

REVISED & UPDATED

THE ONLY

GRANT-  
WRITING  
BOOK

YOU'LL EVER NEED

Top Grant Writers and  
Grant Givers Share Their Secrets

ELLEN KARSH & ARLEN SUE FOX

FIFTH EDITION

THE ONLY  
GRANT-  
WRITING  
BOOK  
YOU'LL EVER NEED

*FIFTH EDITION*

ELLEN KARSH & ARLEN SUE FOX

BASIC BOOKS  
New York

## Copyright

Copyright © 2003, 2006, 2009, 2014, 2019 by Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox

Cover design by Eleen Cheung

Cover copyright © 2019 Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Hachette Book Group supports the right to free expression and the value of copyright. The purpose of copyright is to encourage writers and artists to produce the creative works that enrich our culture.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the authors' intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact [permissions@hbgusa.com](mailto:permissions@hbgusa.com). Thank you for your support of the authors' rights.

Basic Books

Hachette Book Group

1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104

[www.basicbooks.com](http://www.basicbooks.com)

Originally published by Basic Books in July 2003

Fifth Edition: November 2019

Published by Basic Books, an imprint of Perseus Books, LLC, a subsidiary of Hachette Book Group, Inc. The Basic Books name and logo is a trademark of the Hachette Book Group.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Karsh, Ellen, author. | Fox, Arlen Sue, author.

Title: The only grant-writing book you'll ever need / Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox.

Description: Fifth Edition. | New York : Basic Books, [2019] | Revised edition of the authors' The only grant-writing book you'll ever need, 2014. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019020178 (print) | LCCN 2019022254 (ebook) | ISBN 9781541617810 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Proposal writing for grants—United States. | Grants-in-aid—United States. | Fund raising—United States.

Classification: LCC HG177.5.U6 K37 2019 (print) | LCC HG177.5.U6 (ebook) | DDC 658.15/224—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019020178>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019022254>

ISBNs: 978-1-5416-1781-0 (paperback), 978-1-5416-1912-8 (ebook)

E3-20191005-JV-NF-ORI

# CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Introduction to the Fifth Edition](#)

[FUNDERS ROUNDTABLE I](#)

[Grantsmanship and the Funding Environment](#)

## [\*\*PART I Prerequisites\*\*](#)

[LESSON 1](#)

[Who Am I \(and What in the World Do I Want to Do\)?](#)

[LESSON 2](#)

[Wait a Second—What Is a Grant... and Where Do I Get One?](#)

[LESSON 3](#)

[Making \(Dollars and\) Sense of Grant-Application Packages: What Grantmakers Want](#)

[LESSON 4](#)

[Getting Ready to Write a Grant Proposal](#)

[\*If You're a Not-for-Profit Organization...\*](#)

[\*If You're a Government Agency or School District...\*](#)

[\*If You're an Individual Grant Seeker...\*](#)

[LESSON 5](#)

[Intangibles: Things They Never Tell You \(About Proposal Writing\)](#)

[FUNDERS ROUNDTABLE II](#)

[The "Guidelines" Roundtable](#)

## [\*\*PART II It's Finally Time to Write the Proposal\*\*](#)

[LESSON 6](#)

## Writing (Proposals) with Style: 12 Basic Rules

### LESSON 7

Identifying and Documenting the Need: What Problem Will a Grant Fix?

### LESSON 8

Goals and Objectives: What Do You Hope to Achieve If You Get the Money?

### LESSON 9

Developing and Presenting a Winning Program

### LESSON 10

Finding Partners and Building Coalitions (The MOUs That Roared)

### LESSON 11

The Evaluation Plan: How Can You Be Sure If Your Program Works?

### LESSON 12

The Budget: How Much Will It Cost... and Is the Cost Reasonable?

### LESSON 13

Sustainability: How Will You Continue the Program When the Grant Funds Run Out? (and You'd Better Not Say, "I Won't!")

### LESSON 14

Capacity: Proving That You Can Get the Job Done

### LESSON 15

Front and Back: The Cover Page or Cover Letter, the Abstract, the Table of Contents, and the Appendix

## FUNDERS ROUNDTABLE III

The "Pet Peeves" Roundtable

## PART III And After the Proposal...

### LESSON 16

The Site Visit—Playing Host

### LESSON 17

So Now You Know—What Next?

### LESSON 18

When Grant Funding Needs a Boost, Build a Business! (Hint: It Can Be Small!)

## FUNDERS ROUNDTABLE IV

The "What Do I Do Now?" Roundtable

## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### **Tips for Improving Your Chances of Winning a Grant**

### **APPENDIX 2**

#### **Proposal Checklist**

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **Glossary**

### **APPENDIX 4**

#### **Sample Grant Forms**

##### ***Common Grant Application Form***

##### ***Standard Form 424 (SF-424)***

##### ***Sample Cover Letter***

##### ***Sample Letter of Inquiry (LOI)***

##### ***Sample Abstract***

##### ***Small Business Administration Sample Business Plan***

### **APPENDIX 5**

#### **Notes on Some Useful Websites**

### **APPENDIX 6**

#### **Answers to Pop Quizzes**

## **Acknowledgments**

### **Discover More**

### **About the Authors**

In memory of Tess and Rubin Karsh and Ruth  
and Irv Barish



**Explore book giveaways, sneak peeks, deals, and more.**

[Tap here to learn more.](#)

BASIC  
BOOKS

## INTRODUCTION TO THE FIFTH EDITION

ONCE AGAIN we are preparing a new edition of *The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need* in a climate of change and uncertainty. One day maybe this won't be the case, but we're starting to have our doubts. As in past editions, our purpose is to help you write the best proposal possible, whatever the climate, to enhance your chances of getting funding for your organization, educational institution, or personal projects. And, as for past editions, we have turned to foundation officers, outstanding nonprofits leaders, and government officials to seek their best advice. Always in the past we have been able to assure you that, even when the search was difficult, there still would be plenty of grants available if you knew how to find the right funder and present your case clearly and forcibly. This still is true for many foundation and government grants, but ***we need to sound an alarm*** to organizations that depend largely on government grants and contracts.

If you have been reading the newspapers and listening to pundits over the last few years, you are aware that the federal government is engaged in major changes and that budget concerns may force significant retrenchment in many service areas. Many state and local governments traditionally receive and pass on federal funding to educational institutions and nonprofits. But we hear from government officials that there are likely to be fewer grants and contracts to state and local governments and to nonprofit organizations over the coming years. Local governments that have managed to keep needed programs afloat in the face of recent federal and state cuts may find it harder and harder to do so. And we hear from foundations watching this process that they are unlikely to be able to pick up the slack in funding. Although there is hope that such conditions may change over time, organizations that do not prepare for cuts in government funding in the near future may not be around to benefit in the long run.

So a new purpose for this book is to encourage you not only to perfect your grantsmanship skills to function in an even more highly competitive era than in the past but also to identify and implement fundraising methods that do not depend on grants. We will mention, but not discuss in this

book, common fundraising methods that many of you already use—annual appeals, fundraising events, crowdfunding and other social media, events and journals, and more. We believe you need to increase your outreach in your communities to enhance the unrestricted income that you bring in from these activities. There are many excellent books and online resources to help you do this.

We also want to introduce you to some innovative, and sometimes controversial, fundraising methods described by our foundation and government contacts, presented in more detail in an updated introductory roundtable on the funding environment and in a new chapter, [Lesson 18](#). These methods, increasingly used by the most far-seeing organizations, include formalizing and increasing the role of volunteers to enhance existing programs and services, identifying and implementing opportunities for business enterprises that serve your mission, collaborating with other nonprofits and local businesses, and implementing fees for service when possible. ***Your grant-writing skills will be as vital in these initiatives as they are in seeking grants; we will show you how in Lesson 18, in a section on writing a business plan.***

Many organizations currently use the simplest of these methods—for example, having parents help teachers work with children on reading skills, having volunteers serve meals to seniors, running bake sales and auctions, or collecting a nominal contribution for meals or activities. We touch on these methods and more in [Lesson 18](#) because too many organizations acknowledge that they have done very little to diversify funding. And even these simple methods can be expanded and institutionalized to bring more resources into your organization.

We are suggesting broader approaches as well, incorporating both a planned and systematic use of volunteers and what we will call business-oriented or entrepreneurial sources of income (sometimes called *social enterprise*). In many organizations this will require something of a cultural shift because staff are committed to providing services “for free” to needy individuals and families. Unfortunately, these services are not “free”; they have been supported by government and foundation funding. To continue providing the essential services you know are so vital, you must find new ways to support them.

Because one of the authors of this book is a rabid baseball fan, we are once again using our national pastime to illustrate how organizations can think outside the (grant-writing-only) box when it comes to surviving

when money is tight—and, by the way, when isn't money tight?

There probably isn't a baseball fan around who wouldn't agree with this statement: "Boy, has baseball changed." Most readers over 30 grew up never hearing of sabermetrics, a term that came into use in the early 2000s and was featured in a book (which became a hit movie), *Moneyball* by Michael Lewis. To make a long story short, sabermetrics replaces baseball managers' hunches and years of experience with actual statistics. No longer do managers say, "I know that Mighty Casey will hit a homerun now, even though (a) he's a lefty and so is the pitcher, (b) he can't hit a curve ball and this pitcher throws only curve balls, and (c) he's faced this particular pitcher 10 times and struck out all 10 times. He's due." Today there's no way, with all the data and statistics available to the manager, that Mighty Casey would bat against this particular pitcher. The batter would instead be the player with statistics that make him the most likely to have success. Today teams keep track of everything about players—from how hard they hit the ball to how fast the ball comes off their bats to what direction the ball travels. Suddenly "launch angle" is all the rage in baseball. And all this information, these analytics, are loaded onto the managers' tablets and used for in-game decisions, which is why fans watch as fielders shift around before each pitch is thrown so it will be a little more difficult for the batter to get a hit.

But in spite of all these newfangled ways of doing things, baseball itself hasn't really changed: all but a few minor rules are the same as they were back in the day. Still, the successful teams are generally the ones that are using all the latest technology. They are always looking for a way to be better, smarter, more open minded, and more creative. And, as usual, the players are trying to get stronger, healthier, faster, and more skillful.

Like baseball, grant writing\* really hasn't changed either. The basics are the same. But now most grantmakers look for increased diversity of funding sources, and a winning proposal is likely to include and highlight supplementary strategies the organization is using to bring in money and stay afloat when other funding is scarce (see [Lesson 13](#), on sustainability). The questions on the grant application may look the same as they looked 10 years ago, but the proposal that answers the questions in a way that reflects the entrepreneurial spirit of the organization is the one that has the best chance of getting funded. And although a grant application may not include a question that says "Describe the entrepreneurial spirit of your organization," you will be able to find many places in your proposal where

you can easily describe your efforts to “think outside the box”—a phrase funders themselves use frequently. If you’re not there yet, [Lesson 18](#) will give you some ideas about where to start.

## WHAT’S IN THE BOOK?

*The Only Grant-Writing Book You’ll Ever Need* organizes the whole grant-seeking experience into three parts (preparation, proposal writing, and follow-up) and 18 lessons. Each lesson is designed as a workshop, starting with opening remarks followed by discussion questions and concluding with a short “pop quiz.” These questions give you an opportunity to practice what we preach, so we hope you give them a shot. (We provide the answers—with explanations—in [Appendix 6](#) so you can see how you did.)

But there’s a lot more to grantsmanship than just the proposal. So we’ve included a chapter on writing with style; a chapter on “intangibles,” with information that’s usually not communicated anywhere because you’re assumed to know it; and “roundtables” with suggestions from grantmakers, government officials, and nonprofit leaders about what they think it takes to write a good proposal and about how you should approach the economic and social climate in which you’re writing.

We’d especially like to call your attention to two items in the book: Roundtable I: Grantsmanship and the Funding Environment, which follows this introduction, and the new chapter mentioned earlier, [Lesson 18](#): When Grant Funding Needs a Boost, Build a Business!, which makes some of the issues and suggestions in this roundtable more concrete.

After the financial meltdown in 2008, and again in 2014, we asked our panelists for views on grantmaking in that environment, and presented them in economy-focused roundtables in the third and fourth editions. For the current edition, we reviewed those roundtables, checked in with grantmakers, and found that most of what our panel had told us is still relevant. So we’ve kept many of the comments from the earlier editions and added what we’ve heard more recently about their concerns regarding federal budget cuts and the current climate for grantmaking.

After the roundtable, [Part I](#) starts you off with prerequisite lessons: Identifying who you and/or your organization are, what kind of funding you should be looking for, where to look for it, and how to make sense of grant-application packages. We discuss differences (and similarities) in the

approach to grants by nonprofits, government agencies and schools, and individual grant seekers.

We also give you some strategies to ensure that you will be a more well-rounded and successful grant writer than ever. Like the baseball player who is always looking for an edge over the competition, you can gain an edge as well. What makes a successful grant writer (besides good writing, of course)? [Part I](#) ends with a discussion of intangibles that affect grantsmanship, including some thoughts on the role of a grant writer in the organization.

Part II opens with some rules and guidelines on good writing and the opportunity to practice writing sections of a grant proposal. In the remaining lessons in [Part II](#), we take you through the process of developing each element of a typical grant proposal.

Submitting a proposal isn't the end. In [Part III](#) we talk about steps to take after you learn whether you have been approved for funding—or not. This section ends with the new chapter on entrepreneurial approaches to fundraising and on ways in which excellent proposal-writing skills can be transferred to the development of a business proposal.

At the end of each part, we present a lively Funders Roundtable, giving you the responses of a large and diverse group of grantmakers from government funding agencies and foundations to a slew of pertinent questions on the topics and issues covered in that part. Their answers will help even experienced grant writers gain new insight into the grant process and an understanding of what the money people really look for.

We also have updated the appendices. [Appendix 1](#) offers tips to improve your chances of winning a grant (drawn from our own experiences, the comments of our panel of grantmakers, and successful grant seekers). [Appendix 2](#) is a proposal checklist to help ensure you have touched all the right buttons. (We urge you to create your own checklist for each new proposal that you plan to write.) It is followed by an extensive, updated glossary of common terms used in the grants world ([Appendix 3](#)). In [Appendix 4](#) we give you some model application forms and letters; in [Appendix 5](#), which is updated and annotated to reflect major changes in some important websites, you will find notes on a few useful sites. [Appendix 6](#) provides the answers to the pop quizzes.

We want to note that the title of this book is aspirational: We do hope that it is the only grant-writing book you'll ever need. Throughout the book, we have tried to demystify the process of developing programs,

writing proposals, and winning grants so that anyone—even those with the least experience—can succeed. Although readers with relatively little experience or those changing careers may be the ones who find the book most useful, we are doing our best to provide helpful information—about what the grantmakers are saying, and especially about diversifying funding—to even the most experienced.

## **ABOUT THE FUNDERS ROUNDTABLES...**

As you'll recognize if you're a longtime grant seeker (or work for one), or as you will understand one of these days, experienced proposal writers can become a little presumptuous at times and, at least where grants are concerned, turn into opinionated know-it-alls about how to do it. Because we had written so many proposals and won millions of dollars in grants (we're not mentioning right now how many grants we *didn't* win); because we'd attended so many bidders' conferences where applications were explained in minute detail and participated in so many foundation workshops; and because we'd taken (and given) grant-writing seminars over the years, we got to be pretty sure we knew what the funders wanted.

But we can confide in you: Every now and then we were secretly a little afraid that just maybe we really *didn't* know exactly what grantmakers love or hate. So for each edition, we talked with funders and nonprofit leaders representing foundations and organizations of all sizes in all parts of the country, as well as with government officials. And we got some insights and surprises that made the effort worthwhile for us and, we hope, for you.

Then, because the first edition was in preparation during the attacks of 9/11, we addressed with grantmakers the impact of terrorism on grant funding. Not to suggest we're a jinx, but the second time, just after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we asked funders about the effects of natural disasters, disaster planning, and other issues on the grants landscape. For the third edition (just after the financial industry's meltdown) and the fourth (prepared after more than a year of federal budget crises), we asked about funding in a volatile economic climate. Now, on top of many more devastating hurricanes and wildfires, we face a federal government that is more than a trillion dollars in debt and promises years of cutbacks in a wide variety of programs. More than ever, we felt the need to know what government and foundation grantmakers had to say about grant seeking,

and they very kindly gave their time to answer our questions.

Although we call our conversations “funders roundtables,” we didn’t really go the roundtable route. Instead, we interviewed each individual alone, following essentially the same interview format. We wanted to give the interviewees the opportunity to frame their answers independently and without being distracted by things other panelists said. In addition, early on we started interviewing successful nonprofit leaders who have invaluable insights into and experience with the grants process.

Many of those we interviewed were perfectly happy to speak on the record, but others felt that they would have to hold back if they were going to be quoted directly, or even if they were only acknowledged by name in the book. Because our purpose was to get their uninhibited good advice, we decided not to quote anyone by name. The grantmakers and others whom we interviewed couldn’t have been more forthcoming, more giving of their time, more willing to share their expertise and insights, or more clearly committed to the needs of grant seekers and their communities. Whether we name them in our acknowledgment section or not, we are deeply grateful to all of them.



## FUNDERS ROUNDTABLE I

# GRANTSMANSHIP AND THE FUNDING ENVIRONMENT

IN THE BEST OF TIMES, in the worst of times, and in all the time in between, there are always grants to be had (and we hope that will never change). For each of the previous four editions, we focused our interviews on grantmakers' approaches to specific calamities current at the time—9/11, hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the economic meltdown of 2008 and the ensuing financial crisis—that we thought would affect the availability of grants from federal, state, and local governments and from private foundations and corporations. We had a strong hunch—in fact, we thought it was obvious—that catastrophes of all kinds would diminish grant seekers' chances of obtaining more routine funding. And, not surprisingly, we learned from the grantmakers that this hunch was correct.

For the current edition we decided to take a more holistic view of grantsmanship—to look not only at calamities and catastrophes but to place the grants process in the context of the political, cultural, and social environment as well. As we write, the scene is tumultuous, globally as well as nationally. Immigration; health care; the climate change debate amid increasingly severe hurricanes, tsunamis, and wildfires; a fluctuating stock market; ever-present terrorism threats; the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements; and the increase in deadly mass shootings and gun violence are just a few of the topical issues of the day. Moreover, after many years of economic growth since the 2008 financial crisis, there are now fears that a new recession may occur in the not-too-distant future.

With all this uncertainty swirling around, we asked our panel of

foundation and government grantmakers, elected and appointed officials, and nonprofit leaders to suggest how grant seekers can present themselves and their groups in the best light—whether there’s chaos across the globe or all is right with the world. And one thing should be made very clear before we go any further: You *must* be knowledgeable about what’s going on, especially when things seem most chaotic.

One grantmaker we spoke to told us that foundations (like the rest of us) aren’t used to dealing with such rapid and unexpected changes in the cultural environment, and they are working hard to figure out how to fund solutions to new problems that seem to crop up daily. We hope that by the time you’re reading this book, the scene will no longer be so tumultuous, that the world will be more tranquil and issue free—but don’t count on it. Even if some current issues are resolved (or have been relegated to the back burner), there always will be new ones. You need to be sure your organization, your programs, and your grant proposals are as strong as possible to meet new challenges.

## **THINGS TO KNOW IN ANY ENVIRONMENT**

We tried to pin our current panelists down about what a winning grant proposal should look like. They were quick to remind us that although proposals are important, the organizations they represent should be well run and high functioning. Many funders talked about the importance of strong organizational leadership, of nonprofit managers with “relevant skill sets and entrepreneurial vibes,” of being technologically savvy and having a strong presence on social media. They warned that organizations should be “well organized and have better data on hand now” (with the easy availability of online research, there is no excuse not to) and “be able to clearly articulate their goals and move the needle toward their mission.” In all the lessons throughout this edition, we address (and stress) the points that are so important to funders.

### **Measuring Impact Is No Longer an Evolving Concept; It Is a Key for Most Funders**

***Program outcomes and impact on the clients and the community are more important than ever.*** Your first thought might be, “Haven’t outcomes always been important?” The answer is, “Sort of, but sometimes more like lip service,” at least for many foundations. (Government grantmakers always have been very strict about measurable results.)