

12 GRANT MYTHS DEBUNKED



Bad statistics, sociologist Joel Best said, are harder to kill than vampires. Grant myths, then, must be harder to kill than bad statistics. Misunderstandings about federal, state, foundation and corporate funding seem to linger out on the internet, and these mistaken views can hurt prospects for grant seekers, fluster grant writers who must correct client expectations, and bleed the precious time of everyone involved. This paper is meant to stop the “bleeding” and reinvigorate smart grant seeking. While there are many other myths out there, the following list should be a good start to setting the record straight.



Myth #1: Grants come without strings.

Grant money comes with guidelines and restrictions. Once you’ve landed a grant, your organization is charged with managing a promise—to use the money in certain ways, follow reporting procedures, and demonstrate programmatic progress. Break that promise and you could lose that money and future funding opportunities from the grantor. So when you land a grant, imagine that you’ve been handed a baton in a relay race. Your job is to run your project and keep it thriving after the award money has “finished”—what’s referred to as sustainability. Funders want to see the markers of progress: SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound) objectives. Who’s the ultimate recipient of this baton? The community, the study, or the individuals the grant serves. You’re a steward to make it happen.



Myth #2: There’s no money available.

A tough economy means that the competition is fiercer, not that the funding well is dry. It means that determining whether to pursue certain grant programs (e.g., considering eligibility, funding amounts, and anticipated number of awards) is paramount,

relationship building with a foundation and project alignment with a foundation’s mission is crucial, and strict adherence to the guidelines of a state/federal program is a given. It means that investing time in grant writing is more important than ever, and that patience and perseverance should be standard practice.



Myth #3: Anyone can win a grant. Just fill out the application and you get a grant.

This is the optimistic opposite of myth #2. Many grant funding opportunities are highly competitive. If you apply for federal grants, consider that your organization is competing among 50 states, 5 major territories and 11 smaller Pacific Islands, and 565 federally recognized tribes. In some federal-level grant competitions, thousands of grant applications are submitted and fewer than 25 are actually awarded. Be prepared, be prudent, and be persistent to improve your chances to win.

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kill than vampires.

– Joel Best, Sociologist

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Myth #4: Grant writing and grants management is a solo sport.

If you're assigned grant writing duties at your organization, you might not even have "grant" in your title. And you likely already wear a half-dozen other hats. Any project that your organization or client's organization undertakes will likely involve individuals from several departments, as well as outside collaborators and partners.



Myth #5: The government has 'free grants.'

This is the sort of myth perpetuated by the likes of the "question-mark guy" from those old TV commercials. Unfortunately, people still buy it. The federal government has many entitlement programs for eligible individuals, including homebuyer assistance grants; however, there are no true grants to pay your personal debts or vacation costs.



Myth #6: My organization can quickly pull together this application.

You could do it quickly but likely not effectively. Consider the hours involved from the other team players. All grant work varies according to program and project, and it may take days or weeks to complete. The work involves more than just drafting the application. It also includes team collaboration, such as including completing a go/no go assessment to ensure you're optimally positioned to move forward; planning meetings; identifying partners; assigning roles; setting expectations; gathering and reviewing documentation; making sure everyone involved is on board for evening and weekend work; and writing, editing, proofreading, and submitting.



Myth #7: Grants management begins after the grant award notice is signed.

If this is your mentality, then you're too late. The most competitive grant applications will consider grants management during the proposal development phase. Funders should be given a very clear understanding of how you're going to account for grant dollars they award to your organization.



Myth #8: If rejected, you should just move on to the next funder.

Not so fast. Unless you realize it wasn't a good match, you might consider revising and resubmitting your application. By doing so, you can improve it based on peer review feedback, which is ensured if it's a government grant program (be sure to request feedback if the funding agency is a foundation), and get a better score—and thus have a higher chance of getting the grant. Besides, there's no reason to take rejection personally; there are numerous factors aside from the writing that are involved in both acceptance and rejection.



Myth #9: We won! So next year is in the bag!

Just because you won one year doesn't guarantee that you'll receive funding the following year. Future funding depends on organizational performance and politics alike. So even if a contract may be renewed for additional periods, remember this sentence that was taken straight from a NOFA: "Continued funding of the contract in future years is contingent upon the availability of funds and the satisfactory performance of the contractor during the prior contract period."

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Myth #10: This grant alone will keep us afloat.

Dangerous thinking. Proper grants management will take into account other funding sources to ensure that you keep those new firefighters you hired with AFG funding, or that you have multi-point efforts to increase funding, instead of only grants—which are subject to the volatility of the economy, competition, and politics.



Myth #11: It's hard to find previously funded applications (PFAs).

Actually it's much easier these days. Agencies are appearing more transparent and listing successful grant applications on their websites. eCivis has its own readily accessible PFA library for customers. Note also that the PFA request process through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), while a last-ditch effort, is another way to procure PFAs.



Myth #12: Municipalities can't go after grants for nonprofits.

Not true. A municipality can pursue grants for nonprofit organizations if (1) the municipality has created a separate 501(c)(3) foundation for departments that specifically apply for foundation grants, or (2) the municipality has a nonprofit partner to act as the fiscal agent (the municipality can be the grant applicant in this case). When a nonprofit acts as a fiscal agent on behalf of another entity, there is usually an administrative overhead fee.



eCivis is the leading cloud-based grants management system in the nation for state, local, and tribal governments. Our innovative solutions address both programmatic and fiscal grant funding requirements throughout the grant lifecycle, helping clients easily overcome the challenges and heavy workload that come with finding and managing grants.

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