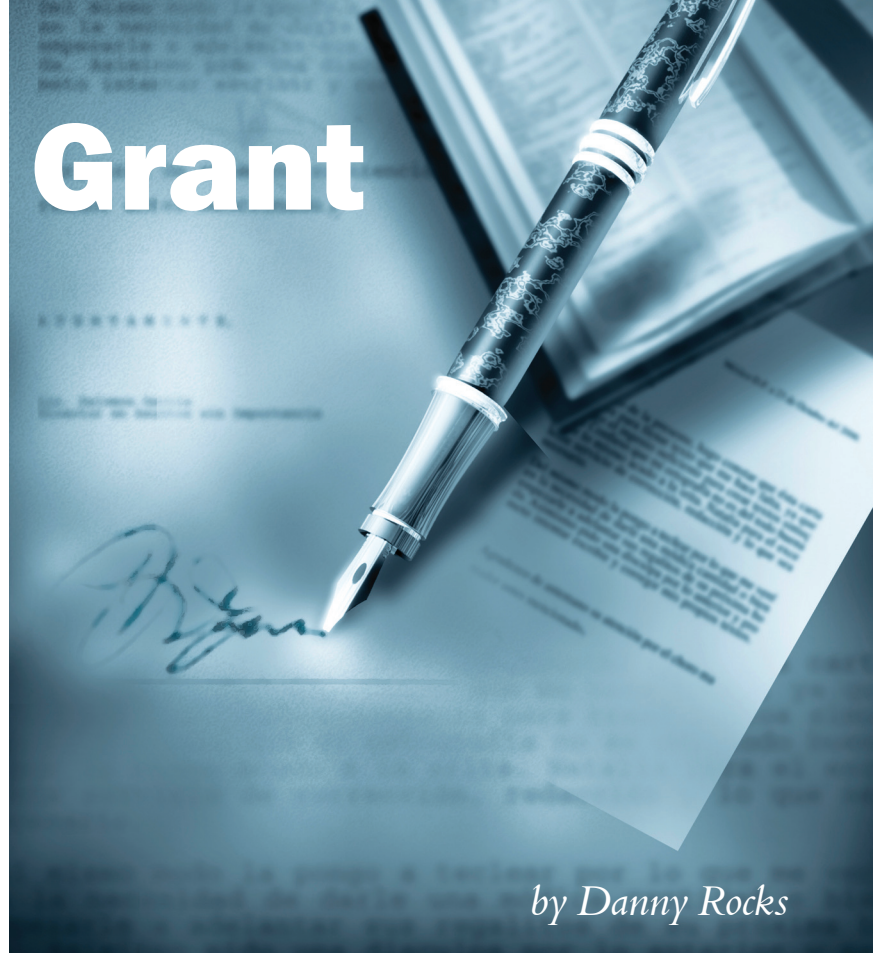


# Getting the Grant

*Annual budgets often provide insufficient financial support for a successful music program. External funding sources are available and the first step to obtain that funding is often completing a grant application. Before you sign on the dotted line, you should understand the grant funding process so that you can target the most likely sources of that funding and best position your program's needs to them.*



*by Danny Rocks*

It's time to plan for the new school year. You are probably worrying about obtaining the money for all of the things you want to do: "I want to add a private lesson program; I want to purchase three new computers for our music lab; I want to take the choir to a festival at the other end of the state," etc. You worry that your budget will be cut or your class size will be increased. You know that you are going to have to raise extra funds, but the thought of starting yet another bake sale gives you a case of the hives.

You wonder if there is a better way to obtain the funds you need. You've heard about grants and perhaps even know a colleague who has obtained a grant. You want to know how to get started with the grant process. Let's begin!

The first step is to move away from saying, "I want..." and learn to identify and articulate needs, of your students and your community. Try it! Change the wording from the opening paragraph of this article. "Twenty percent of the students in our middle school band program will be unable to continue because they lack..., they will need...in order to continue... Participating in this program has enabled them to..." Do you see the difference? Do you want to make a difference? Learn to shine the spotlight on the people that you will help and not on yourself or your program.

As you learn to identify and express the needs of the people you serve and how your program will address these needs, keep this in mind: Be timely, be specific, and be brief! Use accurate and up-to-date statistics. Focus on specific needs and the people who will benefit from a grant. Learn to write and speak succinctly—focus on one strong point.

The second step in a successful grant application is finding

the right donor for your program. There really is no shortage of donors—The Foundation Center ([www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)) reported that in 2002 there were more than 56,000 private foundations in the USA. And that year they gave over \$29 billion in grants to programs of all shapes and sizes. Remember, that this does not include grants from state and federal agencies. And these private foundations must spend at least 5% of their investment assets each year or face penalties from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and loss of their non-profit status.

## **Why Grants get denied**

Now don't get over-confident. With so many potential donors and so much money needing to be spent, finding the right donor—for your program and the needs in your community that your program will address—is actually the most difficult step in the grant seeking process. The number one reason that a grant application is denied is because the people requesting the money did not take the time to see that the interests, mission statement and scope of the foundation (those who have the money) matched up with the goals of the program (that will address the needs.)

Most foundations clearly state the geographic, demographic, and economic limitations that they will consider in a grant application. You can easily find this information on a foundation's website or printed materials. Some key advice: Keep your search local. With few exceptions, foundations prefer to make grants to people and programs in their community or their region. Here's a proven way to find potential benefactors for your Fine or Performing Arts program:

- Attend a performance by your local orchestra and bring home the program.

- The program will list all of the corporations, individuals and foundations who have provided support for the symphony. This is your target list—people who have money and use part of it to support the arts!
- Assemble a team to start researching these potential donors. Go to their websites and learn about their history of charitable giving—who received funding, how much funding they will consider, what time of year do they consider grants, etc.
  - You should also add all of these arts patrons to your mailing list. Invite them to your next concert. Send them news about your program and how the community benefits as a result of it. State your goals.

As you start filling out grant applications you will notice that most follow a very similar pattern. In fact most foundations use a “Common Grant Application Format.” Go to this site to download one: [www.cmu.edu/develop/infoserv/prop/cgaf.html](http://www.cmu.edu/develop/infoserv/prop/cgaf.html). You will improve your chances of obtaining a grant if you remember:

- Grant writing is not a “cookie-cutter” process. Don’t practice “spray and pray”—filling out one application and mailing it to every foundation in your area.
  - Be as selective in trying to match your application to a donor as you are in choosing the proper piece of music for your group to perform at a contest.
- Follow all of the rules exactly! This is the number two reason that a grant application is denied.
  - Do not miss a deadline—even by one hour.
  - Use the terminology that they request. Speak their language.
  - Use a dispassionate proofreader—if you are sloppy with grammar, you indicate that you will not be a careful steward of the foundation’s money.
  - Provide all of the forms requested. Do not exceed the length they specify.

#### **Who has the money and who gets funded?**

In addition to an IRS mandate that foundations spend at least 5% of their investment assets each year, the government publishes the foundations’ tax returns, as a matter of public record. This is Form 990 and [www.grantsmart.org](http://www.grantsmart.org) has a wonderful search engine to find potential grantors. You can search the tax returns of over 100,000 private foundations and charitable trusts. Search by state, zip code, size of assets, etc. You will find an itemized list of all the programs and individuals who received a grant from that foundation. Contact these recipients to learn more about who they serve, what they have accomplished and ask for their help refining your grant search. Typically, grants fund:

- Programs: to start a new one or expand an existing one
- Expensive instruments and equipment (sound reinforcement, risers, etc.)
- Technology: to incorporate it or update and expand it
- Uniforms and tours
- Community outreach and enrichment: to bring music to the community and to involve the community in music
- To start or expand a private lesson program—especially for “at risk” children.
- Professional Development: includes attending in-service conferences.

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*No grant application will ever be successful unless there is a true match between the needs and strengths of your organization, the needs and support of your community and the goals and resources of your funders.*

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Some other helpful websites that I have used include: The Nonprofit Resource Center ([www.not-for-profit.org](http://www.not-for-profit.org)) and School Grants, founded by a former grant writer for Dallas ISD, ([www.schoolgrants.org](http://www.schoolgrants.org)). Of course, you also need to become very familiar with advocacy materials when you are building your case to support your grant application. Your first stop is Support Music ([www.supportmusic.com](http://www.supportmusic.com)).

#### **Clarity of purpose**

While searching the web, I discovered these seven questions, asked in sequence, that neatly define the grant writing process and will help shape your thought process. As you honestly answer each question you will make a successful transformation from the “I want...” (material goods) stage to the “We need...in order to...so that...” goal. In the process you will make yourself more attractive to philanthropists and truly make a difference in your community. The seven questions that I found at [www.paservicelearning.org/PSLA/grantWriting2.html](http://www.paservicelearning.org/PSLA/grantWriting2.html) are:

1. What do you want to buy?
2. What will you do with it?
3. Why do you want to do that?
4. What good will it do?
5. What makes you think you’re the one to do it?
6. How will you know whether you really did it?
7. How will you keep doing it?

As I have reflected on these seven questions, I have found them to be a successful blueprint for undertaking any project. They really get to the heart of what we teach and why we continue to teach music in the face of many difficult odds. The artist Joan Miro said, “More important than a work of art itself is what it will sow. Art can die. A painting can disappear. What counts is the seed.” Philanthropists understand the importance of nurturing the seed. They realize that their money partnered with capable people and organizations can make a tremendous positive change in our society.

#### **Music is collaborative—so is grant writing**

A successful grant application requires a team effort. Foundations do not like to fund “lone rangers,” that is, individuals with an idea. They realize the importance of collaboration in order to get a program started on the road to self-sufficiency. Funders need to see evidence of real community support and involvement in your program. Who are your volunteers (band parents, PTA, etc.)? Who will create and monitor your budget? Who will run the program? Do they require training? What other arts organizations can or will share your resources? Are you thinking too narrow in scope? Who will help keep your organization focused? Who will create the assessment reports many foundations require?

This article is by necessity an overview of the grant writing process. I have offered links to some useful websites where you can gain additional resources to help in your search. However, no grant application will ever be successful unless there is a true match between the needs and strengths of your organization, the needs and support of your community and the goals and resources of your funders. Each needs to see that the other partners share their values and are united in their goals. It is wise to heed the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "People only see what they are prepared to see." Be prepared to succeed. Be prepared to make music and make a difference in your community.

*Danny Rocks recently retired from Alfred Publishing Co., where he served in many executive positions for the past 23 years. Currently, he is the President of the American Music Conference and in that capacity he continues to be a strong and vocal advocate for music education. Danny was recently elected Chairman of the Grants Committee for TIME, The Technology Institute for Music Education.*

