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MUSEUMS & FUNDING

Insights from
a Grant Unicorn

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WE HAVE SCOUTED THE WEB for fundraising learning resources that can help you take the first step in becoming a fundraising master, or a Grant Unicorn as Meredith Noble, founder of learngrantwriting.org likes to call it.

The web page, learngrantwriting.org, straightforwardly teaches the art of fundraising. Fundraising is very competitive, and receiving grants means beating others to the punch. So knowing what you are doing and doing it right will be incredibly helpful. When it comes to it, your writing effort is not a light matter. Meredith Noble's book, *How to Write a Grant: Become a Grant Writing Unicorn*¹, offers a comprehensive and direct approach to grant writing.

The main takeaways are the many questions you need to ask yourself to make sure that everything runs as smooth as possible. There is a lot to learn from the grant application expert Meredith Noble. We have only touched the surface of a few chapters. On Amazon, this book is the most wanted in the museum industry, and we understand why.

1. Noble, Meredith. 2019. *How to Write a Grant: Become a Grant Writing Unicorn*. Seneca Works LLC

WRITE A GRANT & STRUCTURE THE WORK

Grant writing is a lot of work, there is no such thing as free money. The overall trick is continuity, stay on schedule and perform your best work. To be able to do this you need a set of skills, which are very learnable. Below we shed light on things to consider when writing a grant or applying for funding.

What do you do with the funding guidelines?

According to Meredith it is essential to read the guidelines thoroughly, take a break and refill with energy. Then come back, reread the instructions and sharpen your best pen and highlight keywords that are used several times. Analyze and decode.

Do you sketch a skeleton outline?

To prevent feeling overwhelmed by a blank paper, you could sketch an outline. Meredith calls this a Narrative Skeleton. She creates a framework for each section of the narrative and scoring criteria.

When should I finalize the grant budget?

"In a perfect world, project budgets would be nearly complete before starting an application, but it never seems to work out that way." (Noble. location 173, e-book. 2019). It is, however of high importance to finalize your budget early since it affects other parts of the application process.



How do you define the narrative?

A narrative, Meredith explains as a written description of your project, the problem it solves, and why it should be funded. The narrative must be customized for the grant you are applying for and not copy-pasted. One excellent recommendation is to collaborate with someone, have internal deadlines together, and send your progress every 2-3 days to inspire working quickly.

How do you manage your attention and focus?

Meredith aims at working 90 minutes blocks with a full hour rest in between. She walks, stretches, eats healthy foods, catches up with friends, takes a nap, etc. The most crucial point is to stop thinking about writing and leave the computer. Sometimes, it's enough with 20-30 minutes breaks. Write down every task that pops into your mind that allows you to stop thinking about it and move on. Same goes for emails; she tries to wait until completing the top priorities for that particular day before checking emails and similar.

How do you review the application?

Always plan to use, if possible, a fresh set of eyes, someone that hasn't seen parts of the application yet to review the entire application. Meredith stresses that to avoid burnout, mistakes, and unnecessary stress, aim to submit the grant at least one day early but preferably two.

WRITE A CONVINCING NARRATIVE

A convincing narrative is vital. Meredith highlights that "you should tell stories that help the reader understand the bigger context for why your project matters. Do not just explain what you are going to do, show them why." (Noble. location 384, e-book. 2019).

How do you convince - why is the project important?

Describe it with passion; you have to really believe in it. It's like doing sales, its complicated if you do not believe in it. Meredith only takes on projects that she finds interesting and valuable.

How do you define what problem you are solving?

Show that it's more than a good idea. Funding organizations want to fund those who solve real problems and can create positive change.



How do you define your “why arguments”?

Meredith propose these questions to ask yourself when defining why your project matters:

- “Why does this project matter to your community? How are you making your community stronger?”
- What other things can happen by developing this project? Can other investments be made because funding is freed up? Is there a domino effect: if this project happens, will two or three others also fall into place?
- What happens if this project is not funded?
- What are the regional implications? Does your project transcend your organization’s boundaries to affect others?” (Noble. location 384, e-book. 2019).

Do you use phrases like, if this grant is awarded....?

Investors want value for their money. Paint a picture with phrases like “if this grant is awarded....” in the narrative of the grant you have pursued or will pursue to demonstrate relationships between funding resources.

Do you put the team in the spotlight?

“Funders know that projects will be successful because of the people behind them.” (Noble. location 425, e-book. 2019). It’s essential to demonstrate and show throughout the application that you have a competent team. Spend time thinking about why your team has great leaders and are capable of executing the project plan. Assemble the best team you can with unlikely combinations of people and stakeholders.

Do you usually present a detailed scope of work/implementation plan/work plan?

Here is where you convince the reviewer. Do not communicate that you will figure it out once funded, even though it could be true to a degree. You may not be the one leading the project, and it could be stressful and overwhelming to prepare, especially the technical scope of work. According to Meredith, there is a painless way to solve this: ask for bullet points from the technical staff or the person responsible for implementing the project. Another way is to meet in person and record the technical person's answer. Then take the narrative back to the technical person and ask them to edit, you have experts in your team so use them!



FIND GRANTS TO GO AFTER

Meredith's number one recommendation is to visit [Instrumentl.com](https://www.instrumentl.com), which is a great online grant database. You can also hire experts in grant writing through that web page. Another tip is to combine Google search engine and Instrumentl.

How can you be creative?

Meredith uses an example of the building of a skatepark. If you search for "skatepark grants" you probably end up at the Tony Hawk Foundation. The maximum you can apply for is \$25,000. Skateparks cost somewhere around \$300,000 to \$400,000+. So she had to be creative when searching for funding. Think about your project in a smaller "bite-size". It could help to look at the budget and see how certain line items could be funded separately.

- "Adjacent land uses. Next to the skatepark was a large senior housing complex. Research shows that loneliness is one of the main contributors to poor health in seniors. I explored grant opportunities to make seniors feel welcome, spending time at the skatepark. Not only does this give them a lively show, but it also helps detract from unwanted behaviors often associated with skateparks. I found a grant for a shaded seating structure from the national dermatology association. Perfect!
- Community health. I researched how the project improves health outcomes, particularly in combating obesity in youth.
- Community identity. The community has a rich history of glass blowing. I researched ways we could incorporate art grants to the skatepark, perhaps making rideable art pieces. (...) I found several promising art grants." (Noble. location 539, e-book. 2019)



What types of funding do you go after?

Of course, there are different categories of funding to consider. For example, federal grants, low-interest loans also state grants and local grants. Furthermore, private foundations that range in size local, regional, and national.

What do you do if you find the perfect grant but it's due in an insanely short time frame?

Don't do it, even though it is "the perfect grant for us." Crash preparation of grant applications is a recipe for burnout.

Think of it like this: What is the likelihood of getting funded? Does the funding agency support projects or organizations like yours? What is the true cost of grant preparation?

How do you avoid running out of time to complete a grant?

Meredith presents seven steps:

- 1: Develop your grant schedule working backward from the deadline
- 2: Develop a visual, paper-based schedule
- 3: Find someone to keep you accountable
- 4: Gather feedback on specific sections early and often
- 5: Finish your draft of the narrative as fast as possible
- 6: Have dedicated space for deep work
- 7: If you do not have time, then do not do it.

THANKS FOR READING!

Interspectral have had the honor to work with plenty small to medium-sized museums, university museums and science centers that have secured the funds to start research projects, develop exhibitions or implement technology they never thought would be possible. A lot of the institutes that we have worked with over the years apply for funding for our joint projects with positive results. Knowing our products and the value it adds to your museum or science center experience is what we do best.

Visit our web page www.interspectral.com/customers and read about the projects that other museums have had the funding to pursue.

Stay in touch

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