

# How to Write a Grant Report



Congratulations! You found a grant that is the perfect fit for your organization, and the grant application you spent weeks writing succeeded. While you're excited to focus on the important project work that inspired you to apply for funding, it's never too soon to start thinking about how to write a grant report that will secure a lasting relationship with the funder.

You might be groaning inside at the thought, but grant reporting is more than just a way to fulfill your government or foundation funding requirements. A quality grant report is a chance to showcase your organization's professionalism and strengths but can also increase a grantmaker's willingness to provide future and on-going funding. Plus, a grant report rich with narrative details and outcomes data can be easily repurposed to improve annual reports, newsletters, and future funding applications.

So, if you are wondering how to write a grant report or just making sure you'll be ready to write a great one when reporting time comes around, below are some tips and tools to help you succeed.

## A Basic Grant Report Template

Most nonprofit funding includes reporting requirements. While every grantmaker might have specific requests, most include a lot of the same basic information. A standard grant report template will likely include the following:

### 1. Financial Statements

Grant management always starts and ends with financial responsibility. So, not surprisingly, grantmakers want accounting statements for how grant funding was spent. You might also need to include financial reports on the overall organization to demonstrate compliance with legal and grant-specific requirements. Pay special attention to restricted fund accounting and make sure

you can not only show compliance with expenditures but can explain your restricted fund accounting systems if needed.

## **2. Project activities**

Start with a brief narrative outlining the types of activities being funded by the grant. Show how those activities fit into your larger program objectives and why individual expenditures are necessary and/or valuable. You might be able to simply copy or summarize details from your original grant application, just pay special attention to anything that has changed since you first applied.

You'll also want to tell the grantmaker if you worked in collaboration with other organizations and if you were able to leverage volunteer resources to magnify grant-funded efforts. Grantmakers value collaboration among organizations and want to see that you are making the most of their investment.

## **3. Results and Impact**

Explain how the project funding made a difference. Integrate quantitative data and statistics. Highlight key outcomes and metrics data, then, explain how grant expenditures contributed to your results.

When in doubt, go back to your original proposal or application as a starting point. What questions were you trying to answer and what have you learned so far? What changes did you want to see and how is that working? What assumptions did you make and have they proven correct?

Contextualizing outcomes with participant and constituent demographic details, qualitative data, and stories can add depth and meaning to outcomes data and round out your reporting. While your primary goal is to provide your grantmaker with information about how funds were used, a data-rich report also demonstrates that your organization is professional and outcomes-oriented.

## **4. Lessons Learned**

Of course, you want to put your best foot forward and emphasize your success, but it's equally important to share what you are learning along the way. But don't forget: foundation funding and other nonprofit grants are made with a clear expectation that not every project or program approach can or should succeed 100% of the time.

In fact, most grantmakers know that the only way to maximize impact is to test assumptions and see what works. They know that, often, those lessons are learned when something fails or falls short. Even if the grant report template provided by the funder doesn't explicitly ask for lessons learned, including them in the activities narrative is always helpful.

The goal of sharing lessons learned is to support the future success of your organization and their other grant recipients. So, details and context are just as important as take-away realizations.

Explain what you assumed or hoped for, what actually happened, why (or your best understanding of why) it was different, and what you learned that would help you do better.

At the end of the day, just tell it like it is. Foundations know social change and human services are filled with challenges. They respect and appreciate organizations that can be honest and not try to sugarcoat their experiences. Plus, the process of talking through challenges and identifying what lessons were learned is an important part of building a healthy program and bolstering organizational moral.

### **5. Future Plans & Sustainability**

Lastly, grant reporting should include projections and plans about the next phase of the project or the direction of the program or organization. While some grants are awarded with the expectation of a one-time event or activity, most grantmakers see nonprofit funding as an investment to kick-start or continue sustainable change. Use grant reporting show funders that, even after their money is used, you are doing everything thing you can to ensure that their impact and influence will continue.

## **Pro Tip: Teamwork**

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Even if you have a designated grant writer that is responsible for compiling a report, grant reporting requires a team effort. Give yourself plenty of time to collect the necessary information. Encourage program staff and volunteers to share stories and answer questions in their own words — you might be amazed at the details and nuances they can add. And make sure you report back to the team when the report is finished. Often, understanding what worked and what didn't, can help them refine processes and metrics. Sharing grant reporting content internally can also be an easy way to increase internal communication and collaboration.

## **Great Grant Reports Lead to More Funding**

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Now that you know what makes a nonprofit grant report great, you'll be on your way to impressing important funders and earning the trust that will help you continue to receive funding. Thinking about grant reporting in the way outlined above is also a good way to move towards an outcomes oriented approach to program management is something that is becoming more and more important.