

Seventh Period: Communication

Your grant has officially been submitted. Now you wait . . . and wait. Finally, the day comes when you receive an e-mail from the funding organization. The subject says, “Your Grant Application Status,” and you slowly move your mouse over the e-mail and click to read . . .

We hope the e-mail starts off with “Congratulations!” or “Your grant application has been funded!” Many times, though, the e-mail contains the information you were dreading, that the organization “received several quality submissions, but unfortunately” your grant proposal was not funded.

Whether your application was rejected or approved, there are a few more steps to the grant-writing process. These steps are outlined in this chapter, and we will give you a few suggestions for creative ways to thank your funder and reach out to potential granting organizations for future projects. Although this chapter may not contain information on actually writing the grant proposal, the follow-up and communication you have with your funder and all your stakeholders after you have submitted your proposal will often affect the overall experience of the project and correlate to future funding opportunities.

Thanking All Involved

Before you find out whether your proposal was funded or not, it is important to personally thank everyone who helped you along the way. If you work in the same school or office, send personalized messages, thanking that person for exactly what he or she did to assist you when you were working on the proposal; do not send a mass e-mail. If there are people who helped whom you may call on again for future proposals, make sure to show them that you really appreciate their work! Flowers, a small gift card, or breakfast before school can go a long way when you ask them for their help in the future!



Make copies of everything and keep them for your records. Your supervisor may want a copy of your proposal, acceptance letter, and any other documents you have submitted. Additionally, over time, your skills as a grant writer will improve. Keeping old grants, awarded or not, and reviewing them at a later date is an excellent reflective exercise and will help to hone your ability over time.

Make sure to also notify your direct supervisor that the final proposal has been submitted, and send him or her a copy of the final proposal. If you are a teacher, this should be your grade-level head, department chair, and your administrative team. If you were working as part of a teacher team, make sure that each team member receives the final draft and notification of the submission. Check with your principal or administrative team, because sometimes school districts have certain regulations about who needs to be notified when a grant has been submitted (or when funding is awarded). Some school districts will require you to notify the school or district business manager and even the local school board. Keeping everyone up-to-date will increase the collaboration for the program if your proposal is ultimately funded.

If you partnered with a community organization or another outside entity, make sure to notify the organization that the final proposal has been submitted and that you will contact them of the final decision once you hear from the funder. Sometimes it is appropriate to share the final proposal with your partnering organizations, depending on the scope of the partnership.

The Dreaded Rejection Letter

Your grant proposal will end in one of two ways: a rejection letter or an award letter (followed by a check). We hope, after reading this book and putting the strategies you have learned into practice, you will start to receive more award letters than rejection letters.

Rejection letters can be disheartening. You just put in hours and hours of work into writing a needs statement, project description, budget, and evaluation, and now you are right back to where you started: a great idea for a project and no funds to implement it. Frustration, sadness, and apathy are all common emotions after hearing that your proposal was not funded. We have been there! Don't worry, because those emotions go away and soon you will be refocused and energized for your students and school.

Even the best grant writers receive their fair share of rejection letters. You can write a fantastic proposal, but so can someone else, and it comes down to the opinion of the reviewing panel. Because all foundations have a limited amount of funds allocated for grant awards, not all proposals will be funded, and receiving rejection letters is just a part of the process. It doesn't mean you are a bad grant writer or will never win a grant, so keep your head up and focus on your next proposal.

Even with a rejection letter, your work is not done. After receiving the rejection letter, you still need to follow up with a thank-you letter to the granting organization. We know it sounds a little awkward to thank someone who denied your request; you have probably never written a thank-you letter to someone who turned you down when asking him or her on a date, but with grant writing, it is best to stay professional and keep future options open. Your letter should be brief and sincere. We recommend waiting a few days after you receive the rejection letter to let your emotions return to a normal state before writing your thank-you letter. Read the following letter for an example of a post-rejection letter.



Even the best grant writers receive their fair share of rejection letters.

EXAMPLE

Example of a Thank-You Letter after Receiving a Rejection Letter

Columbus High School
Home of the Cougars
234 Freemont Drive
Austin, Texas
555-334-2459

November 9, 2013
Attn: STARS Grant Review Committee
XYZ Organization

On behalf of the students of Room 104 at Columbus High School in Austin, Texas, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to apply for the STARS classroom grant. The students enjoyed brainstorming and creating the class project submitted in the proposal. The experience of planning, researching, and

writing the proposal was highly beneficial for me as an educator. My students and I look forward to applying for future funding from your organization.

Thank you and your organization for your commitment to education.

Professionally,
Mr. Reginald Weeks
Biology teacher
Columbus High School

A quick e-mail to all stakeholders, partners, and your supervisors stating that your proposal was not funded and thanking them again is also necessary. If you have immediate plans to pursue other funding for this project, you can also mention your plans in this e-mail.

Depending on the type of grant you applied for (foundation, state, federal, etc.), you may be able to call the organization or agency and ask for some feedback about your proposal. Some foundations will be more than happy to share your final numerical score or reviewer comments with you. Other foundations that offer smaller grants and do not have a very large staff may not have the time or resources to give each application feedback. When inquiring about feedback, be polite and take the “my school is curious about how we can improve our proposal for future submissions” approach. By law (Freedom of Information Act), federal agencies must give you feedback on your proposal if you request it; however, the time it takes to receive this feedback varies on the number of submissions and staffing of the department. Use any information you receive to review your submitted application and make improvements for future submissions. The best grant writers, much like the best teachers, are reflective and continuously strive to improve their craft.

Victory: The Award Letter

One of the highlights of our careers has been reading the words “Congratulations, your grant proposal has been chosen to be funded!” With this short little sentence comes a rush of emotions and adrenaline. Knowing that all the hard work you and your team just placed into writing this grant was worth it and is a big relief and cause for celebration! After you celebrate, though, it is time to get back to work! Before you dive into your implementation plan and timeline, you need to take a moment to thank the funder and notify all stakeholders that your proposal was approved.

Although this thank-you letter should also be short and sincere, it needs to give the funder your immediate next steps as well. Take a look at the following example letter thanking an organization after a funded application.

EXAMPLE

Example of a Thank-You Letter after Receiving an Award Letter

Columbus High School
Home of the Cougars
234 Freemont Drive
Austin, Texas
555-334-2459

November 9, 2013
Attn: Mrs. Yolanda Jackson
Director of XYZ Organization

On behalf of the students of Room 104 at Columbus High School in Austin, Texas, I would like to thank you for selecting our project, "Students 4 College," to be funded. Your financial commitment will ensure the project's implementation and overall success. The students and I are eager and excited to get started on the initial steps of the project, which include selecting two state universities and two out-of-state universities to research and visit. My students and I are looking forward to updating you on the progress and results of "Students 4 College."

Thank you and your organization for your commitment to education.

Professionally,
Mr. Reginald Weeks
Biology teacher
Columbus High School

Remember all those people you thanked right after you submitted your proposal? Now it is time to go back and tell them the good news! Depending on the number of people who helped you construct your proposal, an e-mail, phone call, or memo is appropriate. People like being part of a successful project, so let them know that their work was not in vain, and they will be more likely to help you again in the future.

Next, you will need to contact all partners and stakeholders from the proposal. If you decided to partner with the botanical garden, as mentioned in chapter 3, make sure you reach out to your contact person and let him or her

know that the project is a go! You don't have to start setting dates for meetings, speakers, or working out the details of a field trip just yet; simply notify your partners that your program was funded and that you will be in touch in the near future to start working on implementation. Sometimes, when a communication about a winning application is mixed with immediate business steps, it can take away from that emotional high of being a part of a successful team. Let each stakeholder have that moment of relief, excitement, and success, and then in a few days or a week, reach out again to get the ball rolling.

Ongoing Communication and Updates

Either the award letter or the follow-up letter from the granting organization will remind you of the specific deadlines to submit updates and your final evaluation. Write these dates everywhere—in your calendar, in an e-mail to yourself, on a sticky note stuck in your sock drawer—whatever you need to do so that you do not miss these deadlines!

In your proposal, you should have described your assessment and evaluation plan in detail. In this section we hope you also identified the data and results that you would be sharing with the granting organization. Some funders will have specific forms or surveys for you to complete. Others will just want regular updates on the progress, budget, and anticipated time left to complete your objectives. The key is to follow the guidelines of the granting organization. Many times for education-related grants under \$5,000, a simple report detailing the achievement of the objectives will suffice.

Depending on the size and type of your project, we have identified some common items that you can send to the funding organization at the conclusion of your project or program:

Single Classroom Project or Unit

- Student data report showing increase or growth in relation to your proposal's objectives
- Sample of completed student work (essay, creation of book, blueprint of dream house, college acceptance letters)
- Copies of all assessments with a report detailing results of each assessment
- All receipts and final budget report

Extended Classroom Project or Unit with Outside School Partner

- Proof of partnership with outside partner (itinerary of field trip, handouts from organization)

- Report detailing how partnership with outside organization added value to unit or program in correlation to proposal's objectives

Schoolwide Program or After-school Program

- Number of applications for program versus number selected to prove rigorous entry or selectivity
- Report identifying growth of students enrolled in program versus similar students who were not enrolled in the program

School District Initiative or Districtwide Program

- Evidence of systemwide impact such as aggregate growth among participants
- A comprehensive booklet-style report detailing not only the overall outcomes and activities of the project but also individual school-based snapshots

Multiyear Programming with One or More Outside School Partners

- Timelines showing yearly progress toward the goals and objectives with projections on future outcomes
- Digital media that allow a reader to explore the many partners and their role in your shared work



If you are ever unsure of what the granting organization needs from you, call the program officer and clarify. Now that your proposal has been funded, it is important for you to maintain communication with the organization and submit all forms and data necessary. If you are in the middle of a multiple-phase or multiyear grant, failure to adhere to deadlines could result in a cancellation of remaining funds.

In addition to sending the updates and final evaluation report to the granting organization, be sure to share final data and results with all stakeholders involved. Let people in your school community know what you and your students did! A successfully funded and completed program can be a great component for your principal to add to his or her end-of-year report (not to mention score you some extra bonus points)! If your school or school district has an e-mail listserv that sends updates to the school community and



Make sure to mention the granting organization in any form of media you release about the project and then send them a copy!

stakeholders, submit an article about your funded project and include the results and a picture of your students. Don't be shy; let everyone know how hard you and your students worked to receive free money and then used it to create something awesome for your students and school!

Here is a list of great ideas for follow-up communication to the funder, stakeholders, and school community:

- Have students write an article for the school paper or local newspaper about the project.
- Contact a local radio station to do a quick, two-minute story about your students and their project.
- Have each student write a personal thank-you letter to the granting organization and all partners.
- Take a picture of all participants at the end of the project, and send it to the funder and stakeholders. Having the students hold something they completed would be even better!
- Send your partners or funder an "honorary member of room 309" certificate signed by all the students.
- Make a picture timeline of the entire project and have students make comments under each picture to hang up in your school or partner organization's office.
- Reach out to a local politician for a visit on the final day of the program (any politician will see this as an excellent photo shoot with students and community interaction), and then send a picture of the politician and your students to the funder for some major bonus points.

Whichever way you choose to follow up with your funders and stakeholders, do not undervalue the use of narrative. People enjoy the journey just as much as the end result. Try to work in personal and organizational narratives into all reporting through photos, quotes from participants, and other media that will connect a reader to your project. Use technology and build a website, wiki, Prezi presentation, or any other kind of format that would allow you to embed video and sound into a report that is able to be sent out. Upload videos and slideshows that showcase your work. Using the tradition of storytelling goes a long way when forging a stronger relationship with a funder.

Building a Relationship with Your Funder and Other Stakeholders

It has been stressed throughout this book that building a relationship among you, your school, and a funder is a key component to the success of your proposal. Funders are people, too, and they are certainly interested in more than the financial transaction that just took place. Oftentimes, we find that a teacher has a closer relationship with the barista at the local coffee shop than the program officer who just provided the teacher with \$10,000!

Similar to any relationship, it takes work, dedication, persistence, and perseverance to build a long-lasting “marriage” between you and your stakeholders. Here are a few tips that will help you build a strong connection with others and may result in future funding:

- *Don't neglect your stakeholders.* Even if your funder only requires periodic or structured reporting, be sure to include the funder on newsletters, event invites, and other means of connecting. Funders may never respond to you or may never be able to make it to an event, but they will most certainly be reading your communications and feel a stronger connection to your school.
- *Provide a space for them to get involved.* Get creative and include all stakeholders (especially funders) in your project in an authentic way. Perhaps you purchased books to build a reading café . . . could you invite your funder or parents to read to students one evening? Maybe the grant funds a debate team . . . is there a way you can include them in your practices? The more active stakeholders are in your project, the more likely they will develop a deep relationship with your school.
- *Discuss other projects.* This can be delicate, because you do not want to badger funders with new ideas every time you talk with them. Instead, try and talk about other projects that they are working on or that you have recently heard about in the area. A conversation that starts with “Did you hear what they are doing out east?” might very well turn into “Well, we should do that here!”
- *Be friendly.* At the end of the day, people want to enjoy their jobs. By being friendly and approachable, your stakeholders will want to be around you more, giving you more opportunities to network. Take a genuine interest in them and try to sprinkle in conversation that is not just about work when appropriate.

Relationship building can lead to additional funding for future projects or, more important, continued funding for your same project. Because many grants

are one-time payments, it is difficult to continue year after year when money has dried up. Building relationships with various stakeholders creates a stronger likelihood that someone will want to make a long-term investment and sustain your project.

Thinking about the Future

If you are like us, as soon as you submit your first proposal, you will begin to start thinking about writing your next grant. Now that you know where to find grants, how to navigate an RFP, how to choose your writing style, and how to construct each section of the proposal, you will be constantly searching for grants to fund more projects for your classroom, school, or district.

If you have a grant that has funded only part of your project or will provide only enough funding for the first year of a multiyear project, you should continue looking for funding to sustain your project. You can certainly have conversations with your current funder about continuing but it is good practice to have back-up plans that may include approaching other potential funders and applying for new RFPs. One common technique is to make a small tweak to a program or project before applying to a new funder. See the following example.

You have been awarded funds to support an after-school robotics team. The funds cover only the first year but you intend to keep the robotics team going in the future. Your administration has promised to provide money for supplies once grant dollars run out next year but you still need funds for travel, a teacher stipend, extra help, and other program costs. Your current funder has indicated that the organization hands out only one-year grants and will not continue to fund you after this year. You find a new RFP that looks to increase science scores in middle school-aged children and want to apply but your program only works with high school students. You decide to apply to the grant and expand your program by offering a seventh- and eighth-grade extension program in which once a month, your high school students go to the local middle school and work with their students on early robotics training. You are able to report your year-one findings on the new RFP as further justification as to why the program should grow to the middle school and useful statistics about increasing science scores, meanwhile creating an effective transition between eighth grade and freshman year.

We encourage you to avoid basing new projects off of RFPs you come across in your search. Instead, search for RFPs that align to the units or programming you currently have with your students and the needs in your school and district. If you find an RFP that will fund an after-school science program, and you see a need for growth in science scores, by all means go for it! We just recommend you don't write

an RFP for a specific program that doesn't align to the needs of your classroom or school. Think about what would happen if you wrote a proposal to receive funding for a Saturday school trilingual program in which students would have the opportunity to learn French and German. It sounds like a fantastic opportunity for students, but if your school needs help with literacy in English, putting staff hours and commitment into a program that doesn't align to your needs, just because you won a grant, may be more of a hindrance than an opportunity.

We know that you are busy lesson planning, grading papers, analyzing student data, communicating with parents, and finding some time to sleep. As teachers, we try to have a set time every other week or once month that we spend researching available RFPs. Bookmark links to organizations or online RFPs that you think you may want to apply for in the future. Create a list categorized by month of when revolving grants become available and their deadlines. Try to write one proposal per academic year to stay up-to-date on current RFPs and hone your grant-writing skills. A few teachers in our organization dedicate their entire summer to writing proposals for the coming school year!

Writing grants can be stressful, time consuming, and mentally draining but when you realize that you have the power to receive free money for your students, the grant-writing process becomes addicting. Check out appendix B for full examples of submitted grant proposals, and refer back to the chapters in this book as often as you need. We look forward to reading your future proposal for the UNITE Classroom Grant! Happy writing!

Search for RFPs that align to the units or programming you currently have.

Seventh-Period Review Guide

- ✍ Before you even hear back from the granting organization about the status of your proposal, thank everyone who helped you during the process. Your appreciation of their help goes a long way!
- ✍ Rejection letters happen to all grant writers. You will live through it! Still take a moment to professionally thank the granting organization for the opportunity to apply for the grant.
- ✍ Enjoy the feeling of success after the award letter! Notify everyone involved that the proposal was funded! Professionally thank the funding organization for the opportunity and award.
- ✍ Make sure to meet all deadlines of communication with your funder.
- ✍ Think of some creative ways to thank the granting organization and publicize your program.
- ✍ Don't stop! Keep searching for RFPs, writing proposals, and winning grants!

Seventh-Period Exit Ticket

1. *True or false:* A thank-you letter to the funding organization is necessary even if you were not awarded the grant.
2. List two ways you can recognize and thank a funder in addition to your initial thank-you letter.