

## **Grant Writing: Show Me (How to Get) the Money!**

by [Barbara Gottschalk](#)

Numerous research studies from experts such as Marzano (2004) and less well-known online authors Greene, Kisida, and Bowen (2014) have pointed out the value of project-based activities and real-world experiences for all students, but especially our ELLs. How to get the extra money to pay for these extras that we know shouldn't be extra at all? School budgets are tighter than ever. In addition, U.S. census statistics from the American Community Survey show children living in households where a language other than English is spoken are more likely to be poor than children in English-only households (Child Trends Databank, 2014). A successful grant application can fund activities that will benefit not only ELLs, but the rest of the student body as well. In this article, I'll share some grant-writing lessons I've learned from my accepted applications and many rejections.

MONEY TALKS is an acronym I'll use to help you remember my 10 tips. In the past 4 years, I've obtained more than US\$30,000 of funding for my school through various mini-grant programs available to classroom teachers just like you. This has helped me expand my impact beyond my classroom and stealthily influence teachers to incorporate project-based learning, service learning, and the arts into their teaching, things that especially benefit ELLs. That's money talking!

### **M: Measure Outcomes**

Grant programs want to know the curriculum standards you are planning to meet with the money they give you and how you will measure whether students have met them. Depending on your particular situation, you'll reference Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, etc.

### **O: Obey the Application Rules**

This seems like stating the obvious, but every tip sheet I've seen has mentioned this, so apparently it's something many grant seekers overlook. I've had the opportunity to listen in remotely to webcast grant reviews and heard the reviewers say things like, "Well, this applicant submitted word documents instead of PDFs like they were supposed to." Not obeying the rules is a great way to get your application eliminated.

### **N: Never Start New**

If you already have something in place, grant funders will be more likely to give money to help you take it to the next level. For example, I successfully applied for a Target Arts grant to bring a group from our local symphony orchestra to my school. A key part of the application was that I was able to mention that the retired conductor and present conductor of the orchestra had visited the previous year to read to our 4th and 5th graders.

### **E: Everybody Involved**

All other things being equal, grant funders look favorably on programs that can benefit large numbers of students. If you have a great idea for your classroom, can you somehow expand it to benefit all of the students in your program or school?

## **Y: Youth Input**

Many programs emphasize this. It's especially hard with young children, but it's important to show that students are actively involved in your project's planning and execution. It's even better if the students can actually take part in preparing the application. What a great way for students to practice using authentic, relevant English!

## **T: Tell a Story**

My first successful Target Field Trip grant was for students to attend a ballet performance of *Aladdin*. That was a pretty average idea, but when I added the fact that many of our students were from the Middle East and showed how we were going to build an entire study unit around the familiar story of *Aladdin*, it made a much more powerful request.

## **A: Ask for Action Items**

Too often, people apply for grants to buy something, but instead they should think of their grant request in terms of what they, or better yet, their students, are going to *do* with the money. For example, instead of asking for an iPad, you should specifically say why you need an iPad to accomplish your objectives. I once submitted a grant application to buy inexpensive ukuleles for my students. It was rejected. Several years later, I submitted another application, with similar learning objectives, to buy materials to make metal tubular xylophones. This request was successful, I believe because the application explained how the students would be getting hands-on experience actually creating their musical instruments.

## **L: Learn What's Funded**

I've had proposals rejected by some grant programs—and then accepted by others. I'm convinced the whole process is a lot like a job search; you've got to find the right grant program for your idea. If you're trying hard to tweak your idea to fit the program, it's not going to make a strong application; better to find the program that's a right fit. Here are some of my favorite sources of national grant information:

- [www.getedfunding.com](http://www.getedfunding.com)
- [www.grantwriters.net](http://www.grantwriters.net)
- [www.grantstation.com](http://www.grantstation.com)
- [www.ysa.org](http://www.ysa.org)
- [www.neafoundation.org](http://www.neafoundation.org)

Just reading through the available grants listed on these websites will give you an idea of what's getting funding at the moment. You'll soon find that you'll have more than enough grant sources; a bigger challenge is finding the time to write the applications.

## K: Keep Trying

I've had many grant programs reject my applications, but accept my applications later. With experience, you'll also learn which programs have higher rates of success and thus are worth your valuable time. Table 1 shows the number of applications I've written in the past 4 years and the success percentage rate. You can see that I'm submitting about the same number of applications every year, so I'm not working any harder, but I'm definitely getting smarter. You will, too, with practice!

School Year	Number of Applications	Success Rate	Funding Received
2011–12	21	33%	\$10,870
2012–13	22	32%	\$5,162
2013–14	19	53%	\$3,661
2014–15	20	60%	\$12,967

Table 1. Application Success Rate

## S: Sustainability

Grant funders like to know that the gift they give will keep on giving. The xylophones previously mentioned were still being used in a music class 4 years later. That sustainability helped me get another grant for the music teacher to make his own set of xylophones.

Finally, if you're lucky enough to receive grant funding, remember to submit your final reports and thank your sponsors. Many different grant applications remind potential applicants that they need to complete final paperwork from previous years to be eligible to apply again, which indicates that some people don't submit required final reports or thank their funders. That's not a good idea if you want to ask for money in the future!

## Examples

### Student Work

The photos below illustrate several of the grant-writing tips in this article. The letter (Figure 1) shows how even young ELLs can be involved in preparing a grant application. It also "tells a story" about an ELL student leading his classmates on the proposed field trip after having visited this farm before, as a newcomer. It indicates previous involvement, too, as it's not proposing a completely new activity. The thank-you letter (Figure 2) from the student to the grant sponsors again shows youth involvement. This was included in the final report, and perhaps helped us successfully win another grant award from this same sponsor the following year!

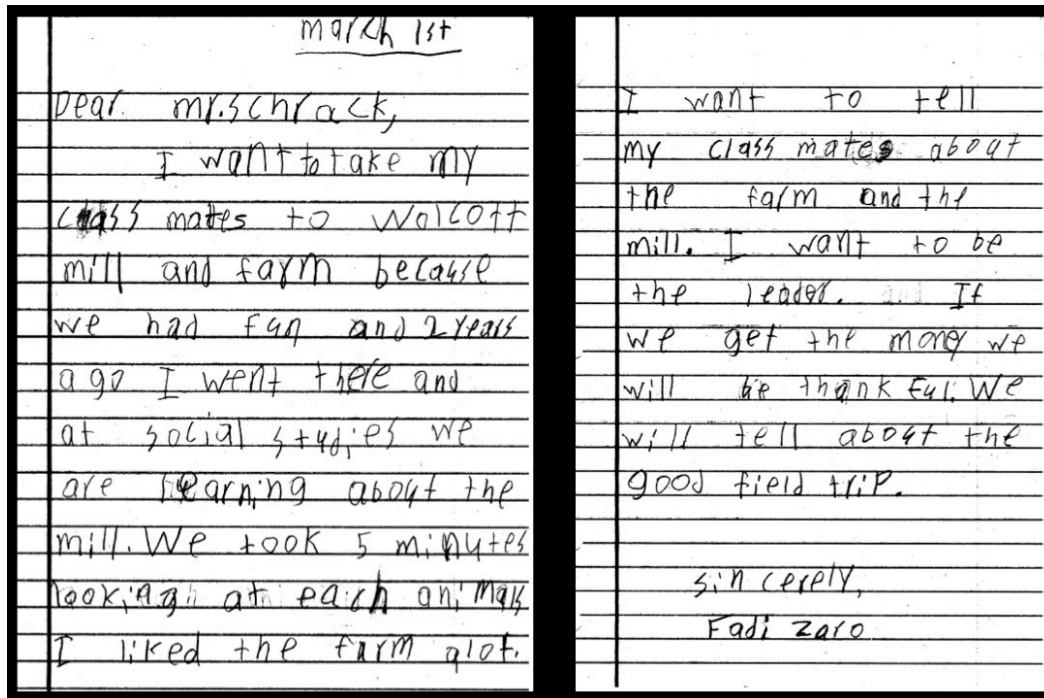


Figure 1. Student Letter

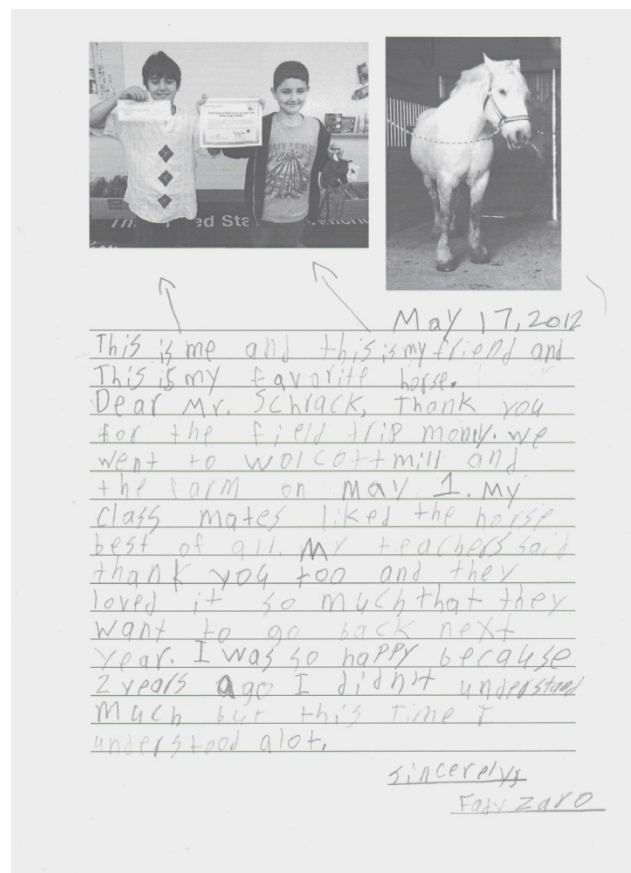


Figure 2. Student Thank-You Letter

## Example Application Text

The following paragraph is from a successful application for a National Education Association Learning and Leadership grant. The program summary of a grant application is an opportunity to explain your idea as clearly and succinctly as possible. Note how in just 100 words, I used some of the tips—sustainability, involving everybody, asking for action items, good program fit—I’ve just given you:

*The lower elementary teachers at Susick Elementary will work together to help Susick’s youngest English language learners attain proficiency even more quickly than they do now. Kindergarten teacher Catherine Cushard will head the effort by attending a train the trainer institute at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington, D. C. on "What's Different about Teaching Reading to English Language Learners." Back at Susick, she and Barbara Gottschalk, English language acquisition teacher, will lead a study group composed of their lower elementary colleagues, the teachers at Susick with the greatest numbers of English language learners in their classes.*

In conclusion, I hope these tips have shown you that grant writing is easy to do. It gets even easier, too, once you start submitting applications and have a bank of previous applications you can reference. The biggest obstacle is simply getting started. I hope this article has motivated you to do so!

## References

Greene, J., Kisida, B., & Bowen, D. (2014). The educational value of field trips. *Education Next*, 14(1), 78–86. Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/the-educational-value-of-field-trips/>.

Marzano, R. J. (2004). *Building background knowledge for academic achievement*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

Child Trends Databank. (2014). Dual language learners. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=dual-language-learners>

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