check, read for errors, and correct errors in Microsoft Word
- Copy and paste the text from Microsoft Word into the online form



# Follow the formatting guidelines

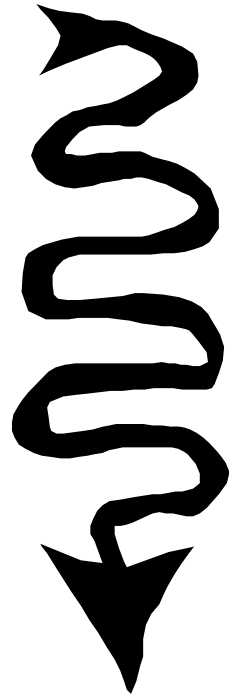
Poor formatting can be distracting to the person reviewing a grant application. If your organization's application does not follow the guidelines listed in the grant application, the funder may not think your organization is good at paying attention to details. If they see that you do not pay attention to grant guidelines, they might wonder if you are also careless with other details. This might lead them believe that your organization is a not good candidate for the grant.

Check to see if the funder asks for the following:

- Page, section, or word limits – do not write longer descriptions than what is allowed
- Specific fonts, such as Times New Roman, Arial, etc.
- An electronic copy by e-mail or a hard copy sent by mail, or both
- Specific attachments



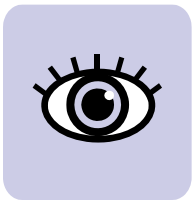
## Get to the point



Do not use more words than you need to make your point. Answer questions directly and stay focused. You do not want to repeat the same information in multiple parts of the application. Your mission, history, and program descriptions should not be the same.



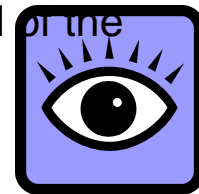
# Ask someone to look at the grant with “fresh eyes”



Sometimes it's such a relief to finish writing an application that you just don't want to look at it anymore. Or, you have looked at it so many times that you feel it must be ready. However, it's not really ready until you have somebody else read it.

**Having another person who is not involved in preparing the application read it to see if it makes sense provides a set of “fresh eyes” to look at what you wrote.**

“Fresh eyes” may catch a spelling error you missed, be able to suggest a better word, or ask for clarification. Don't take the suggestions personally! It can be difficult to let other people read your writing. However, you want the grant application to clearly and accurately describe your organization and your plans. If there is something that is hard to understand, it's better to have a colleague catch it instead of the funder!





# What if I still don't get the grant?

It is possible that even if you find a funder that is a good fit and you do a great job describing your organization, you still might not get the grant. Not to worry! This gives you a great opportunity to learn from the experience so you can apply again.

If you do not get the grant:

- Call the funder and ask if they will give you feedback – they may be able to help you improve your application for next time
- Apply again – you may have applied during a time when the funder had a lot of excellent applications, making it impossible to fund them all



# Section 6

## Additional Resources

- Resources for information on many parts of the grant application process



### **Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC)**

CLOCC is a nationally recognized consortium that brings together hundreds of organizations and individuals to confront childhood obesity in Chicago. The CLOCC website has a wealth of resources, including materials for the *5-4-3-2-1 Go!* message, childhood obesity research, healthy lifestyle information, and a search for other local programs. You can also sign up to receive CLOCC's weekly e-mail, which lists grant opportunities and links to recent news articles on childhood obesity and healthy lifestyles. To explore the CLOCC website, visit:

<http://www.clocc.net>

### **Donor's Forum**

The Donor's Forum is a resource for networking, education, and information for philanthropy in Illinois. The Donor's Forum has a library in downtown Chicago; 5 suburban philanthropy centers in Glen Ellyn, Schaumburg, Grayslake, Quincy, Effingham, and Joliet; free access to resources on-site at the downtown library and philanthropy centers; and in-person workshops (fee-based). Non-members can use the library for free, and can access databases such as *Illinois Funding Source* and the *Foundation Directory Online* from their library or any of the philanthropy center locations.

<http://www.donorsforum.org/index.html>

The Donor's Forum also has an online Grantseekers Toolbox that covers the basic process of getting funding and writing a grant. The toolbox also has a useful glossary of terms for reference. You can find the Grantseekers Toolbox here:

<http://www.donorsforum.org/resource/gstoolbox1.html>



## **The Foundation Center**

The Foundation Center is an organization dedicated to providing a variety of services to non-profits. They offer workshops, online resources, and access to a database of foundations. Some services are available by subscription or fee while others are free. The short version of their proposal tutorial is free online and the longer course is available for a fee. The tutorial has a particularly helpful explanation of the differences between goals and objectives.

<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/>

The Foundation Center also has a good article on what defines a foundation, found here:

<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/guides/whatis.html>

They also have a brief article on how to approach a foundation (written by a senior program officer at the Hearst Foundation), that gives a good overview of what should be involved in the process of choosing a grant and applying for that grant:

<http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/guides/approach.html>

Free online training webinars from the Foundation Center are available here:

[http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/training/webinars/pwb\\_webinar.html](http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/training/webinars/pwb_webinar.html)

## **Non-Profit Guides**

Non-Profit Guides offers a set of free grant-writing tools that include step-by-step instructions on each of the various components of a grant. This web site also offers two sample Requests for Proposals and two corresponding sample grant applications. This is useful for those who learn by example.

<http://npguides.org/guide/index.html>



### **Guidestar**

Guidestar is a useful resource for understanding how a particular foundation distributes its grant money. They allow you to see recent 990PF tax returns for a large number of foundations. By looking at the most recent 990PF tax return for a foundation you can find out which organizations received funding from that foundation during a particular year. You can get basic information on organizations, including recent tax returns, with a free registration to the web site, and more detailed information with a paid subscription.

<http://www.guidestar.org>

### **National Minority AIDS Council**

While the National Minority AIDS Council focuses its community-building on the AIDS epidemic, their free organizational effectiveness guides are well-written and the basic concepts are applicable to any kind of non-profit. Some of the guides are available in Spanish. One of the guides focuses on grant writing, and has information on defining goals, setting objectives, working with collaborations, and managing the grant-writing process when working in a group. They also include a helpful section on how to create a budget and a glossary of terms.

<http://www.nmac.org/index/oes-english>

### **Top 10 Grant-Writing Mistakes**

The Pearson publishing company website has a brief article that highlights some common grant-writing mistakes.

<http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PSZ3Tm>



### **Grant Proposal.com**

The Grant Proposal.com web site has information on the tone and style involved with the writing of a proposal. The site may be out of date (some resource links no longer work), but a good deal of the information is applicable. The pages on “Tips” and “Advice from Funders” are particularly interesting.

<http://www.grantproposal.com>

### **Grant Writing Pro.com**

This is a for-profit company that charges for most of its services, but the website has a good list of quick tips available for free.

<http://www.grantwritingpro.com/resources.asp>

### **Chicago Foundation for Education**

The Chicago Foundation for Education offers free one-hour grant writing workshops for teachers by appointment. The site’s resources are subject-specific, with a focus on grants for education.

[http://www.cfeteachergrants.org/pages/tips\\_on\\_grant\\_writing/56.php](http://www.cfeteachergrants.org/pages/tips_on_grant_writing/56.php)

### **Association of Fundraising Professionals**

The Association of Fundraising Professionals is a membership organization that provides tools for effective fundraising to professionals in the industry. They post a variety of interesting articles on fundraising in their resource tools section:

[http://www.afpnet.org/resource\\_center/resource\\_tools](http://www.afpnet.org/resource_center/resource_tools)

### **Innovation Network**

If you are interested in going beyond grant proposal writing, and want information on topics like strategic planning or program evaluation, the Innovation Network has a large number of articles and a few tools to help you learn about the process. Registration and use of the tools and resources is free of charge.

<http://www.innonet.org/>



Thank you for reading this guide and working to promote healthy lifestyles in your community. Good luck to you and your organization as you work to find funding and implement programs in your area.

This guide has been prepared by the Consortium to Lower Childhood Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC). If you have any questions contact:

**CLOCC**

**2300 Children's Plaza**

**Box #157**

**Chicago, IL 60614**

**<http://www.clocc.net>**

**[info@clocc.net](mailto:info@clocc.net)**