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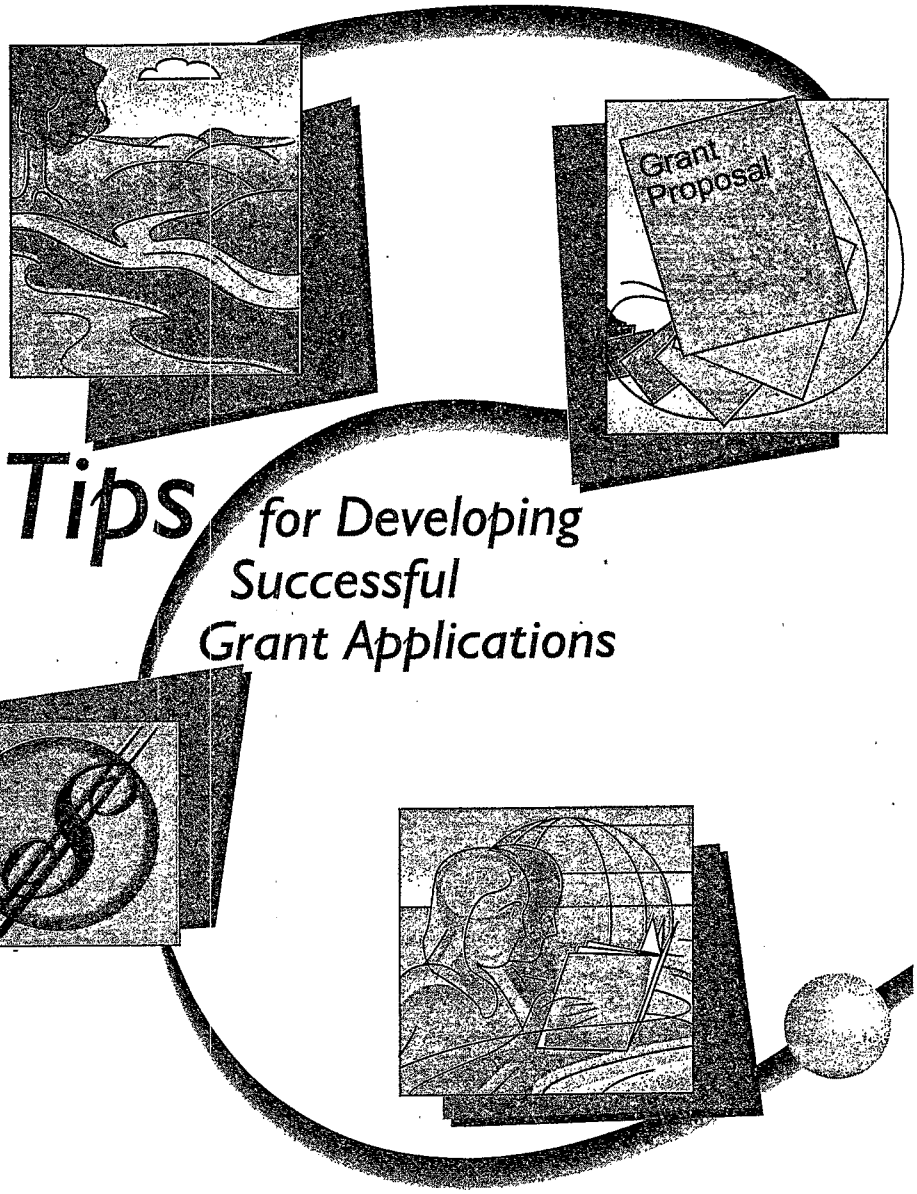
Environmental Education Grants Program



Tips for Developing Successful Grant Applications

"Tips for Developing Successful Grant Applications"

Each year the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awards environmental education grants worth between $2.4 to $3 million to support quality environmental education projects. These grants provide seed money to help support projects that increase the public's awareness and knowledge about the environment and provide the skills to make informed decisions and take responsible action. The competition for environmental education grants is intense, and approximately 250 grantees are selected nationwide from among more than 1,500 applications received.

This document is intended to supplement, not replace, the instructions provided in EPA's annual Environmental Education Grant Solicitation Notice, which always contains the current requirements for proposals. The tips in this document are intended to provide helpful hints for grant applicants. The items should guide the development of an application and help you avoid common errors that result in the disqualification of an application or a decision by EPA not to award a grant. Visit EPA's Office of Environmental Education World Wide Web site at *<http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/>* for a copy of the solicitation notice and additional information about EPA's environmental education grants program. You should also visit EPA's grant-writing tutorial on-line at *<http://www.epa.gov/seahome/grants.html>* to walk through the grant-writing process and participate in a mock grant-writing activity.

GOALS

Environmental education projects must enhance critical-thinking, problem-solving, or decision-making skills of the target audience. EPA will not fund projects that provide opinions about environmental issues or problems or projects that simply disseminate information.

ADMINISTRATIVE

- Meet the deadline for submitting your application--EPA will not consider proposals postmarked after the deadline
- Submit all application materials required for a proposal:
  - Two Federal Forms: Application (SF 424) and Budget (SF 424-A)
  - Work Plan:
    1) Project Summary (one page)
    2) Full Project Description
    3) Evaluation Plan
    4) Detailed Budget Showing Match
    5) Time Line
    6) Resumes of Key Personnel
    7) Memoranda of Understanding from Partners, if applicable
- For grant requests of up to $25,000, submit your application to your EPA regional office
- For grant requests over $25,000, submit your application to EPA Headquarters in Washington, DC
- Make sure your organization is eligible to apply for grant funds:
  - A college or university; a local or tribal government education agency; a state education or environmental agency; a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization; or a noncommercial educational broadcasting entity is eligible
  - A teacher's school district, an educator's not-for-profit organization, or a faculty member's college or university may apply, but an individual teacher is not eligible
  - The primary applicant must be based in the U.S.; partner organizations and project activities may be located in Canada or Mexico

CONTENT OF PROPOSAL

- Describe how the project will meet at least one of EPA's environmental education priorities, such as teacher training, which are identified annually in the solicitation notice.
- Stay focused — don't try to address through one project every EPA priority listed in the solicitation notice. Avoid simply restating the goals and priorities listed in the solicitation notice. Evaluation panels often select projects with a clearly defined purpose which can be accomplished, rather than projects that attempt to address multiple priorities
- Avoid proposing ineligible projects, such as technical training of environmental management professionals; research and development not of an educational nature; or environmental "information" projects that have no educational component
- Describe the project accurately and precisely:
  - Research the project and describe exactly why there is a need for the project in your community or in the field of environmental education
  - Identify existing efforts related to the project — use the information to support the project or to justify a different approach
  - Define the specific goals and objectives of the project
  - Describe exactly what you are going to do and how you are going to do it
  - Identify the products that you will use or produce and how you will distribute them (EPA prefers not to fund new curriculum because there are many excellent existing materials)
  - Specify the methodology you will use to implement the project and explain how it teaches critical-thinking, problem-solving or decision-making skills

- Target your audience carefully:
  - Describe clearly the individuals or groups that make up your audience; for example, 30 high school teachers or 60 middle school students
  - Explain why your audience needs the project
  - Explain how you will recruit your audience
- Explain the project's potential for wide application or how it could serve as a model for other communities or organizations
- Build strong partnerships and alliances with community organizations and environmental and industry groups:
  - Enlist the support of other groups that have similar goals
  - Secure a commitment of services or dollars
  - Identify how partners will collaborate and describe specific responsibilities of each partner
  - Submit letters of commitment or memoranda of understanding from partners which state the dollars or services committed
- Develop a realistic time line:
  - Demonstrate that you can complete the project within the funding period (one year for small grants or up to two years for grants over $25,000)
  - List the sequence and time frames of all tasks you will undertake to meet the goals of the project (on a schedule that covers the entire grant period)
- Describe how the project will be sustained after the federal funding period ends
- Develop a methodology for evaluating the project:
  - Describe how you will know when the goals and objectives have been met (for example, measures of success)
  - Identify the strategies, milestones, and tools that you will use to monitor the project
  - Describe how monitoring will be used to strengthen the project

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

BUDGET/FUNDING

- Set a realistic limit on the amount of EPA funds you request:
  - EPA must limit the size of the grants to ensure nationwide coverage with available funding
  - The likelihood that EPA will award funds for your project increases significantly if you request $5,000 or less from an EPA regional office or $75,000 or less from EPA Headquarters
- Develop a realistic budget:
  - Make the budget clear and concise; provide detail on the basis of costs for items, such as cost per hour, number of hours, and total cost
  - Present the budget in such a manner that someone unfamiliar with your organization will understand it
  - Identify the personnel, materials, and other resources you will need to implement the project:
    - Identify those that you and your partners already have and those for which you need funding
    - Clarify which costs will be charged to matching funds, in-kind matches, EPA funds, or other funding sources
- Clearly identify matching funds:
  - Show that your organization has obtained the required level of nonfederal matching funds, that is, at least 25 percent of the total cost of the project (divide the amount of EPA funds you have requested by 3 to determine your minimum matching funds)
  - Carefully document those matching funds that are provided in cash and those represented by in-kind contributions and other nonmonetary support
- Be cautious about including what might appear to be excessive personnel or travel costs and high overhead expenses
- Check the budget forms for mathematical errors
- Make certain you don't include unallowed items, such as construction costs

FORMAT

- Meet the format requirements specified in the solicitation notice:
  - Pages must be letter-size — $8^{1/2}$ x 11 inches
  - Use a standard type size — 10 or 12 cpi (no fine print)
  - Number every page
  - Provide one original signed copy and additional copies as specified in the solicitation notice
  - Do not exceed the page limits specified in the solicitation notice
  - Do not send extra material, such as videotapes, newspaper articles, etc.
- Spell out each acronym at first use
- Perform an internal or external review of the application, or both:
  - If possible, ask someone who has experience in writing grant proposals to review the application
  - Perform an editorial review for clarity and conciseness
  - Check the proposal for typographical, grammatical, and mathematical errors
- Perform a final quality control check to ensure that application materials are complete and signed and that the copies are legible

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Follow instructions and format
- Write clearly and concisely
- Price the project competitively

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Environmental Education (1704)
Washington DC 20460

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