

Are You A “Grant Writer”?

Decoding the Language

Do you write grants? Well, if you’re a grantmaker, maybe. But if you’re trying to get grant funding, then you’re not a “grant writer.” You’re a grant proposal writer, a grant developer, a grant specialist, a development specialist, a grant professional, or something else. But not a “grant writer.”

Who cares? Why get picky with this language? Because we know words matter, affecting how we think and ultimately impacting what we do.

The field of grant development, formally initiated in 1972 with the first training by The Grantsmanship Center, has grown, evolved, and become more complex, touching a vast number of lives. We get it, “grant writer” is shorthand, an abbreviation used by people who are busy moving mountains to make the world better. Here’s why we care about changing this terminology:

It’s incorrect.

Most of the time when “grant writer” is used, it’s inaccurate. Grantmakers write grants. Grant seekers write *proposals* or *applications*, not grants.

It’s a misdirect.

“Grant writing” limits this complex process—as if “grant” (the money) plus “writing” sums it all up. This language inadvertently triggers chasing the money—counterproductive, dangerous. And it’s also misleading because developing a successful grant proposal requires much more than writing.

What matters more than the money is what your program will accomplish—the results—the outcomes you’re proposing. Sure, money’s a factor—a tool—it’s just not the most important ingredient.

And yes, writing is certainly part of it all, but writing is the *culmination* of a more complex thinking and planning process. Critical thinking, logic, data, and a sense of humanity inspire funders to award grants. Careless thinking, with faulty assumptions and bloviated claims, results in declines, no matter how well written.

“Grant writer” suggests that people simply put words on a page to get a grant—like pulling a rabbit out of a hat. It doesn’t work that way.

It shortchanges people and the process.

Would you ever intentionally disrespect colleagues or the people you serve? Of course not! But this terminology does just that. It leaves out key people and essential processes.

Successful grant proposals rely on solid program planning, research, and teamwork. They demonstrate an understanding of the community, its needs, and the causes of the problems it faces. It’s a thoughtful process, which at its best is logical, culturally sensitive and inspired by a drive to help others.

Funders will ask: “What about the beneficiaries? Did you engage them in planning?” Your beneficiaries are the most important people in this process. When their vision, voices, and experience are neglected, a project is usually doomed.

And what about program staff? Ever heard the wails after a grant was awarded and program staff who weren't consulted asked, "You want us to do *what?*"

You risk losing valuable insight, guidance, and muscle if administrators and your board are ignored, leaving them feeling blindsided and possibly jeopardizing the work. Other community leaders and organizations also have a stake in your work. Including their energy and knowledge will benefit everyone.

Whatever your job title—proposal writer, program planner, development director, executive director, grant professional, board member, volunteer, or something else—we want to thank you for what you accomplish every day, knowing that your hours are often long as you work for vital change in your community.

We wish you great success and satisfaction!



Want more?

[The Grantsmanship Center](#) has a wealth of resources for you! For 50 years, we've served nonprofits, academia, and government and Native American groups by providing [training](#) and the textbook, [Grantsmanship: Program Planning & Proposal Writing](#). Choose a training to fit your budget, schedule, and experience and join 145,000+ alumni helping to build a better world!