

Push to Pre-K: Grant Writing Tips

Office of Early Learning and Instruction

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PRESENTED BY

Dr. Nykia Washington, Prekindergarten and Mixed Delivery
Program Manager

Alexis Washington, Communications and Engagement
Manager



Presentation Outline

1. Introduction and Where to Begin
2. Grant Writing Tips
3. Common Pre-K Grant Submission Mistakes
4. Questions and Answers



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Introduction and Where to Begin

Introduction

In today's session we will provide an overview of the prekindergarten grants and share grant writing tips to assist applicants with submitting a successful grant application. Additionally, we will provide a review of common mistakes and strategies to use when preparing the application.

Where to begin

Before you begin, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I read the Grant Information Guide (GIG)? Do I understand it?
- Is my organization eligible to apply, based on the eligibility criteria in the GIG?
- Does my organization have the technical expertise, personnel, and financial capacity to successfully provide prekindergarten (Pre-K) services as described GIG?
- Are all my organization's stakeholders supportive of applying for this grant?

Be sure you can answer “yes” to each of these questions.

The Grant Information Guide

Application Requirements

- Instructions
- Proposal Cover Page
- Prekindergarten Slots Requested
- Application
- Budget
- Request for Payment Advance
- Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Rubric
- Appendices



<https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/maryland-pre-k-grant-programs>

The Grant Information Guide

A Wealth of Information

Read the entire grant application guide and follow instructions carefully.

- Background and purpose of Maryland Prekindergarten Grants
- Application and submission instructions
- Guidelines and Policies (Eligibility, Award, Funding Restriction, Data Sharing, etc.)
- Evaluation Criteria (Rubric)
- Submission Criteria
- Point of Contact



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Grant Writing Tips

Before Completing the Grant Application

- **Read the Grant Information Guide (GIG).**

- You must be fully prepared to meet all requirements of a grant award. Grant award requirements are set by MSDE and are neither negotiable nor optional. Before putting time, effort, and money into preparing an application, be sure that you can fulfill the requirements.

- **Select Someone to Write the Proposal.**

- Waiting until the last minute to prepare an application is not a sound practice. Equally important is the need to select the person(s) who will write the application.
- Some business or organizations are lucky enough to have a grant writer on staff who is responsible for preparing grant applications. If you don't have a grant writer on staff, however, you have several options:
 - Designate another employee.
 - Write it yourself.
 - Obtain the services of a professional grant writer.

Assemble a Grant Writing Team

This usually consists of:

- Senior-level management (who must support and sign grant applications);
- The program manager (who is the primary source of program-related information);
- A grant writer (may be the senior-level management, program manager, or an outside consultant);
- An editor (otherwise unaffiliated with the project so that they can provide an independent assessment of how well the application presents the required information); and
- Finance expert(s) (to help develop a good budget).

Grant Writing Tips (1 of 4)

- **Start preparing the application early.**

- Allow plenty of time to gather required information and documentation. Rushing may cause unnecessary mistakes and may reduce the amount time you have to make improvements, corrections, or edits.

- **Follow the instructions and application guidance carefully.** The instructions call for a particular organization of information and materials. Present information according to the prescribed format.

- Check your application against the grant and application requirements. Make sure that your grant proposal includes all requested documentation. All solicitations contain a core set of required documents, but we also may request additional documentation such as a map of the program area. Be sure you have included all the documents required for the solicitation.

- **Create a Grant Application Checklist.**

- Creating a checklist of all the things you need to do for the grant might prove invaluable when writing and reviewing the draft proposal. Such a checklist helps to ensure that you include the information required. You can create the checklist from the solicitation by simply listing the information that is requested for each part of the application.

Grant Writing Tips (2 of 4)

- **Start thinking about your budget requirements early.** A well-planned budget is critical to the success of your grant proposal. Include all necessary expenses, such as salaries, equipment, and supplies, and justify each expense. Review the budget requirements of the Pre-K grant.
 - Your budget should justify all expenses and be consistent with the program narrative.
 - A complete, well-thought-out budget serves to reinforce your credibility and increase the likelihood of your proposal being funded.
 - A well-prepared budget should be reasonable and demonstrate that the funds being asked for will be used wisely.
 - The budget should be as concrete and specific as possible in its estimates. Make every effort to be realistic, to estimate costs accurately.
 - Ask: Is my organization prepared to successfully provide Pre-K services within the budget we're proposing?

If you are developing a budget in anticipation of a solicitation being announced and do not yet know the funding amount, review the same grant solicitation (if offered in past years) to project future funding levels.

Grant Writing Tips (3 of 4)

- **Follow the formatting guidelines.** Pre-K grant proposals have strict formatting requirements, so follow them carefully. Present information according to the prescribed format.
 - Make sure you meet all the requirements, including the format, necessary information, and deadlines.
 - Pay attention to the page limits, font size, and spacing requirements, and make sure your proposal is well organized and easy to read.
 - You also may need to include supporting materials, such as letters of support or resumes.
- **Be brief, concise, and clear.** Your grant proposal also should include a plan for evaluating the success of your program. Explain how you'll measure progress and outcomes and use the data to improve over time.
 - Make each section understandable. Provide detailed answers to the basics: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?
 - Provide accurate and honest information.
 - If any required information or data is omitted, explain why.
 - Make sure the information provided in each table, chart, attachment, etc., is consistent with the proposal narrative and information in other tables.

Grant Writing Tips (4 of 4)

- **Collaborate and seek feedback.** Before submitting your grant proposal, have it reviewed by someone who has experience in grant writing or providing Pre-K services. This can help you identify any areas that need improvement and help you refine your proposal.
- **Understand the review process.** After you successfully submit your application, it goes through the grant application review process.
 - All Pre-K grants will have a rubric. The rubric tells you exactly how the grant applications will be evaluated, reviewed, and scored.
 - Reviewers will evaluate your application based on specific criteria in the rubric, so address each one in your proposal.
 - Rubrics show what makes a proposal excellent, what parts of a proposal matter the most, and help to make judgments fairer by using clear criteria.



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Common Pre-K Grant Mistakes

Tips for a Successful Application

- Please be sure to use the current and appropriate application.
- Please read the application carefully and follow **ALL** directions.
- Make note of page counts and word counts as directed in various sections of the application.
- Do not alter the application in any way.
- Please check for grammatical errors.
- Use the application scoring rubric as a tool to make sure your application is addressing the required components effectively.

Tips for a Successful Application

- Please be sure to download **all** required components of the application.
- Please be sure to include **all** required attachments and supporting documentation with the application.
- Refer to the Appendices and use the samples provided for guidance.
- Answer each question completely (there are several multi-part questions).
- Read and sign all pages that require a signature.
- Please make sure all budget calculations are included and correct.

Tips for a Successful Application

For current grantees that may be re-applying for a grant:

- Write your application as if the reader has no prior knowledge of your program.
- Do not copy and paste from a previous year's application as the questions may change from year to year.
- Having the grant one year does not automatically mean that a program will receive the grant for the following year if the new application does not meet the evaluation criteria for a successful application.

Tips for a Successful Application

- The budget narrative and implementation plan are clearly aligned to the program goals and strategies described in the application.
- As you create your **budget narrative**, think about how you will use these **funds** to support your proposed plan/grant activities throughout the school year.
- As you create your **implementation plan**, reflect on proposed plan/grant **activities** to clearly explain how these activities will progress throughout the year (see wording from rubric).

Application Evaluation

The review of applications will be a three-part process:

1. Written applications will be pre-screened for submission requirements and for inclusion of all required sections. Applications not meeting all pre-screen requirements will not be read.
2. A review committee established by MSDE will evaluate written applications. The committee will be comprised of MSDE personnel. Reviewers will comment on the proposals and assign numerical scores.
3. Final approval for awards will be determined by the review committee.

Note: Please submit the application to the email address identified in the application.



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Questions

Links and Resources

Pre-K Grants Webpage: <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/maryland-pre-k-grant-programs>

Push to Pre-K: <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/pushtoprek>

MSDE Grants Page:

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/OFPOS/GAC/GrantPrograms/index.aspx>

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