

# Leave No Stone Unturned: Six Steps to Winning a Grant for Your Drug Testing Business

It happened too often during my 10-year career at the Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration (APRA) for the District of Columbia: a well-skilled organization lost its chances of winning a grant because it “did not qualify.” All of these organizations, including substance abuse providers, had excellent credentials in performing the grant services (like background checks and drug testing), and they submitted the grant application on time, but failed to pay the extra attention necessary to prepare the application for submission.

*Grant preparation is key.* The paperwork, certifications, and management strategy must be available and included in order for an application to be considered successfully completed and ready for submission. Your documentation should display the most recent Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certification, statistics, data, results, descriptions, and other details that benefit the successful implementation and completion of the grant services. In other words, you must be *ready* to apply for a grant *before* you apply for a grant.



Below are six surefire ways to successfully prepare your grant application to secure funding for your drug testing business:

1. Do your homework.
  - a. Learn about the grant. Thoroughly read the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) and the request for application (RFA) to identify the grant objectives, reporting details, and if your lab is eligible.
 

For example, NIH grant PA-18-061 is seeking eligible applicants to support existing research that examines prescription opioid, benzodiazepine, and marijuana use in adults. This RFA does not explicitly state the need for a CLIA-certified lab. But, in order to fulfill the grant requirements, only a certified testing lab can provide research data to support the initiative. Therefore, a CLIA-certified drug testing lab partnering with a behavioral health organization would be eligible.
  - b. Learn about the funder. Studying the funder’s budget reports and interests via their website is a great way to learn their mission and therefore, state how your implementation aligns with their focus. After all, they want to see that you will use the funds to fulfill their mission.



*Tip: While studying the funder’s website, pay close attention to the esthetics, such as the colors on the mission and services-offered pages. There are reasons why these colors were chosen, and maybe those color choices are important enough that, if used on your grant application, might draw positive attention*

*to you. Of course, keep in mind that you must comply with the grant instructions and guidelines, so check them first.*

2. Follow the instructions—This seems intuitive, but you may be surprised to learn that a high number of applicants do not follow simple instructions like maximum page sizes or submitting before a deadline date.
 

For example, the following requirements are included on certain Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs):

  - Example from Centers for Disease Control FOA: “Each section should use 1.5 spacing with one-inch margins.”
  - Example from Department of State FOA: “Please also attach CVs for these staff members/volunteers, which are not more than two (2) pages each and indicate the person’s relevant skills and experience.”
  - Example from Department of Commerce FOA: “APPENDICES (not included in 12-page limit)”
  - Example from Bureau of Justice Assistance FOA: “Applications should include a high-quality Project Abstract that summarizes the proposed project in 400 words or fewer.”


Remember that grant guidelines are found in a number of locations: the RFA, the request for proposal, and the overall grant application. Be specific and thorough, and give the funder exactly what they are asking for.




*Tip: Your grant application should follow the order of the requested information in the RFA. Reviewers should*

*not have to search through your application to find information. If the information is out of order, there is a chance that the reviewers will not review the application.*

3. Ensure your calculations are accurate—Are your budget statistics and information accurate? A number of applicants do not review the budget numbers to make sure they are accurate, consistent, and realistic to the grant amounts. An inaccurate budget means a ruling against your application in the early review stage. Besides, if you can't manage your own budget, how will you be able to manage additional funds allocated to your business?


 *Tip: Use the latest, most up-to-date budget figures, not old ones from previous years. For example, do not use epidemiological budget reports from 2010 when you can use 2017.*

4. Provide proper justification—Trade places with the funder and imagine offering a large sum of money to fulfill a mission. You would want to know that your money will be spent properly. Many applicants lack the thorough budget justification needed for the funder to have complete confidence that their monies will be well spent. For example, your narrative states that you are going to spend \$657,000 to drug test 100 people for a one-year period. This means that you are charging \$6,570 per person. You must quantify the narrative. The narrative and the justification must match.

 *Tip: A great way to impress the grant reviewers is to prove the competence of your proposed solution by ensuring that the funding request matches the scope of the project.*

5. Balance long-term and short-term goals—many applicants do not demonstrate with their application the necessary

balance between long-term and short-term goals. The application should show future plans demonstrating that you understand the bigger picture, while also stating details on expected and immediate outcomes. Remember, a funder must feel like they are making a wise decision when choosing your organization.

 *Tip: To ensure the success of the proposed long-term and short-term goals, make sure you have total buy-in from your organization's leadership.*


6. Share your story—Once again, you must comply with grant guidelines and instructions, but you should also write with clarity and interest. How does your program provide the solution to the issue? Address the issue and clearly convey the solution and advantages of your program with a story. Effective grant writing maintains a balance between technical guidelines and readers' interest. It is the strong approach to realistically stating your case that grabs the reviewers' attention while keeping you in the competition because of a thorough, yet interesting grant proposal.

For example, for grant announcement PA-18-061, the applicant should provide a clear and concise solution for supporting the research data initiative. This solution must detail how the CLIA-certified lab will collect and analyze the data in conjunction with providing clinical practices to identify the risk factors.

That solution would flow much like a storyboard that includes:

- Explaining that the target population is individuals with earlier onset of drug use who are now aged 50 or above.
- Hiring a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) and a Certified Addiction Counselor (CAC) to provide clinical evaluation, counseling services, and data collection.

- CLIA-certified lab screening for all clients and provide the data.

 *Tip: In addition to meeting all grant requirements, make sure your story includes verbiage from the grant announcement. This helps to clarify your proposed solution by aligning the narrative with the grant.*

In summary, grant applications should be compliant, thorough attention-grabbers. Through the narratives and figures, the funder must know that they are making a wise investment when choosing your drug testing organization. Do the legwork and submit a grant package that “leaves no stone unturned” because there are clients and customers waiting to receive your skilled services. ■



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company's mission to helping small businesses qualify and successfully complete behavioral health grant services. With more than 10 years of experience in full-cycle grants management, Mark has a proven ability to foster relationships with grant funders and organizations for behavioral health and substance-use disorders. His vision and ability to develop these relationships lead to short-term “wins” and long-term solutions because Mark knows that people service people.

Prior to organizing ACG, Mark served as the Deputy Director of Operations at the Addiction Prevention and Recovery Administration (APRA), for the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), and then as Director for the same department for the District of Columbia (Washington, DC). For a preliminary review of your grant application or to schedule a consultation, email [marklassiter@atlanticCgroup.com](mailto:marklassiter@atlanticCgroup.com).